ON DESPAIR IN KIERKEGAARD'S THOUGHT

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Philosophers and religious believers have commonly held that suffering is a basic feature of human existence, while responding to this problem in different ways. Philosophers have often tried to mitigate suffering in their own lives through the pursuit of knowledge, virtue, and autonomy, but with penetrating insight, Kierkegaard argues that this offers no real escape from their affliction. Rather than depend on one's own efforts or understanding to resolve suffering, one ought to turn to Christianity with faith that one will attain salvation by receiving God's grace. In this study, I examine Kierkegaard's philosophical attempt to understand human suffering by analyzing his notion of despair, with the aim of determining why he thinks it should motivate the adoption of a religious way of life. He believes that a phenomenological investigation of human existence reveals that despair is central to our condition. In his view, it arises through the tension of being a free person situated in an impersonal world that operates coercively under principles of necessity, and thereby signifies our paradoxical nature as embodied spirits. Despair intensifies as our spiritual capacities of thought, imagination, and volition become realized over the course of our development. As freedom becomes realized, and we become more conscious of ourselves, we are likely to resist subordination to external forces beyond our control. Because freedom and the world that absorbs us are at odds, and both constitute us as human beings, despair is best understood as a state of disintegration in the person. Kierkegaard believes that to eliminate despair, the conflicting elements of our nature need to be harmonized so that integrity is achieved, but this is a paradoxical feat that cannot be accomplished without divine assistance. However, I challenge his claim that personal integrity requires religious faith, and argue that a person should be able to attain it on his own through an ethical way of life, which balances firmly held ideals and rational principles with concrete living. I also call into doubt his claim that despair is universal to humankind, and argue that he cannot consistently maintain that it is a state that the person brings upon himself through a misuse of will. His premises entail the disturbing conclusion that God brings it upon us in the process of creating us from nothing.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Works of Søren Kierkegaard

CD Christian Discourses
CA The Concept of Anxiety
CI The Concept of Irony
CUP Concluding Unscientific Postscript
EUD Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses
EO Either/Or, 2 vols. (Hong Translation)
FT Fear and Trembling
FSE For Self-Examination & Judge For Yourself!
REP Repetition
MLW "The Moment" and Late Writings
PF Philosophical Fragments
PC Practice in Christianity
SUD The Sickness Unto Death (Hong Translation)
SLW Stages on Life's Way
TA Two Ages
UDVS Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits
WOL Works of Love

Full details of publications can be found in the Bibliography.
Introduction

A spirit of optimism tends to resonate throughout society in the West, despite being occasionally disrupted by a national calamity, or curbed by economic or political crises. While this general mood brings cheer to many of us, and encourages those who are weary to bear with their plight with the hope of better times ahead, there is reason to think that as a matter of fact, all is not well in the world. One does not have to probe too deeply into the human psyche to understand why many would question this attitude that is impressed on us in through popular culture from a young age. A cursory glance at the state of the world would reveal that poverty, disease, mental illness, maltreatment, oppression, and violence are rampant in human life, some of which seems eminently preventable. Although we have taken measures to mitigate sources of suffering through advancements in areas like science and technology, we have hardly succeeded in controlling them completely. Without question, the call for racial and gender equality has made many of us more conscientious, and led to improvements in our situation as a whole, but political and economic injustice is still prevalent due to the radically unequal distribution of wealth. Those who are more globally conscious might be concerned about wars, famines, and exploitation of labor occurring overseas, even as the suffering experienced in these regions is difficult for most of us to imagine. Such anxieties call into question the overarching narrative of human progress and prosperity that is customarily accepted without serious questioning, and are prone to drive those affected by them to despair.

It would be unfair to accuse those who doubt the popular narrative of stubborn faultfinding, or to discredit them by attributing their view to depression. Many raise these worries out of alarm for the human condition and a desire to set things aright, and not because they intend to spread gloom or be contrarians for the sake of it. Their pessimism might not be easily put to rest by the cool reassurance of others, who risk trivializing the issues in recommending confidence in our capacity to resolve the problems that continue to beleaguer us. At worst, these individuals might recommend blithe forgetfulness of them, which would only ensure that they would fail to be addressed adequately. Many of one's misgivings might be moral in nature and pertain to the actions of human beings, including one's own personal failings, but they might also stem from an awareness of danger and insecurity lurking in existence that none of us can get a firm handle on. For instance, death and adversity are uncomfortably at hand for
all of us, without us being able to do much about it. Some might respond to these worries by arguing that it is all a matter of perspective, and that the worldview of the unflagging optimist has just as much merit as that of someone more critical or pessimistic about the human condition or existence in general. Each side can offer reasons in defense of their view, but there remains the question of which evaluation is more truthful and has a preponderance of evidence on its side. Addressing this complex issue should be of concern to those who intend to approach life with honesty and insight into human existence, and so will likely be done by those want to live a good life.

**Life out of Balance**

Those who examine traditional sources of wisdom will likely conclude that sages and religious leaders have tended to side against the popular narrative in their reflections on human suffering and the ambiguities of life. A common refrain in major philosophical and religious circles has been that suffering is an elemental feature of human existence, regardless of nation or epoch. Many of the teachings propagated in the East intend to enlighten individuals about this phenomenon in hopes of liberating them from it, along with the despair that it can foster. Buddhists, for instance, believe that the first truth of existence is *duhkha*. This is a Sanskrit word often translated as 'dissatisfaction,' but with an etymology that suggests a wheel out of kilter.¹ To get a sense of what this could mean, one might imagine riding in a carriage with a wheel that is out of alignment. A trip through the countryside might begin as pleasurable, but the wobbling and bouncing of the carriage eventually becomes irritating and disruptive, and eventually the trip is no longer very pleasing. Buddhists think that such a metaphor conveys a basic truth about human life. "Something basic and important isn't right. It bothers us, makes us unhappy, time after time ... no matter how hard we try to cultivate pleasure and keep it coming our way, eventually the pleasure recedes and the disturbance and vexation return. Nothing we do can keep them entirely at bay."² Of course, Buddhists can appeal to the obvious problems mentioned earlier to support this point, but there is a more profound psychological basis to their worry. In their view, even those blessed with happiness and good fortune are beleaguered by nagging suffering, even though it appears that everything goes well for them. Whether it is bad moods or

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¹ See Hagen, *Buddhism Plain and Simple*, p. 25. I have also borrowed from the metaphor Hagen uses when describing the meaning of this term.

minor frustrations that contribute a disproportionate amount of suffering to our day,
dissatisfaction lingers in us all, however subtly. Since to be a self is to suffer, they believe that
the dissolution of the self would end its suffering. The goal of Buddhist practice is to eliminate
the conditions that give rise to duhkha by awakening a non-dual state of consciousness in which
the distinction one makes between oneself and things other than oneself dissolves. When the self
no longer demarcates itself from anything external to it, it ceases to exist as a separate entity, and
liberation, or nirvana, is attained.  

The idea that suffering is a predominate feature of human life can also be found at the
origin of Western philosophy, but in a dualistic form that maintains a strict division between the
knower and objects or entities known. In Plato's Phaedo, Socrates contends that the human being
is a composite of a mortal body and an immortal soul, comparing the body to a prison that keeps
the soul mired in the earth. The task of the philosopher, he thinks, is to work on separating the
soul from the body in this life so that he or she will be prepared for its release to the afterlife
when the body dies. To secure a heavenly migration to the eternal realm of the intelligible
Forms, where one is liberated from the suffering of human existence, one must gain wisdom and
virtue through the exercise of reason. To care for one's soul, one should come to know the true
and good, and avoid associating with the body, which corrupts the soul and besets it with all
sorts of ills and annoyances. This means renouncing bodily pleasures, worldly desires, and
appetites that would keep the soul attached to this impure earthly realm, and paying little heed to
the senses, which mislead one in the pursuit of truth. The philosopher hopes that by purifying his
soul in this life through contemplation and the cultivation of reason, he will exist in a divine state
much better than his current one upon death, and be free of the body once and for all. If he does
not practice this method of detachment to approach the true and divine with clarity of thought,
his soul will remain mired in the earth, and be imprisoned in a different body in its next
incarnation. It would therefore continue to suffer

Finally, those in the Judeo-Christian tradition explain the evils and suffering that burden
humankind through the myth of the Fall, appealing to divine revelation rather than philosophical
speculation. According to Genesis, after God created the world, he created a paradise for human

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3 Ibid., Chapter 11 (pp. 133-137)
4 Plato, Phaedo, 62b
5 Ibid., 64c-67a
6 Ibid., 81e
beings to dwell in, called the Garden of Eden. God told the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, that they could eat from any tree in the garden except the tree of knowledge of good and evil. If they gained this wisdom by eating from this tree, they would die. A cunning serpent persuaded Eve to eat from it, telling her, "when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." After Eve and Adam ate from the tree, they realized they were naked, and fear and shame came over them. Meting out punishment for their disobedience, God told Adam, "cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." After doing this, God confirmed that the serpent was not lying when he said that they would become like Him with their knowledge. To keep them in check, he exiled them from the Garden, which prevented them from eating from the tree of life and living forever. Since all human beings are descendants of this couple, the allegory suggests that we are also separate from the home originally intended for us in paradise, burdened by the sins of our ancestors who have transferred their unhappy condition to us.

Within Christianity, and under the influence of Plato, Saint Augustine expanded on this idea with his doctrine of original sin. According to his interpretation of the Fall, out of pride and love of self, Adam had turned away from God and toward himself with his transgression. His willful act of defiance transformed human nature, which was created wholly good and subject to God, so that it became corrupted and mortal. By inheriting his punishment, we instead became subject to fleshly lusts, sensual desires, and turbulent emotions that move and disturb us against our will. This includes carnal desires, anger, avarice, and cravings for status and power, which as philosophers like Plato are accustomed to point out, "move in an un­governed and inordinate manner, and consequently need the regulation of mind and reason." Since we are a composite of a body and a rational soul, which struggles to contain the various earthly lusts, our nature is set against itself, and the body's insubordination to the will brings guilt and shame upon us. Augustine therefore endorses a "downward fall," where after falling away from God and into the

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7 Genesis 3:5
8 Genesis 3:17-19
9 See City of God, Book Fourteen, Section 13, p. 415 (Dods Translation)
10 Ibid., Section 12, p. 414
11 Ibid., Section 19, p. 421
12 Ibid., Section 15, pp. 417-419.
dregs of earthly life, discord in the human being exists due to his recalcitrant bodily nature and a will that has been weakened. Although the human being is out of kilter in this life, by accepting Christ's offer of redemption, the Christian has faith that God will heal his divided nature so that the original harmony he enjoyed in paradise will be restored in heaven, and the will would have the body under its incontestable dominion once again.

A different and intriguing interpretation of the allegory of the Fall can be found in Kierkegaard, who claims that the Fall awakened reflection and deliberate decision in the human being for the first time (EUD: 125). On his view, this event did not happen only once with Adam, but repeats itself in the life of the human being when he chooses to sin (EUD: 127). He does not disagree with Augustine that sin gives rise to lusts and corruption in the human being, and that God allows this to continue as a form of punishment. Neither does he disagree with Plato that the embodied human being suffers "imprisonment" in a "fragile earthen vessel" in being separated from his home in the eternal (EUD: 337). However, he departs from both of them in emphasizing that knowledge of good and evil incites restless questioning about life. This is more like an upward fall than a downward fall, since through this knowledge, the higher capacities of thought are realized for the first time. In paradise, where everything was perfect and blessed, the human being had no need to question anything at a deeper and more abstract level, or to think critically about his existence and the state of the world. Because there were no problems to resolve, and was no breakdown or confusion in the order of things, "no one would have asked where everything came from" (EUD: 126). Kierkegaard describes the anxiety of the reflective individual who has been exiled from this fortunate state and initiated into the sorrows of earthly life:

Troubled, he asked: What is the good, where is the perfect to be found? If it exists, where is its source? But the doubt that had come along with the knowledge coiled itself alarmingly around his heart, and the serpent that had seduced him with the delectable now squeezed him in its coils ... Doubt would explain to him first one thing, then another, and in the explanation itself it would lie in wait for him in order to disquiet him still more. (EUD: 127)

Kierkegaard is not the first person to have stated this position. It is likely that he adopted it from Hegel, who used the allegory of the fall to describe the emergence of spirit from nature, in which it becomes conscious of itself and its rational powers. See Hegel, Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, pp. 437-452.
For Kierkegaard, the kind of separation from God that occurs through sin leaves one disoriented in self-reflection, and spurs an inward search for a greater meaning and deeper understanding of existence. Doubt cannot put to rest the existential questions it raises, or find closure in the answers it arrives at, since these answers only lead to more questions for it. Kierkegaard elaborates on the insecurity of reflection under the pseudonym of Johannes Climacus, who claims that reflection is "infinite," and its interrogating can only be stopped through a "resolution," or an act of will (CUP: 112-113). For example, one might think that life on earth can be explained as the outcome of cosmic events tracing back to the Big Bang, but continue to ask for an explanation for that event, and so on ad infinitum, until one decides to terminate one's chain of reasoning and be done with it. But without an adequate final explanation for the phenomenon in question, it is ultimately explained, or "without why," and the groundlessness of it unsettles reflection, which insists on getting answers and closure. Kierkegaard claims that such nagging doubts about one's condition reveal one's need for God, who might do what one cannot of one's own accord by ending the discomfort and incertitude of reflection. Consequently, the only way to relieve these paralyzing doubts in this life is through the resolution of faith (EUD: 136-137).

**Human Life as Despair**

Under the "higher" Christian pseudonym of Anti-Climacus, in *Sickness Unto Death*, Kierkegaard conceives of the human being's fallen condition in terms of despair.\textsuperscript{14} To despair means to be without hope, but the Danish word for this concept that Anti-Climacus uses, *fortvivlelse*, has a different etymology that clues the reader into the unique meaning it has for him.\textsuperscript{15} *Tvivl* is the Danish word for doubt, while the prefix *for* is used to intensify the meaning of the root. *Fortvivlelse* is literally, then, intensified doubt. Furthermore, *tvivl* is etymologically related to the number two, which suggests that a kind of doubling occurs in this state of intensified doubt. In ordinary instances of doubt, there is a difference between the belief one currently holds and the belief that it might be mistaken or inadequate, which indicates duality.

\textsuperscript{14} According to Kierkegaard, Anti-Climacus is “higher” in the sense that he represents what it means to be a Christian to an extraordinary degree (JP VI: 6439). While Kierkegaard believed he was able to elucidate the Christian ideal presented in Scripture, he did not think that he met the rigorous demands of being a Christian stressed by Anti-Climacus in his own life. For this reason, he declined to pen the works under his own name (JP VI: 6446).

\textsuperscript{15} I have borrowed this etymological analysis from Beabout. See *Freedom and its Misuses*, pp. 71-72.
and conflict in one's cognitive state. For Anti-Climacus, in the case of fortvivlelse, there is a duality that concerns the disposition of the whole person, and not mere uncertainty about what to believe. He defines despair [fortvivlelse] as a "misrelation" or disequilibrium in the human being, who is a "synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity" (SUD: 13-14). He adds that this synthesis is "a relation between two" that is capable of "relating itself to itself," and when it becomes active in this sense, the human being becomes a self, or spirit (SUD: 13). Minimally understood, it follows that in despair, there is discord between the spiritual and animal aspects of the human being, who in the infinitude of reflection, is nevertheless finitely situated in the natural world. The task of this dissertation will be to analyze the nature of despair in Kierkegaard's thought, using Anti-Climacus' definition of despair as a misrelation among the different components of the self.

In this regard, Anti-Climacus agrees with Plato and Augustine in their dualistic assessment of the ills of human existence. But like Kierkegaard, he departs from them with the suggestion that an intense form of doubt and troublesome reflection besets the person who has become conscious of being in despair. On this view, the awakening of the human being's higher spiritual capacities brings him to despair, just as his eyes became opened to suffering and his nakedness upon learning of good and evil after the Fall. As reflection intensifies and becomes increasingly self-enclosed, he loses the harmonious relationship with the world that he had enjoyed in the earlier part of life, and becomes dissociated from that finite aspect of himself that resides in it. While Aristotle distinguishes man as the rational animal, for Anti-Climacus and Kierkegaard, it would be more apt to view him as the sick animal, where this illness stems from his spiritual nature as it becomes actualized in the natural world.16 This nature would include his rational capacities insofar as they are used in any act of self-reflection or questioning, and consequently, reason contributes to his spiritual illness in no small part.

The definition of despair as a misrelation between the spiritual and bodily aspects of the self allows us to break ground in our investigation into its nature, but it still brings little clarity to the meaning and significance this term has for Anti-Climacus. In arguing that all human beings are in despair, he clearly divests the term of its ordinary meaning in Danish or English, and uses it in a technical sense (SUD: 22). Since despair impacts those who seem like ordinary, happy people, it cannot be a psychological disposition characterized by feelings of hopelessness or

depression as is commonly understood, even if it occasionally presents itself this way. He opposes his view of despair to the “customary view” that despair appears rather infrequently in the general population. Those with this "superficial" conception of the problem typically believe it is up to each individual to discern whether or not they are in despair, and that we have to take them at their word when most of them claim not to be (SUD: 22-23). As a self-proclaimed “physician of the soul” who diagnoses despair as a spiritual sickness, Anti-Climacus perceives matters quite differently (SUD: 23). Just as a sick individual might believe they are healthy when a physician knows they are not, so too can they be mistaken about not being in despair. This might happen in several different ways. Many remain entirely ignorant of their despair because they are buried in worldly distractions or busywork that helps them take their mind off it. There are still others who are not completely ignorant of it, but have a faint idea of its presence in their lives. Rather than confront it directly and learn the truth about it, however, they settle with this rudimentary understanding (SUD: 48). Anti-Climacus believes that most people find ways to repress despair from conscious awareness, and that self-deception occurs in all of these cases. While palliative measures serve most people quite well, he believes that a person can be cured of despair only by boldly facing up to it. In giving an account of despair, he intends to bring his reader to a deepened awareness of it so that by coming to accept it, they might take the measures necessary to overcome it.

This raises the question of what relation Anti-Climacus' technical notion of despair bears to our customary one, and whether he thinks despair shares much in common with the more natural types of sickness. In his view, freedom is an essential component of selfhood. With that being the case, despair emerges of our own free will and not by necessity. It is therefore always a condition that we are responsible for as individuals, and indicates a fall on our part. This means that despair does not happen to a person in the way that we might speak of someone catching a cold or developing cancer. Of the despairing individual, he writes, “every moment he is in despair, he is bringing it upon himself” (SUD: 17), which he does by either not wanting to be who he is or wanting to be someone he is not (SUD: 13). Anti-Climacus believes this because he is convinced that God establishes every self as a relation that is “in the proper relationship,” and only through our own poor choices could it ever become a misrelation (SUD: 16). This state of discord in the self never befalls it; once despair arises through some misuse of the will, it is the individual who wills to sustain the misrelation in the different constituents of the self by refusing
to be itself in one way or another. While there might be cases in which individuals bear some responsibility for contracting a natural sickness, such as when they neglect their bodies, they do not sustain this condition like they do with despair. Anti-Climacus believes that the individual can choose to bring the relation back into order at any moment by willing to be the person he was established to be, but he argues that the vast majority of us do not do this because we do not want to abide in God, in whom we nevertheless "live and move and have our being." He therefore understands despair to be universal to the human condition, and a basic fact about ourselves that we all cope with in some way (SUD: 22).

Anti-Climacus says little about what it means to bring despair upon oneself in a way that makes one responsible for it. It is wildly implausible to think that we could be willing despair at every moment of our lives if it is understood as a repeated intentional act that we are consciously aware of. Most people rarely even think about despair, much less intend it like they do with things like working, brushing their teeth, or being with their family, yet he nevertheless believes they spend the entire duration of their lives in this state. To make sense of Anti-Climacus' notion of despair, it is best to interpret it as the basic disposition of the self that shapes one’s entire way of life, including one's worldview and conception of oneself. As a deep-rooted disposition of the human being that is intentional, all other intentions arise from it, including the ordinary intentions of everyday life that seem totally unrelated to despair in the traditional sense of the word. This refusal of authentic selfhood would therefore encompass all of one’s thoughts, desires, and behaviors, as well as the choices one make. It would even lurk beneath one’s happiest moments, when it seems otherwise furthest from one's mind.

Because despair is a firmly held disposition that the individual wills at a primordial level, Anti-Climacus rejects that it is a psychological or physiological affliction as it is understood on the customary view. A person who has become conscious of being in despair will likely experience painful feelings of depression, anguish, or hopelessness, but these episodes would be the result of a prior misuse of freedom. If she experiences them, it is because she was already in despair, and the troubling consequences of it have surfaced to awareness (SUD: 24). He thinks this strange phenomenon is possible because despair originates in the eternal component in the

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17 See Acts 17:28. Kierkegaard phrases our refusal in these terms in one of his upbuilding discourses, but as a Christian, Anti-Climacus would agree (EUD: 134).
18 In characterizing despair as the basic disposition of the self, I am drawing on Kant's notion of Gesinnung, or cast of mind. Kant describes this disposition in the human being as "the supreme inner basis for the adoption of all his maxims." See Religion Within The Bounds of Bare Reason, p. 58.
human being, unlike any of the natural sicknesses that originate in time. When someone who was previously healthy gets a fever, for instance, we cannot say that this person already had a fever, since the fever began at a certain moment in time (SUD: 24). This is also the case for transitory psychological states like depression, happiness, and the like, but it is not the case for despair, which is categorically different due to its primordial and eternal origin.

Since despair is an entrenched act of the will that produces a misrelation in the self, it is an error to classify despair in Kierkegaard’s work as a mood. As temporal phenomena, moods are constantly in flux, and often arrive contrary to our intentions or wishes. Although we might choose to indulge in certain moods on occasion, they tend to arise involuntarily and of their own accord. We are also passive to them in a way that is foreign to Anti-Climacus’ notion of despair. As Heidegger rightly observes, a mood “assails” us. For Anti-Climacus, however, despair does not do this. It is true that in misusing our will, we become vulnerable to awful feelings or moods that we rightly attribute to being in a state of despair. In calling these psychological states despair, Anti-Climacus agrees with the customary view. But to characterize despair as a mood or an affect would be to ignore the active, voluntary component that is essential to it. It is conceivable that someone could feel despondent or miserable without being in despair, supposing they happen to suffer from these feelings rather than being complicit in willing them into existence. In fact, Anti-Climacus believes that despair rarely manifests itself in psychological symptoms when it is present. This is one of the main reasons why so many people go through life without ever becoming aware of being in despair. While they appear to others as mentally healthy and think of themselves in this way, Anti-Climacus believes that in truth, they are spiritually ill. Conversely, those who are deemed mentally ill by society might be closer to spiritual health if their difficulties have put them on the verge of faith, with the hope that God will intervene to relieve them of their misery.

There is another key difference between the customary view of despair and Anti-Climacus’ view that one must consider before getting clear on what he thinks it means to despair. On the customary view, to despair is to be without hope more generally, but Anti-Climacus believes that despair is essentially a religious matter, and is the opposite of faith. In his

19 See for example McCarthy, The Phenomenology of Moods in Kierkegaard, Chapter IV.
20 Heidegger, Being and Time, p. 176.
21 This would be the case if someone were suffering under these emotions while still having faith in God. One possible cause of this type of suffering would be a chemical or hormonal imbalance in the body. The person of faith would have to “sit tight” and not let these emotions compromise it.
endorsement of Christianity, he believes that to use one's freedom appropriately and eliminate despair, one must have faith (SUD: 131). He defines this as a state in which "in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it" (SUD: 131). In prescribing faith as a cure for despair, Anti-Climacus suggests that in truth, it would be impossible for an individual to want to be herself without first knowing herself as a spiritual being who is not self-sufficient, but who is fully dependent on God. The thought seems to be that, in order to live authentically and without engaging in self-deception, you must finally accept that you have been brought into existence as an individual in relation to God, and have faith that He will end the suffering you brought upon yourself by rejecting Him, along with the kind of person He intended you to be. This is certainly a contentious conclusion that is likely to leave the reader with a host of questions and doubts about the tenability of his position, especially if one is not inclined toward Christianity. Why think that everyone is in despair? Supposing Anti-Climacus is even correct that despair is a misrelation or dysfunction in the self generated by the will, why does he need to introduce religious notions like God and faith in positing a solution to it? Might a self-reflective individual defeat despair as Anti-Climacus conceives of it by willing to be herself in relation to something or other, without assuming that it must be an omnipotent God, and without adopting any form of religious belief? Even if we grant that there is an immense creative power beyond ourselves that established us in existence, why should we care about it, and why should it have any bearing on how we conduct our lives?

An Outline of My Project

Kierkegaard’s response to such worries can be found in other works in his authorship, some of which, at least prima facie, do not deal so emphatically with religious themes. Through the fictional characters portrayed in the pseudonymous Either/Or, Kierkegaard intended to show how despair of the type described by Anti-Climacus is implicit in those ways of life that are not essentially religious in character. In this work, Judge William discusses two types of "life-views" that he calls esthetic and ethical. A life-view, he says, consists in "a conception of the meaning of

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22 Theunissen endeavors to give Anti-Climacus' analysis of despair a secular interpretation instead of treating it as a spiritual condition that requires an intervention from God to resolve (Kierkegaard's Concept of Despair, p. ix). In Chapters 5 and 6, I explain that the idea that despair can be resolved through one's own powers commits one to a serious distortion of Kierkegaard's texts, and that on his view, we must depend on an external act of divine grace for this.

23 Thanks to David Sussman for raising this worry.
life and its purpose" (E/O II: 179), and he believes every human being has a need to adopt such a comprehensive principle to bring unity and coherence to the many experiences of his life (E/O II: 183). Because a life-view is prone to change over time and is something one is well aware of having, it is not a basic disposition like despair. It is, however, an attitude toward existence that provides the individual with a conceptual framework for understanding the particular events that occur over the course of his life, along with his central task and core values. As the Judge describes it, esthetic life-views aim at sensual enjoyment in the earlier phase of human life, and interesting material for observation in the later, reflective phase, while ethical life-views aim at the cultivation of virtue through the fulfillment of duties and responsibilities toward oneself and society. While the lifestyles of most of us might not exactly resemble those of the figures portrayed in Either/Or, given that they only represent paradigmatic cases of esthetic and ethical ways of life, Kierkegaard suggests that, in one way or another, a great many of us have life-views that can be described in these terms.

As we will see in the following chapters, by using these figures to provide an insider's look into the character of the esthetic and ethical ways of life, Kierkegaard attempts to show that despair is common to both life-views, and is therefore a central problem of the human condition. Often these efforts are overt, such as when the Judges admonishes his friend, A for living in despair by neglecting the duties that he thinks are essential to selfhood, and by indulging in esthetic reveries that bear little relation to reality. At other times the presence of despair in human life is merely suggested, such as in A’s essays on boredom and tragedy as distinctive features of human existence. While A appears to resign himself to despair based on his morbid insights into existence, the Judge believes that by living ethically, he has become victorious in his own struggles with it. Although Kierkegaard concludes the work by allowing the Judge the upper hand over A, there is reason to suspect that he does not escape from despair in the way he would like. The failure of an ethical approach to the problem becomes evident in Kierkegaard’s later works, where he puts forward the religious way of life, or the life of faith, as a third option available to those who wish to overcome despair. In interpreting any way of life outside of Christianity as a refusal to be oneself, Anti-Climacus offers a religious starting point to those who have recognized the inability of the esthetic or ethical life-views to contribute lasting unity and coherence to his life, which they seek as spirit.
In his pseudonymous writings, Kierkegaard does not understand the three life-views as a set of alternatives that the individual can arbitrarily choose from at any random point in his life. The life-views should instead be understood as basic attitudes that gradually emerge at different stages of one's personal development. These "stages of life" are also defined in esthetic, ethical and religious terms in his works. The order of the stages follows a necessary sequence that is not up to the individual, but he can hinder or encourage his passage through them through the choices he makes. On a standard interpretation of the stages, a person proceeds through the esthetic stage of life before moving onto the ethical stage and finally ending at the religious stage. This is a progression in which a person arrives at a more truthful conception of himself and his relationship to the world, to others, and to God as he matures as an individual.

Kierkegaard suggests that the human being begins at the esthetic stage, with little self-knowledge or volition, but that he can choose to adopt an ethical or religious life-view later in life after gaining more knowledge and experience. Anti-Climacus is unique among the pseudonyms in conceiving of the stages of life as forms of despair rather than as life-views, although I will argue that the three life-views can be reclassified under his scheme. On this picture, the human being begins life ignorant of himself and his despair, while despair intensifies into weakness and then defiance as his will becomes empowered and he gains greater knowledge of himself and existence. In weakness, the individual does not want to be who he is, while in defiance, he wants to be someone he is not. At the end of this process, which most people will never get to, the individual rests in faith by willing to be himself before God.

Anti-Climacus argues that the movement through the different forms of despair has a dialectical character that results from the self continually refusing to be itself. With his notion of the dialectical, he follows Hegel in assuming that human existence consists of a restless process of development in which existential tensions are resolved through negations of previously held positions, which go on to generate new tensions that demand resolution. For Anti-Climacus, these tensions ensue over time because the self is a synthesis of contradictory components that nevertheless seeks unity and coherence in its existence. I will explain how this dialectic works in the following chapters, but in the broadest sense, the esthetic way of life is abolished upon

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25 I am in agreement with Rudd, who neatly summarizes this idea when he writes: "According to Kierkegaard, the factor that drives us from one stage of life to the next is an—at first unconscious and inchoate—desire for wholeness, for an ultimate integration and coherence in our lives" (*Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical*, p. 134).
entering the ethical stage, and the ethical way of life is abolished upon entering the religious
stage, while each of these stages preserve and transform certain profitable aspects of the
preceding stage in the self's effort to achieve integrity. But where Hegel believes that this
dialectical process of negation is a logical movement generated in the act of thinking about what
exists, Kierkegaard argues throughout his work that logic only provides the concepts, forms, and
rules through which we think about existence and discern connections between things, and
cannot itself produce an actual movement in it. 26 Any existential movement produced through
negation occurs through the will of individuals whom God has endowed with a will, and not in
thought, which only guides the will by conceptualizing reality and making judgments about it. It
should also be noted that on Kierkegaard's view, despair intensifies through the growth of human
freedom in the natural world, where this freedom is a quality of distinct agents that move through
the stages of life in a self-willed fashion, refusing to be who God made them to be. It is never
that of an impersonal deity that acts according to logical necessity throughout the entirety of
world-history, using human beings as its members as Hegel claims.

Despite such crucial differences, there are other similarities in their brands of dialectic,
which they believe can be supported through a phenomenological investigation that studies the
different shapes consciousness assumes as one comes to know oneself over the different periods
of human life. As Taylor points out, "Hegel and Kierkegaard develop alternative
phenomenologies of spirit that are designed to lead the reader from inauthentic to authentic or
fully realized selfhood." 27 For Hegel, this investigation of the structures of consciousness centers
on the spiritual life of God, and describes how God comes to know himself over the course of
history through the rational activity of human beings. For Kierkegaard, it centers upon the
spiritual life of the individual, and describes how he comes to know himself through learning that
he must have faith that God will heal his despair, which he brought upon himself by misusing his
will. Although Kierkegaard and Hegel fundamentally disagree about what self-realization entails,
and about how to categorize the different stages that human beings pass through in their

26 For elaboration of this idea and a rundown of Kierkegaard's dialectical method, see chapter II in Malantschuck,
Kierkegaard's Thought, especially pp. 170-172. On this point, Kierkegaard agrees with the empiricist notion that
reason alone cannot motivate an action. See for example Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, 3.1.1. In Chapter 1, I
claim that Kierkegaard is an empiricist, although not of the naturalistic sort.
27 Taylor, Journeys to Selfhood, p. 13.
development, they both agree that this process can be delineated through a dialectical logic that culminates in Christian religiosity.28

By presenting the theory of personal development Kierkegaard provides through the pseudonyms, I examine his argument that despair is a central feature of each stage of human life prior to the religious stage, where faith is attained at the final moment of the journey toward self-realization. Given that Anti-Climacus contends that despair is “a sickness of the spirit” (SUD: 24), an understanding of his notion of spirit, or the self, is a prerequisite for any deeper investigation into what he takes to be the nature of despair. For this reason, in the first chapter, I explain what it means to be a self on his view, and how the self can be understood dialectically as a synthesis of the eternal and temporal, the infinite and finite, and freedom and necessity. I have already introduced Anti-Climacus' definition of this sickness as a misrelation between the spiritual and embodied aspects of the self that is brought on by one's refusal to be oneself, but in the remainder of the dissertation, I interpret despair as a state of disintegration in the self. As we will see, for Anti-Climacus, its lack of integrity has a distinctive phenomenology behind it that is best conceived in terms of self-alienation, even though it is not essentially a psychological condition and does not necessarily involve feelings of alienation. In the second chapter, I explain that in the earlier phase of the esthetic stage of life, where one is in thrall to worldly or sensual enjoyment while being ignorant of being a self, the self is alienated from the eternal and infinite components of itself. In avoiding deeper spiritual concerns, it lacks an awareness of its freedom and has little if any volitional capacity. In the third and fourth chapters, I look at the later phase of the esthetic stage, where the self becomes alienated from its temporal and finite components due to its not wanting to be who it is. When this happens following an earthly loss or difficulty, the self gains a degree of independence by choosing to distance itself from associations with the world, and by not conforming to the life of the crowd. As freedom emerges in the life of the individual, he becomes self-enclosed in heightened reflection, and is likely to think deeply about himself and his problems, or to approach existence through esthetic contemplation. At this more advanced stage, the psychological states customarily linked with despair, such as feelings of depression and misery, are likely to beset the individual for an extended period for the first time.

28 As Malantschuck explains, while there is a logic involved in the progression of the stages according to Kierkegaard, it is a much more informal variant than the one described by Hegel, who thought the process could be rigorously formalized and designated as a science. See Kierkegaard's Thought, p. 169. Throughout this project, I show that Kierkegaard's thought is far more systematic than is generally recognized.
Once despair becomes an obvious problem for the individual, he might decide to take measures to overcome it by changing his "life-view," or his basic attitude toward life. In the fifth and sixth chapters, I explain that as despair intensifies and the self arrives at greater knowledge of itself and its freedom, it might will to be itself by transforming itself in its existence, and becoming the principal authority over its life. In earnestly affirming his autonomy and his capacity for critical thought, he might decide to hold beliefs, values, ideals, and principles that are out of keeping with the social groups he belongs to, and pursue a way of life that is unique to him. After reconsidering his interests and concerns with the aim of self-improvement, it is likely that he will adopt an ethical life-view or a stoical attitude, and commit himself to virtue in a manner that is rare among his contemporaries. However, as we will see in chapter five through the figure of the Judge in *Either/Or*, someone might commit himself ethically without breaking significantly with the beliefs, norms, and general practices of his culture. His deliberate decision to embrace the established order would seem to bring him into harmony with the world and society, so that he would no longer be alienated from them. While self-determined individuals in the ethical stage might believe they have conquered despair, in chapter six, we will see that Anti-Climacus argues that they cannot correct the imbalance within themselves of their own accord. In their self-sufficient posturing, they remain alienated from the temporal and finite components in themselves, and will to be someone that that they are ultimately not. In order for such an individual to become who he is, he must finally admit his total dependence on God to heal the division in his nature, but this individual has too much pride and self-will to acknowledge his need for God's grace.

In summary, Anti-Climacus understands despair as a metaphysical rupture in the self that only God can repair, rather than an epistemic problem resulting from ignorance of one's true nature as the Buddhist claims. It is also not a problem that can be resolved by fleeing from bodily existence and into an abstract realm of ideas through the exercise of reason, as the Platonist claims. After the individual severs his connection from God through sin, there arises a break in the fabric of reality that cannot be rectified through human knowledge or ability. On his view, nothing short of faith in Christ's atonement will resolve the discord that compromises the individual's existence. My general task in the dissertation will be to explain why Kierkegaard, through his pseudonyms, argues that the overwhelming majority of human beings are in despair, even though many fail to acknowledge it. By making despair a product of the will, he believes
that we are not approaching life with the right attitude or living in the way that we ought to be. He aims to help us correct this by making us aware of our inadequacy as self-willed individuals who are not doing God's will. In choosing to turn away from God and toward ourselves by relying on our own capabilities, the suggestion is that we've lost sight of the highest good in existence, and are somehow to blame for this fall. By examining what Kierkegaard takes to be the failures of esthetic and ethical life-views, and how individuals who lack faith are supposed to be misusing their will over the course of their development, I hope to shed some light on why he believes we need faith to overcome despair and become self-actualized individuals.

Despair is a difficult topic to confront at length, and not all readers are likely to agree with Kierkegaard's negative assessment of ordinary ways of living. He is sometimes accused of misanthropy for sounding off on the wretchedness of people, and the mediocrity of the general run of humanity. Yet those who advance this criticism downplay his admiration for the greatness and potential of each and every human being. He does not see himself as conveying esoteric wisdom, but believes nearly everyone is capable of self-actualization if they will it (TA: 22). While Anti-Climacus concedes that it might seem bleak to see all of humanity as being in despair for not willing this, and to make despair the focus of inquiry in the way he does, he insists that his view is not bleak, and that his interests are not morbid:

> It is not somber, for, on the contrary, it tries to shed light on what generally is left somewhat obscure; it is not depressing but instead is elevating, inasmuch as it views every human being under the destiny of the highest claim upon him, to be spirit. (SUD: 22)

Anti-Climacus argues that our destiny can be fulfilled only after we recognize that in this life, we are spiritually ill and in desperate need of help that we cannot offer ourselves. One of Kierkegaard’s principal objectives as an author was to assist in healing persons of despair by bringing them to an awareness of their spiritual nature, or in other words, the truth about themselves. As a student of Socrates, he thought of himself as a midwife who would meet his reader on her own terms through the pseudonyms, and gradually lead her from ignorance in the esthetic way of life to knowledge of herself and her despair (POV: 7). Part of this maieutic strategy executed "in service of the truth" involved the esthetic and ethical pseudonyms in

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Either/Or (POV: 37), but it also included the use of Anti-Climacus, an idealized “physician of the soul” who sees the remedy for despair in the Christian faith (SUD: 23). Kierkegaard's project can therefore be seen as a form of therapy in which the spiritual health of the individual is the primary aim. Because the human being is spirit, this health is arguably the most important thing for us to achieve.

It would seem all too easy to quickly dismiss Anti-Climacus’ view as radical and unconvincing for its religious thrust. It is tempting to reject Kierkegaard’s curative effort on the grounds that he wrongly projects the melancholy he dealt with in his personal life onto the rest of humanity. It might easily be doubted that a turn to religion is always necessary to overcome despair, assuming one is in despair at all. There is no question many would find belief in Christianity unappealing on rational or religious grounds, and discredit it as a solution to despair. Kierkegaard does not take the need for faith for granted, however, but intends to show the appeal that Christianity ought to have for people through compelling philosophical insight into the human condition. He should not be dismissed without first examining his view and determining where or if he goes wrong. In assessing Kierkegaard's view, I will decide whether he offers a plausible account that is likely to persuade someone who lives an esthetic or ethical way of life to adopt a religious existence characterized by the renunciation of worldly goods and pursuits. This will include a discussion of whether his criticisms of these ways of life are viable without reference to any “outside” religious perspective, or carry force only if his religious position has already been accepted.

Like Kierkegaard's own work, this dissertation will deal heavily with metaphysical themes, but despite its theoretical character, it is motivated foremost by practical and ethical concerns. In order to figure out how one should live, what one should aim for, and what basic attitude one should adopt to properly orient oneself in existence, one should have made some progress in understanding oneself, and this requires a great deal of self-interpretation. On Kierkegaard's existentialist conception of the human being, one does not arrive at this understanding once and for all or as a matter of course, but rather through personal striving on a life-long journey of self-discovery. I believe that Kierkegaard's thought is highly instructive in this regard, and will guide the reader through the process of self-interpretation that he describes in his account of personal development.
Chapter 1
The Constitution and Dialectic of the Self

1.1 Introduction

As I mentioned in the introduction, because despair for Anti-Climacus is essentially a "sickness of the spirit" (SUD: 24), an examination of his notion of spirit should precede any inquiry into his notion of despair. He begins The Sickness Unto Death by claiming: “A human being is spirit,” and that “Spirit is the self” (SUD: 13). He defines the self in a notoriously obscure passage that recalls the idiom of Hegelian dialectics. There he writes:

The self is a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation’s relating itself to itself in the relation; the self is not the relation but is the relation’s relating itself to itself. A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short, a synthesis.

A synthesis is a relation between two. Considered in this way, a human being is still not a self. (SUD: 13)

The self is described as a relation between contradictory elements that, in reflecting on itself, relates itself to itself as a particular human being. To complicate matters even further, he goes on to claim that a second relation between the psychical [Sjel] and the physical constitutes the human being as a synthesis. He also contends that the self is a "derived, established relation" that, in relating itself to itself, must also relate itself to "the power that established it" (SUD: 13-14). This means that the self did not originally create itself in its existence, but was put it into existence by a greater power transcending it. In relating to this other power, the self is able to demarcate itself in its existence by discerning limits to its powers and capacities.

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30 Compare Anti-Climacus’ definition of the self to that of Hegel: “The realized purpose, or the existent actuality, is movement and unfolded becoming; but it is just this unrest that is the self; and the self is like that immediacy and simplicity of the beginning because it is the result, that which has returned into itself, the latter being similarly just the self. And the self is the sameness and simplicity that relates itself to itself.” Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, p. 12.

31 As Taylor points out, “Sjel” is a difficult word to translate accurately into English, and is more literally rendered by the word “soul.” While the word has some religious connotations in Danish, it refers principally to the mind, or the mental processes of the individual. See Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship, p. 88. Lowrie translates this word into English as “soulish” in his translation of The Sickness Unto Death, but this sounds rather awkward. I will follow the Hongs in translating this as “psychical.”
In this cryptic passage, which the rest of the chapter will attempt to shed sorely needed light on, Anti-Climacus defines the self by three basic attributes. It is (a) a bipolar relation, or synthesis of contradictory elements (b) that is actively self-relating and reflective, and (c) that is dependent upon a greater power that established it. His conclusions about the constitution of the self might seem like a matter of stipulation, since he does not claim to arrive at them by way of a discursive argument that could be rendered in a syllogistic format. Instead, he claims to have discerned them by means of a “psychological exposition” of human existence. His methodology should not be construed as psychological in the manner of the empirical sciences, or as disinterested and impersonal in the way that scientific analysis aims to be. Instead, he presents a phenomenological argument that attempts to describe the formal structures of the self "from the inside," through the first-person standpoint of the individual interested in his or her own personal existence. Importantly, he characterizes his investigation as Christian. The thought seems to be that anyone who introspects upon his or her experience as a human being can intuit these structures under the guidance of Christian principles. He therefore offers a phenomenology of human life from the Christian perspective.

While non-Christians or secularists will likely deem his religious presuppositions to be problematic, similar conclusions about the nature of the self and of despair are drawn in Either/Or quite independently of religious considerations. In that work, the structure and constitution of the self is gradually disclosed through philosophical reflections on despair as it emerges in ways of life that Kierkegaard describes as ethical and aesthetic. In the following chapters, I will argue that his portrayal of human existence in that more literary work serves as an indirect defense of Anti-Climacus’ religious starting point by providing non-question-begging reasons to accept it. By attempting to show how lives lived outside of Christianity are ones of

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32 John D. Glenn, Jr. clearly lays out these three attributes of self when interpreting this passage in light of Kierkegaard’s other works. See Glenn, “The Definition of the Self and the Structure of Kierkegaard’s Work,” p. 5. However, this view is in no way controversial. Most commentators who have discussed this passage in depth also point out the same three underlying features, in one way or another.

33 Kosch explains that at the time that The Sickness Unto Death was written, psychology was not yet established as a scientific discipline. Neither was the discipline a prospect for the foreseeable future. “The words Kierkegaard uses (psychologisk, psychologie) were used to indicate something roughly coextensive with Hegelian ‘philosophy of (subjective) spirit’…Hegel’s Encyclopaedia section on subjective spirit included discussions of the soul, the nature of consciousness, reason, representation, thought, inclination and drives.” See Kosch, Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling, and Kierkegaard, p. 207.

34 Kierkegaard claims to be strictly opposed to Christian apologetics, even though he can't help but sneak in his own defense in the unfamiliar guise of the pseudonyms, as I will attempt to show throughout this work. Anti-Climacus, for instance, writes, "it is certain and true that the first one to come up with the idea of defending Christianity in
despair, even on their own terms, Either/Or aims to show the appeal that Christianity should have to those who recognize they are in despair and who want to overcome it once and for all.

Kierkegaard commentators generally agree that Anti-Climacus’ analysis of the self is brusque and opaque. Some have argued that Kierkegaard parodies Hegelian dialectics in this notorious passage, but unlike the Postscript, The Sickness Unto Death does not generally have a satirical tone. He issues it as an earnest work intended for edification and spiritual awakening. Furthermore, Kierkegaard considered himself a dialectician, and the indebtedness of his thought to Hegelian philosophy has already been well established in other scholarship. Taking this passage seriously, the objective of this chapter will be to unravel its meaning with help from other material in Kierkegaard’s corpus. This will serve as the groundwork for my efforts to trace the developments of selfhood and of despair in Kierkegaard’s work in later chapters. By drawing from a wide variety of his writings from his pseudonymous and non-pseudonymous authorship, I intend to show that a coherent, albeit complex conception of the self can be gleaned. In contrast to those interpreters who would characterize this conception as chiefly philosophical or anthropological, in section 1.2, I argue that it should be understood as a religious conception that has a historical basis in Scripture. Section 1.3 will be dedicated to examining the constituents of the self described by Anti-Climacus. It will be focused on elucidating the nature of the eternal and temporal, which are the basic components of the self that are paradoxically united within it in a dialectical relation. In section 1.4, I explore the way in which the self emerges from nature as a free agent through the activation of reflection and the will. I explain that for Kierkegaard, Christendom is de facto a Judas No. 2 ... he who defends it has never believed it. If he believes, then the enthusiasm of faith is not a defense—no, it is attack and victory” (SUD: 87).

Beabout, for instance, writes that the passage where Anti-Climacus defines the self “is so algebraic, so abstract, so Hegelian, that I am sure many readers have put down the book immediately, perhaps never to pick it up again.” See Freedom and Its Misuses: Kierkegaard on Anxiety and Despair, p. 85. Although some of what Anti-Climacus goes on to write later in Sickness Unto Death helps explain this passage, it is a short work that offers little explanatory detail. For this reason, supplemental material is needed to grasp many of the concepts and ideas included in it.

Several authors have regarded Anti-Climacus' definition of the self as a parody of Hegel. See for instance Judith Butler, “Kierkegaard’s Speculative Despair,” pp. 363-364. See also Fred Reinhard Dallmayr, G.W.F. Hegel: Modernity and Politics, p. 187. In his Journals, however, Kierkegaard denies using the pseudonym of Anti-Climacus for humorous effect. “With Climacus,” a former pseudonym he employed, “everything drowns in humor...Anti-Climacus is thetical” (JP VI: 6439).

Dunning, for example, has written a work that reveals the major influence Hegel had on Kierkegaard. He argues, “Kierkegaard was quite unconscious of the extent to which he continued, even after breaking with Hegelianism, to think in terms that permit—and often seem to demand—a Hegelian structural analysis.” Kierkegaard’s Dialectic of Inwardness, p. 5. See also Jon Stewart, Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel Reconsidered. As for Kierkegaard’s own view of the matter, in his Journals, he calls himself a “dialectician with an unusual sense for rhetoric” (JP V: 5981). He also claims that “only a dialectician can portray Christianity,” and he felt tasked with this project throughout the whole of his authorship (JP I: 761).
the human being is tasked with achieving unity between the eternal and temporal aspects of himself through a passionate mode of self-relational activity that mobilizes the imagination. We will see that throughout his works, Kierkegaard depicts a self that is not ready-made, but is instead tasked with becoming spirit in time through its embodiment in the world. In realizing its freedom concretely through a historical process of development, in an intense state of inwardness, it works to shape itself into what it already in some sense is—that is, eternal.

1.2 Kierkegaard's Religious Conception of the Self

There has been some disagreement among commentators about the role religion plays in Kierkegaard's conception of the constitution of the self, and whether or not Kierkegaard's thought should be understood as ontological. Elrod, for instance, claims: “For Kierkegaard, the God question is an existential question, not an ontological one. Discussions of God appear in his descriptions of the ethico-religious stage of existence, not in his ontology.” Elrod is correct that Kierkegaard tends to emphasize the practical or lived dimensions of theistic belief rather than its more theoretical underpinnings, this does not mean that ontological inquiry is absent from his authorship. Kierkegaard intends to inculcate a deepened understanding of human existence into his reader in order to motivate the appropriate kinds of actions or responses to take in it, and because of this, ontological inquiry is ubiquitous in his works. In this section, I argue that the revealed God of Christianity lies at the foundation of Kierkegaard's ontology as the omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient being who created human beings and the rest of the world ex nihilo. In this sense, he offers a religious conception of selfhood that stems from a deeply personal investigation of his inner life.

Kierkegaard does not ascribe this foundational status to God without reservation, however. Under the pseudonym of Johannes Climacus, he objects to traditional philosophical arguments for the existence of God, such as the ontological and teleological arguments, and claims that God’s existence must remain "an objective uncertainty" for human beings (CUP: 204). He certainly does not intend to discredit theistic belief with these standard objections, but rather to keep theists out of a mindless state of complacency in their belief. Climacus insists that

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38 Elrod, Being and Existence in Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Works, p. 70, note 133.
39 Kierkegaard believes that without this objective uncertainty, one cannot have the passion that is essential for faith. Under the pseudonym of Johannes Climacus, he writes, "If I want to keep myself in faith, I must continually see to it that I hold fast the objective uncertainty, see to it that in the objective uncertainty I am “out on 70,000 fathoms of water” and still have faith" (CUP: 204).
one “demonstrates the existence of God by worship—not by demonstrations,” indicating the importance of faith in the absence of decisive proof of God's existence (CUP: 546). Climacus also stresses that God is an idea postulated first and foremost out of the passion of human need, and not to fill in the gaps in any explanatory framework. He claims that the individual naturally assumes the existence of God when the tension and uncertainty of human life "brings passion to despair and assists him in grasping God with “the category of despair” (faith), so that the postulate, far from being arbitrary, is in fact necessary defense, self-defense" (CUP: 200). While this idea will be more closely examined in later chapters, the claim is that the idea of God provides the self with stability, meaning, and purpose in the midst of insecurity caused by the difficulties of existence. God cannot, however, be made an object for human knowledge as would normally be expected in ontological study, and so his ontology rests on the uncertainty of faith.

Several scholars have considered Kierkegaard to be offering an anthropological conception of the self with his work. This interpretation is liable to be misleading, and is simply mistaken if anthropology is understood as an empirical approach to studying humankind based on the attitudes, beliefs, and practices observed in various cultures or communities. While he does provide anthropological insights insofar as he studies human nature, Kierkegaard firmly rejects any secular or scientific theory that would explain the human being in terms of his or her physical, social, or even psychological constitution. Because the human being is a normatively governed subject, and norms are abstract principles that are not sensuous in character and do not exist as concrete objects in the natural world, he does not believe that the evidence gathered from human experience supports a reduction of that experience to empirical elements or processes. Similarly, the anthropologist relies on a conceptual framework that is not actually present in the natural world or society to empirically investigate human beings, and so is unable to account for this framework empirically. Rather than proposing an origin of human existence that would take

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40 The Hongs have suggested that Kierkegaard offers an anthropological account of human existence with despair as a central feature. See their historical introduction to Sickness Unto Death, p. x. See also Gouwens, Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker, Chapter 2. Admittedly Kierkegaard does describe certain areas of his thought as “anthropological,” but anthropology was conceived of much differently in his time than in the contemporary age. In its current usage, the term does not accurately capture the intention of his study of human existence.

41 See for example Papirer VII A200 (D619), where Kierkegaard argues that a gifted scientist, in his impartial theorizing about a phenomenon in the world or about nature in general, will be unable to understand himself as a particular individual, since he cannot understand the moral aspect of his life. "Spiritually he does not become transparent to himself in the moral appropriation of his gifts."
the individual to be a contingent moment in the life of the human race as a naturalist would, or as a trivial event in the cosmic process, he holds that her existence is singular and extraordinary as a result of her being self-aware before God.

Consequently, Kierkegaard is not interested in arriving at impartial insights about humanity in general in his authorship, but rather in understanding the plight of the single individual who exists before God. While Kierkegaard certainly wrote deeply personal reflections to get clear on his own spiritual condition, it would be unfair to say that his motivations were entirely selfish, and that he had no concern for the spiritual journey of other individuals.42

Following Socrates, who was a major inspiration to him, Kierkegaard thought of himself as a midwife tasked with reaching out to his reader and assisting him in coming to know himself, along with his desperate need for God (POV: 7). One part of his maieutic strategy involved adopting the role of a “physician of the soul” under the pseudonym Anti-Climacus (SUD: 23). In analyzing despair as a spiritual illness that can beset human beings, Anti-Climacus assumes that religious concepts are needed to understand the existence of his reader adequately, and to address the more personal concerns about existence that science and philosophy, in their disinterested efforts at objectivity, often fail to address. Criticizing the "loftiness of indifferent knowledge," he writes: "All Christian knowing, however rigorous its form, ought to be concerned...Concern constitutes the relation to life, to the actuality of the personality" (SUD: 5-6). He therefore embarks on a therapeutic project with the aim of helping the reader understand himself so that he is equipped to care for himself in the right way. Although he is a Christian author, he is also situated in the Socratic tradition insofar as he stresses the importance of caring for the soul by living a good life and diligently seeking the truth about one's condition. But in contrast to Socrates, who thought knowledge of these matters could be attained through reason, Anti-Climacus believes that one can only achieve self-knowledge by cultivating a relationship with God based on faith in divine revelation, and by realizing one's total dependence on Him.

42 In The Lonely Labyrinth, Thompson argues that Kierkegaard was a profoundly sick man whose whole authorship should be seen a form of self-therapy. Thompson believes it is his own health that Kierkegaard seeks, not the health of the reader, and that he does this by experimenting with the different life-views of the pseudonyms in a desperate attempt to discover a cure for his sickness. See p. 13 & 208. In his portrayal of Kierkegaard as a morbidly self-absorbed individual who succeeds in cutting himself off from all human connection, Thompson forgets that Kierkegaard identified as a Christian from the very beginning of his authorship, including the period in which he was writing the pseudonymous works. This is obvious in his decision to publish religious discourses concurrently with each of them. Thompson also disregards the maieutic strategy Kierkegaard claimed to be adopting in using the pseudonyms to give birth to self-knowledge in his reader.
1.2.1 The Dependence of the Self Upon God

Anti-Climacus describes the self as "a derived, established relation" that can exist only "in the relation to the power that established it" (SUD: 13-14). In claiming that the self depends on something other for its existence, Anti-Climacus makes a decisive break with the tradition of German idealism, which maintains that the self posits itself in its existence of its own powers.43 On the idealist view, in the final moment of knowledge, one understands that there is nothing outside of the self or consciousness—anything that might be thought to be foreign to the self, such as a formal law or material object, is in truth, a product of the self's own spontaneous activity of thinking. Perhaps the most decisive expression for this basic position was given by Fichte, who could pithily summarize it by announcing, "I am thoroughly my own creation."44 For Anti-Climacus, however, human experience reveals that the self is not the ground of its activity of thinking or living, but that it is grounded in a greater power (or collection of powers) that brought it into being and that posits it as a self. On his view, this other sustains the human being and enables its activity by providing it with the physical, psychical, and spiritual conditions for its existence, which it cannot bring about of its own accord.45 The self therefore has a predominantly passive character in being delivered into existence as a thinking, feeling, desiring,

43 David Kangas explains that idealists including Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel all held positions that are variants of this basic insight. For a brief introduction to their accounts, see Kangas, The Instant, pp. 1-4.
44 The Vocation of Man, p. 73. It should be noted that, for the German idealists, the self that posits itself is not the empirical ego (or individual subject) that Kierkegaard campaigns for in his account of human existence. It is rather the transcendental self (or universal subject) that encompasses all empirical egos, and of which they all share in common. In this view, in its infinitude, the transcendental self posits finite selves in existence while ultimately remaining identical with them. For Kierkegaard, however, the notion of a universal subject, like a unicorn or flying pig, is an abstraction with no corresponding reality. He says under the pseudonym Climacus: “The fantastical I-I is not infinitude and finitude in identity, since neither the one nor the other is actual; it is a fantastical union with a cloud, an unfruitful embrace, and the relation of the individual I to this mirage is never stated” (CUP: 197). Climacus therefore rejects the Hegelian thesis that the universal and particular can be mediated in existence, claiming: “Existence is always the particular; the abstract does not exist. To conclude from this that the abstract does not have reality is a misunderstanding…” (CUP: 330). As we will see, Kierkegaard is willing to admit the reality of the abstract with his notion of infinitude and possibility, but against the idealists, he does not believe that thought, which concerns universals, can account for the particular existence of anything actual.
45 There are important objections to the view that the phenomenology of selfhood reveals that the self is given to itself in its existence, and that it is not its own ground. For instance, Neuhouser argues that as a unity, consciousness does not seem, from the inside, to have its origin in anything outside itself. See Foundations of Hegel's Social Theory, as cited in Kosch, Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling, and Kierkegaard, p. 203. While acknowledging that such evidence might point to problems for this view, I will follow Anti-Climacus in assuming that the self is able to do things like thinking, willing, and imagining, but that from the inside, it cannot seem to support or sustain itself in these activities without depending upon a great power for the conditions under which it does them. It therefore does not seem that the self originally gives itself its own existence in a self-positing act, even though one is able to do things like think for oneself and decide on the kind of person one will be from within one's given existence.
and embodied human being. In emphasizing the primacy of such givenness to human existence, later existential thinkers, such as Heidegger and Sartre, have similarly understood this dependency as a basic phenomenological datum for their studies. In the first part of this section, I explore Kierkegaard's reasons for rejecting the idealist conception of God, which he thinks extinguishes the radical differences between God and the human being. Although the self for Kierkegaard should understand that it is ultimately passive and impotent in relation to God, in this latter part of the section, I explore his idea that it mysteriously grants the human being freedom and independence apart from it, including her own capacities of thought and volition.

The ambiguity of Anti-Climacus's claim that the self exists in relation to a power that established it might suggest that he believes this greater power (or collection of powers) could be interpreted in many different ways, whether it is in naturalistic or spiritualistic terms. Following the strategy of Climacus discussed in the previous section, Anti-Climacus dogmatically takes this power to be God, departing from the phenomenological approach that characterizes a large portion of his work. The relationship to God is therefore the primary attribute of selfhood under his view, and in this respect, he can be said to endorse a religious conception of it. One might accept his conclusion that the self does not give itself its existence while remaining skeptical about the existence of God, as is the case with Sartre and Heidegger. Those unwilling to accept this conclusion in any form might object that it makes no sense to claim that the self can be given its existence by a greater power, since any notion of giving requires that there be something already there to receive the gift. But this would be impossible under Anti-Climacus' view, since the self, as a derived being, cannot exist before being given its existence by an original being, or God. Hence, there is something incoherent about the idea that the existence of the self can be understood in terms of givenness or passivity as he thinks.

Although Anti-Climacus does not use this expression specifically and so might avoid this difficulty, Kierkegaard adopts it in the discourse "Every Good Gift and Every Perfect Gift is

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46 Heidegger, for instance, describes this dependency of the human being (whose mode of existence he refers to as *Dasein*) in terms of *thrownness*. "As being," Heidegger writes, "Dasein is something that has been thrown; it has been brought into its "there", but not of its own accord." He goes on to claim that, "in being its *Self*, Dasein is, *as a Self*, the entity that has been thrown. It has been *released* from its basis, *not through* itself but *to* itself, so as to be as this basis." See *Being and Time*, pp. 329-330. Although he tends to stress the active component of human existence, Sartre expresses a similar thought when he writes, "man is condemned to be free: condemned, because he did not create himself, yet nonetheless free, because once cast into the world, he is responsible for everything he does." *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, p. 29.
From Above." In an evocative description of the spiritual life of the individual that recalls the language of the empiricist tradition, but without naturalistic sentiment, he writes:

…the inner being looks not at the gifts but at the giver. For the inner being, the human distinction between what might be called gift and what language is not inclined to designate as gift vanishes in the essential, in the giver; for the inner being, joy and sorrow, good and bad fortune, distress and victory are gifts; for it, the giver is primary. Then the inner being understands and is convinced that God is a Father in heaven and that this expression is not metaphorical, imperfect, but the truest and most literal expression, because God gives not only the gifts but himself with them in a way beyond the capability of any human being, who can be present in the gift only in a feeling or mood, not essentially, cannot penetrate infinitesimally the total content of the gift, cannot be completely present in the whole gift, even less completely present in the least part of it. (EUD: 99)

For Kierkegaard, human existence is rather unlike a gift in the conventional sense. It is not a gift that we receive from outside of ourselves as a pure spirit and go out to collect as the objection supposes, but is one that we are present in peripherally as God "releases it from his hand, as it were" (SUD: 16). Following the traditional monotheist account of creation, he holds that God does not form human beings out of pre-existing matter (ex materia) or out of His being (ex Deo), but rather creates them out of nothing (ex nihilo), along with everything else in the natural world.47 Although the multitude of individuals in creation are impotent in themselves and have no actuality of their own in being created from nothing, God "encompasses" them to preserve them in existence and support their activity (WOL: 252).48

In this passage, he also offers a subtle criticism of idealism on phenomenological grounds. The phenomenology of human life indicates that existence originally greets us in its

47 Explaining how God creates individuals apart from Him, Kierkegaard writes, “for individuality is not mine but is God’s gift by which he gives me being and gives being to all, gives being to everything. It is simply the inexhaustible swell of goodness in the goodness of God that he, the almighty, nevertheless gives in such a way that the receiver obtains individuality, that He who created out of nothing nevertheless creates individuality, so that creation over against him shall not be nothing, although it is taken from nothing and is nothing and yet becomes individuality” (WOL: 253).
48 Kierkegaard describes the way in which God encompasses the self in the gift of human existence in one of his Christian discourses. Remarking on the inability of the self to do anything without God's assistance, he states: “At the Communion table you are able to do nothing at all, not even this, that you hold fast the thought of your unworthiness and in this make yourself receptive to the blessing…Alas, no, you are capable of nothing, not even of holding your soul by yourself at the peak of consciousness that you stand totally in need of grace and the blessing. Just as someone else supported Moses when he prayed, so also at the communion table you must be supported by the blessing; when you are to receive the blessing, it must encompassingly support you as it is communicated to you" (300: CUD).
overwhelming givenness. As finite beings, we are not able to comprehend the totality of existence within our partial frame of thought, as its greatness inevitably overflows our capacities. Although we can certainly think through the content given to us, we do not first constitute or rationally determine this content in pure thought, as idealists like Hegel have held with their self-positing thesis. Neither do we arrive at experience with transcendental capacities of our own, as Kant had argued in his defense of a priori knowledge. Instead, we are originally receptive to our concrete existence as individuals in a feeling or mood, and only from the periphery of that starting point can we engage in abstract thinking and reflection upon existence. To conceive of the self as distinct from this gift or originating outside of this feeling or mood would be to understand it altogether abstractly, and apart from its concrete existence as a living human being. For Kierkegaard, we are essentially living human beings in our particularity under the living God. This is not a naturalistic form of empiricism that begins with items of perception in the vein of Hume, but is rather a spiritualistic form that takes God as its point of departure, who remains undisclosed to us.

For this reason, Climacus charges German idealists with error when, for the sake of constructing a totalizing theory of existence, they turn their own existence as individuals into an object of disinterested speculation and assume they are treating it adequately. By taking up a "view from nowhere" as impartial subjects who survey their own lives with an objective or "scientific" attitude, they proceed as if they occupied a timeless standpoint at a remove from their concrete existence. From this God's-eye perspective, their own personal existence becomes one piece of content for thought among others, and has no greater significance than that. Of course,

49 Heidegger follows Kierkegaard in agreeing that as individuals, we always find ourselves in a general feeling or mood at any given moment in our existence, whether it is fatigue, elation, or the like. He develops this idea in sections 29-31 of Being and Time with his notion of "attunement" (Befindlichkeit), which is the basic state-of-mind in which the human being (more precisely, Dasein) finds itself "thrown" into its existence. It should be noted that Kierkegaard's notion of human existence as gift resembles Heideggerian thrownness, since the human being is present in the gift in such a way that he does not choose it as God releases it from his hand. Of course, describing human existence as a gift is not as bleak as describing it in terms of thrownness.

50 The "view from nowhere" is a phrase coined by Thomas Nagel in his description of the point of view that scientific inquiry aims to achieve in its striving toward objectivity. Describing this process, Thomas Nagel writes of "a polarity. At one end is the point of view of a particular individual, having a specific constitution, situation and relation to the rest of the world. From here the direction of movement towards greater objectivity involves, first, abstraction from the individual's specific spatial, temporal and personal position in the world, then from the features that distinguish him from other humans, then gradually from the forms of perception and action characteristic of humans, and away from the narrow range of a human scale in space, time, and quantity, towards a conception of the world which, as far as possible, is not the view from anywhere within it. There is probably no end-point to this process, but its aim is to regard the world as centreless, with the viewer as just one of its contents." See "Subjective and Objective," p. 206. This is the same type of concern that Climacus raises in his criticism of objective thinking.
this tendency occurs in other disciplines as well: "The way of objective reflection now leads to abstract thinking, to mathematics, to historical knowledge of various kinds, and always leads away from the subjective individual, whose existence or nonexistence becomes, from an objective point of view, altogether properly, infinitely indifferent" (CUP: 193). But for Climacus, this strategy is fantastic when taken to extremes as it is in totalizing thinkers like Hegel, since in his impartial theorizing, the particular thinker remains an existing subject in his living concretion. His abstract thinking must therefore proceed from "somewhere" and in time, and he cannot become entirely indifferent to himself in the way that objective thinking aims at making one become in the final moment.

Climacus is certainly not arguing that objective thought is impossible or illegitimate, but rather that one cannot escape from one's situation as an individual subject to become entirely objective and impersonal in one's thinking, regardless of how universally valid one believes one's thinking to be. In defense of this claim, he states that when it becomes fantastic, the way of objective reflection "will lead to the contradiction that only objectivity has come about, whereas subjectivity has gone out, that is, the existing subjectivity that has made an attempt to become what in the abstract sense is called subjectivity, the abstract form of an abstract objectivity" (CUP: 194). Insofar as this human being has not vanished from existence entirely in his abstractions, he has not achieved the purely objective standpoint that he thinks he has, and so can only approximate to objective knowledge. From his finite situation in existence, he has no guarantee that his knowledge is infallible and complete. Hence, such thinking always begins from within one's concrete existence as an individual, rather than from a timeless, godlike standpoint outside of it.

If God gives himself in allowing the self to exist as a concrete individual in the way that the foregoing passage states, then it seems difficult to see how a distinction between the self and God might be drawn in existence. This problem arises elsewhere in Kierkegaard's authorship. Adhering to Scripture, Kierkegaard affirms, “God is spirit,” which might initially seem incompatible with Anti-Climacus' claim that a human being is spirit (JP II: 1943). Climacus also defines spirit as subjectivity, and refers to both God and human beings as subjects (CUP: 33, 200). Climacus and Anti-Climacus certainly do not intend to intrude on the otherness of God by suggesting any kind of identity relation between them, however. Although human beings depend

51 See John 4:24
on God for their existence, Anti-Climacus contends that Christianity maintains there is an
“infinite qualitative difference” between God and man (SUD: 126). He laments that, following
the lead of monists or idealists like Spinoza and Hegel, thinkers in his day had “pantheistically
abolished” this difference in an effort to conceive of God as essentially continuous with human
beings, society, and the natural order (SUD: 117). He writes:

No teaching on earth has ever really brought God and man so close together as Christianity…But neither
has any teaching ever protected itself so painstakingly against the most dreadful of all blasphemies, that
after God has taken this step it should be taken in vain, as if it all merges into one—God and man...
(SUD: 117)

Rejecting that speculative reasoning could succeed in rendering God immanent to human
existence on religious grounds, Anti-Climacus stresses the radical separation of God from human
beings and the external world. As a proponent of Christian revelation, he believes that God's
transcendence cannot be located within a system of existence as Hegel or Spinoza held, and that
to understand God's nature through logic or theory would be to undermine revelation by making
Him rationally intelligible in all of his workings. Under this view, as the absolute and infinite
being, the being of God cannot be contained within the scope of human thought, since this
thought must proceed from within the limitations of finite human existence rather than from an
unlimited, God's-eye standpoint on the universe. On this point, Climacus claims that we can
indeed obtain a conception of God through revelation, and postulate his actual existence out of
need (CUP: 483-484). We do not, however, have immediate knowledge of God's existence as
some monists have traditionally held. Although his transcendence can be alluded to, it cannot be
systematized or adequately conceptualized. For Climacus, the immanentist notion that the

52 The purported unity of man and God within a single, rational system of existence is suggested throughout Hegel’s
work, although he is sometimes more clear on this than at other times. For instance, he claims, “God is God only so
far as he knows himself, his self-knowledge is, further, a self-consciousness in man and man's knowledge of God,
which proceeds to man's self-knowledge in God.” See Hegel's Philosophy of Mind, para. 564, p. 298.
53 This gesture towards God's radical transcendence was made by negative (or apophatic) theologians such as
Meister Eckhart, Dionysius the Areopagite, and Clement of Alexandria. These mystical thinkers attempted to arrive
at knowledge of God by way of negation, or by expressing what God is not. In other words, any positive (or
kataphatic) concept that might initially be deemed applicable to God, such as greatness or goodness, must be
rejected as inadequate when one comes to know God in truth, because God as he exists in Himself surpasses all of
our conceptions of Him. In Kierkegaard as Negative Theologian, David Law draws some interesting parallels
between Kierkegaard and these figures by pointing out apophatic motifs in Kierkegaard's thought. Nevertheless, it is
crucial that the kataphatic elements of Kierkegaard's thought not be overlooked, and this is why one must disagree
with his contention that "it is not only possible to understand Kierkegaard as a negative theologian but to argue that
infinite reality of God's activity could become comprehensible to human beings as a system is absurd in its pretensions, since we can never attain this standpoint of omniscience in the manner of an infinite being that thinks sub specie aeternitatis.\textsuperscript{54} To believe this synoptic vision is feasible for one to attain is to confuse oneself with God.

Nevertheless, God's radical transcendence and otherness would appear to present a difficulty for any attempt to define both God and the human being as spirit, while conceiving of the human being as a gift of Himself. To begin to see how Kierkegaard attempts to resolve this, we must first distinguish between two qualitatively distinct types of spirit. In an important journal entry, Kierkegaard describes the nature of God as the “unconditioned,” as “being-in-and-for-itself,” and as “pure subjectivity” who has “nothing of objective being in himself” (JP II: 1449).\textsuperscript{55} As being-in-and-itself, God exists essentially and depends on no other for his existence, and as being-for-itself, he has the freedom, power, and knowledge to impose His will in existence in whichever way He sees fit. To say that God has no objective being in Himself means that as absolute subject, God expels or absolves Himself from all of that existence which is finite, mutable, worldly, or natural.\textsuperscript{56} As absolute subject, God also has a synoptic vision of existence as a whole. None of these qualifications apply to the existence of the human being. Since the human being is a derived subject whose existence is given to him, he has his being in another—that is, he is more apophatic than the negative theologians" (p. 207). For Kierkegaard, the nature of God Himself is not infinite negativity but love, and a positive expression of His will is indeed given in Scripture, as explained in writings like Works of Love. Yet this cannot be known, but must be taken on faith. The negative theologians generally try to abolish the infinite qualitative difference between themselves and God through a mystical union obtained through esoteric insight into God's hidden and secret nature. This would be a way to attempt to maneuver one's way into God's transcendence through knowledge (even if it is knowledge of the unknown), where all speech fails. Yet for Kierkegaard, because a radical break or separation between man and God has commenced through sin, this union cannot be attained. This attempt at mystical union with God presupposes nothing other than pantheism, which means that at the state of purported union, the mystic simply confuses the self with God.

\textsuperscript{54} Climacus does not reject the idea that existence is a system, but simply thinks it is impossible for an existing human being to step outside their immediate position in the world to understand the whole of existence that way. “A system of existence cannot be given. Is there, then, not such a system? That is not at all the case…Existence itself is a system—for God, but it cannot be a system for any existing spirit” (CUP: 118).

\textsuperscript{55} Already from this passage, one can see how Kierkegaard's monotheistic conception of God differs from Hegel's pantheistic conception. For Hegel, the being of God as Spirit is expressed positively in the natural world and in human society, including the events of history. The objective history of the universe and of humankind is not separate from God, but is an integral part of His very being as rational and self-positing activity. For Hegel, the infinite reality of God contains the finite reality of natural existence in itself as a subsumed element, which is repeatedly posited and then negated by Spirit in its process of coming to know itself in actuality. Kierkegaard, however, believes this attempt to mediate transcendence and immanence through speculative reasoning is a form of pantheism, and that in its idealizing, it is incapable of dealing with the concrete existence of human beings, as Marx also argued with his materialist conception of human existence (for different reasons).

\textsuperscript{56} Herein lies the difficulty and seeming impossibility of the incarnation of God in Christ, which Climacus describes as an "absolute paradox" for the understanding (CUP: 217). This is in contrast to Hegel, who thought that the infinite and finite are rationally mediated, and who speculated about the nature of this union in his thought.
God, and not in himself. In his earthly environment, where he comes up against limits as an embodied creature among other creatures, the human being is constituted by objective elements that exist at a remove from their divine origin in being created ex nihilo. As the sacred ground of all being that establishes the finite conditions under which human beings live and think, God is not subject to such constraining factors. But since God endows individuals with subjectivity in giving Himself, they harbor a trace of the divine nature within them, with the possibility of arriving at an idea of God. Kierkegaard refers to this divine trace as the "image of invisibility" that God implants in human beings when, according to Genesis, he creates them in His own image (UDVS: 192). When compounded with objective elements of existence, which includes psyche and body, this trace makes man a conditional spirit (or what one might call "impure subjectivity"), but it does not and cannot make him unconditionally spirit. Only God is spirit in this pure sense.

As an alternative to pantheism, Kierkegaard provides a Christian account of creation that helps illustrate how God can create a human being as spirit while preserving an infinite qualitative difference between them. Because God wants to let human beings stand and act on their own, and to think for themselves about how they will live, in bestowing the gift of selfhood, Kierkegaard contends that he freely chooses to constrain the expression of his own omnipotence in existence. This self-imposed limitation allots a space for us to grow as individuals and be “the most fragile of all things—a being independent of that very omnipotence” (JP II: 1251). In establishing room for a human being to become himself or herself in freedom apart from Him, Kierkegaard explains that divine omnipotence

…must contain the unique qualification of being able to withdraw itself again in a manifestation of omnipotence in such a way that precisely for this reason that which has been originated through omnipotence can be independent…Only omnipotence can withdraw itself at the same time it gives itself away, and this relationship is the very independence of the receiver. God’s omnipotence is therefore his goodness. For goodness means to give oneself away completely, but in such a way that by omnipotently taking oneself back one makes the recipient independent. (JP II: 1251)

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57 See Genesis 1:27. Genesis does not suggest that this divine image relates to human subjectivity, however. This is an interpretation that follows from Kierkegaard's conception of God as absolute subject. He explains how God, as subject, reproduces himself in human beings (but not other living things) by endowing them with subjectivity: “God is spirit, is invisible, and the image of invisibility, of course, is in turn invisibility. Thus the invisible Creator reproduces himself in the invisibility, which is the qualification of spirit, and the image of God is explicitly the invisible glory…The lily does not resemble God, precisely because the glory of the lily is visible” (UDVS: 192).
By giving the individual her existence while refusing to be directly or immediately present to her, God establishes the conditions necessary for her to be independent in her very dependence upon Him.\(^{58}\) Along with granting her freedom of thought and will, this withdrawal establishes a radical separation between the human being and God that allows him to maintain His transcendence from the natural world, rather than remain immanent within it as pantheists claim. In a paradoxical fashion, God can therefore be considered to be present in the life of the individual in His absence.

Consequently, in Kierkegaard's mystical ontology, God does not reside within creation as a totalitarian power that dictates every action or event in human existence, whether this is construed in terms of forces of necessity as rationalists often do, or in terms of an inscrutable, predestining power as religious believers (including many Christians) often do.\(^{59}\) Instead of selfishly treating individuals as pawns or playthings, God renounces autocratic rule by absconding from creation in order to produce separate individuals who live in the world, while also existing in an indirect relation to Him as free persons acting on their own accord.\(^{60}\) Climacus confirms this when he says that "no one is as resigned as God, because he communicates creatively in such a way that in creating he gives independence vis-a-vis himself: The most resigned a human being can be is to acknowledge the given independence in every human being and to the best of one’s ability do everything in order truly to help someone retain it" (CUP: 260). In granting the human being the ability to think and will on its own as a self, the individual is "for-itself" as a being that relates itself to itself, but it cannot be conceived as existing "in-

\(^{58}\) As Climacus puts it: “No anonymous author can more slyly hide himself, and no maieutic can more carefully recede from a direct relation than God can. He is in the creation, everywhere in the creation, but he is not there directly, and only when the single individual turns inward into himself (consequently only in the inwardness of self-activity) does he become aware and capable of seeing God” (CUP: 243-244).

\(^{59}\) As Malantschuck points out, "Kierkegaard quickly perceived that the doctrine of predestination in its strictest form does justice neither to man nor to Christianity’s conception of God. Since God, according to the doctrine of predestination, determines everything, "the origin of evil" [JP II: 1302] must also be traced back to God, and as for human beings, by denying the possibility of “human freedom” [JP II: 1231] this doctrine renders it impossible for a person to be responsible before God. According to Kierkegaard, “the concept: predestination” “must be regarded as a thoroughgoing abortion” (JP II: 1230). See Malantschuck, Kierkegaard's Concept of Existence, p. 12.

\(^{60}\) In posing his own alternative to pantheistic and theosophical accounts of the creation of the human being, G. K. Chesterton offers an account that closely resembles Kierkegaard's. Chesterton explains that the pantheist deity "is like a giant who should have lost his leg or hand and be always seeking to find it; but the Christian power is like some giant who in a strange generosity should cut off his right hand, so that it might of its own accord shake hands with him. We come back to the same tireless note touching the nature of Christianity; all modern philosophies are chains which connect and fetter; Christianity is a sword which separates and sets free. No other philosophy makes God actually rejoice in the separation of the universe into living souls." See Orthodoxy, p. 198.
itself” in the way that God does, since in being created \textit{ex nihilo}, any existence it has is derived from Him (SUD: 14).

Kierkegaard admits that this act of creation is "incomprehensible" in its finer details (JP II: 1251). Although he does not elaborate on why this is the case, there are obvious difficulties in understanding how the human being might be capable of its own activity of thought or volition while being utterly passive in its dependence on God. First, because God creates human beings without them having any choice in the matter, and in such a way that they are not free to not be free, there must at least be some kind of determinism at work in his account. This does not mean that all the actions of the person are causally determined by prior events or powers external to him that are governed by necessary principles. Depending on how one defines freedom, it might, however, challenge the idea that a human being truly has freedom after all. Second, the type of agent causality typically desired in a libertarian account of individual freedom requires the agent to be an uncaused cause of at least some of her actions, so that they are not causally determined in the above sense. However, it is difficult to make sense of Kierkegaard's position under the libertarian conception of human freedom. In the event that an act of God causes the human being to exist as he claims, the human being does not exist as an uncaused cause of her existence. If she is not an uncaused cause of her existence, then it would seem that she cannot be an uncaused cause of any of her actions, since she acts in existence. If it were somehow possible for God to create her this way, He would be causing the human being to exist as an uncaused cause, which sounds paradoxical. At this point, Kierkegaard would have recourse to the notion of divine withdrawal, but he would have to claim that the mechanism of this form of causation is simply inconceivable to human thought, which he indeed affirms in the above passage.

Alternatively, he might consider taking a compatibilist approach to human freedom and claim that she can be the cause of her actions, even though these are causally determined and she does not exist as an uncaused cause. But if he did this, then it would then be possible to trace these actions to an original and external cause, which in his view, would be God. If the passivity of the human being means that all her acts are ultimately caused by God, this would not only create complications in making sense of human responsibility or the choice to do evil; it would also fail to preserve the infinite qualitative difference that exists between them by locating both within a single causal system that is immanent in existence and conceivable through abstract theorizing. Rejecting a monistic strategy that would minimize this difference and establish a
systematic relation between them through causal lines, Kierkegaard would likely adopt the libertarian conception of human freedom. In doing so, he would admit it is inconceivable how God, in withdrawing from creation, could create us in such a way that we are the original cause of our actions as individuals, while nevertheless drawing our activity and potency from Him. This is less worrisome for those who accept that we are limited in our capacity to think this problem in being derived spirits constituted by the physical and psychical.

1.2.2 The Tripartite View of the Self as a Religious Conception

Anti-Climacus’ conception of the human being as a composite of psyche, body, and spirit (pneuma) has roots in Christian theology, which proceeds from the teachings of divine revelation. In his journals, Kierkegaard admits that this division is not an original discovery, and that he borrows from an “ancient idea” in making it (JP I: 52). Many scholars who have done exegesis of this passage seem to have missed that the ancient idea in question is a Christian view of man as tripartite. This overlooked view is supported by several verses of scripture and has storied history in the Christian tradition.61 Although it was endorsed by many of the earliest church fathers, including Irenaeus, Origen, and Clement of Alexandria, it ended up being suppressed in most theological circles due to the tremendous influence of the Greek schools of philosophy, which generally followed Plato’s dichotomous view of man as a composite of soul and body.62 Following the dichotomous view of the Greeks, interpreters of scripture commonly regarded psyche and pneuma as synonymous terms for spirit, rather than as separate aspects of the human being. Anti-Climacus appears to reject the Greek’s philosophical conception of man in favor of a theological conception that carefully distinguishes the two. St. Paul provides the clearest scriptural support for this distinction, writing, “…the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”63 Drawing on the Pauline conception, Anti-Climacus uses psyche to designate our primitive mental faculties,

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61 See J. B. Heard, The Tripartite Nature of Man. One verse that has been offered as evidence of this tripartite distinction is 1 Thessalonians 5:23. “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (KJV). This interpretation is also suggested by the Old Testament in Genesis 2:7. “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath [pneuma] of life; and man became a living soul [psyche]” (KJV).


63 Hebrews 4:12 (ESV)
drives, and desires, including the kinds of sensible and perceptual capacities that we share with other animals, while reserving *pneuma* for the spiritual aspect of the human being, which he takes to be the self with its reflective, imaginative, and volitional capacities.\(^{64}\)

By endorsing a trichotomous view of man, Anti-Climacus rejects a substance ontology that would divide man into two different kinds of substance that possess intrinsic being. Descartes famously made this move by adopting Plato’s dichotomous view in his *Meditations*, where he argued that the human being is a union of soul and body. For Descartes, the soul is an immaterial substance through which we think, while the body is a material substance that interacts with the soul and allows it access to the physical world. Under this dichotomous view, there is no real distinction between *psyche* and *pneuma*, since both describe the same activity of the mind or soul. Descartes’ position has been supposed to lend support for religious orthodoxy, even though he arrives at his conclusions about the nature of God and the soul through philosophical arguments that he supposes to be valid independently of revelation.

Anti-Climacus agrees with Descartes that a human being is a composite of soul (*psyche*) and body, and that these are distinct kinds of things that spring from the creative activity of God. However, he redefines Descartes' notion of the soul so that it would include our sensible or perceptual faculties, but not the higher capacities of thought or will. For Anti-Climacus, the psyche is a part of our constitution as natural creatures and an immanent aspect of life in the world, but it cannot account for the ability we have to step back from the natural world and our immediate drives, impulses, or desires and decide for ourselves how we want to act. This "reflective distance" also allows us to think critically about ourselves and our behavior, to use language and understand signification, to grasp abstract ideas and meanings, to imagine new possibilities, to make choices that we can claim as our own, and so on.\(^{65}\) In other words, as spirit, we are able to transcend our immediate environment in ways that non-human animals cannot, while nevertheless remaining within our concrete station in existence. However, it would be a mistake to ascribe no mental life at all to animals as the Cartesian view does, since they exhibit basic signs of intelligence, along with a sensory responsiveness to their surroundings that includes the ability to feel pleasures and pains. Although the dichotomous view of the human being acknowledges human transcendence, the tripartite conception has the advantage of

\(^{64}\) I provide in-depth discussion of the difference between soul and spirit in the next section.

\(^{65}\) I'm borrowing this term from Korsgaard, while not necessarily using it in the same sense. See *Self- Constitution*, p. 116.
accounting for immediate and spontaneous mental activity that occurs naturally without involving spiritual acts of transcendence. This would make sense of the notion that there is something special about human beings that makes them different from other animals, while granting that there are psychological and physiological dimensions to animal life that are also found in human beings.

Although Anti-Climacus uses reason along with phenomenological reflection to describe the configuration of the relation between psyche, body, and spirit, he does not originally obtain his tripartite conception of spirit through philosophical argumentation. Like Pascal, he takes his God to be the revealed God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and “not of the philosophers and savants.”⁶⁶ Therefore, he believes his conception of God and the self to be received from a source outside of the self, rather than formulated by human reason through its own powers. For Anti-Climacus, and in Kierkegaard's thought in general, human beings therefore assume a passive role in obtaining the revelation of God’s word empirically through its transmission within the community. But because the human being is not wholly passive in being allotted a sphere of autonomy by the withdrawing God, he must think for himself about whether God's revelation is worth taking up and endorsing as a free agent, and risk being offended by its conflict with the understanding.⁶⁷ While we might inquire into the meaning of revelation and seek to understand it through reason, the veracity of this historical doctrine cannot be verified a priori or through any kind of logic or argumentation. While Kierkegaard does seem to embellish the biblical notion of man with his own speculations, the attributes of the self that he discusses are consistent with those described in Scripture. They therefore suggest a religious conception of the self that locates it in relation to the eternal in existence.

1.3 The Eternal and Temporal Constituents of the Self

In the passage introduced at the beginning of the chapter, the self was defined as a bipolar relation constituted by the eternal and temporal, the infinite and finite, psyche and body, and

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⁶⁶ Pascal, Pensées, p. 285.
⁶⁷ In a work following Sickness Unto Death, Anti-Climacus develops in painstaking detail the notion that the genuine Christian must pass through the possibility of being offended by Christian revelation on the path toward faith. He insists that whether one will believe that a particular human being (Christ) is God or be offended by his claim to be God is a decision made in freedom. “Faith is a choice, certainly not direct reception—and the recipient is the one who is disclosed, whether he will believe or be offended” (PC: 141).
freedom (later: possibility) and necessity, which relates itself to itself (SUD: 13). In defining the self as self-relating in its dependence on God, Anti-Climacus conceives of the self as a productive activity rather than as a substance in which feelings or thoughts inhere as accidents, like many in the philosophical tradition had previously done. As Barnett puts it, “It is something one does.” Although its existence is given to it as constituted, the self, or spirit, is tasked with synthesizing opposing elements so that they compose a unified whole. With the exception of the relation between psyche and body, each pair of these elements does not constitute its own relation such that there are three separate relations at stake; rather, they all belong to a single bipolar relation of which the eternal and the temporal are the foundational elements. The eternal aspect of the self corresponds with infinitude and possibility at one pole of the relation, while the temporal aspect corresponds with finitude, necessity, and the psyche-body relation at the other. Although eternity and temporality are ontologically distinct and strictly separate from one another, they are held together and mutually engaged in a dynamic interplay as they relate to each other in the self. This means that the self, as a paradoxical unity of contradictory elements, is a fundamentally divided self, split in two while remaining essentially one. We will see in the following chapters that this division is liable to contribute to great

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68 Although he originally defines the self as a synthesis of freedom and necessity, in a later explanation of the constituents of the synthesis, Anti-Climacus appears to change or even correct his position by referring to this as a synthesis of possibility and necessity (SUD: 35-42). If this synthesis is in fact of freedom and necessity, then Anti-Climacus account of the self, or spirit, leads to intractable problems. For instance, later in the work, he claims: “The self is freedom” (SUD: 29). As Taylor points out in his analysis of Kierkegaard’s concept of the self, it would seem impossible for freedom to be both the synthesizing third as well as a synthesized element, especially given the claim in another pseudonym that two contradictory principles can be synthesized only through a third element (CA: 43). Taylor notes: “By the identification of spirit with one of the elements to be synthesized, the third necessary for the synthesis seems to have disappeared.” See Kierkegaard’s Pseudonymous Authorship, p. 89. He works around this difficulty by understanding freedom to be the synthesizing factor, rather than a synthesized element. I believe that he is justified in this assumption, since Anti-Climacus consistently refers to the self as a synthesis of possibility and necessity later in the work. To avoid confusion, I have followed Taylor’s recommendation in my own analysis of the self as a synthesis. In the next section, I explain that freedom should be conceived as the self-relational activity that manages the components of the self, rather than a managed component.

69 Taylor explains that prior to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, philosophers commonly accepted a substantialist view of selfhood in attempting to explain how the self can experience changing states over time while remaining the same. However, later thinkers like Spinoza, Locke, Hume, and Hegel came to challenge this position. Taylor convincingly argues that, following Hegel, Kierkegaard rejects the notion of the self as a substance in which accidents inhere in favor of a dialectical conception of the self as a “dynamic process by which possibilities are actualized.” See Kierkegaard’s Pseudonymous Authorship, p. 115. In making this move, Kierkegaard wishes to avoid concluding that the self is originally unchangeable and what it is essentially, and instead put forward the idea that it has the existential task of becoming unchangeable and actualizing its essence in existence through a single-minded pursuit of goodness (UDVS: 29-30). In the later Christian portion of his authorship, it becomes clear that he believes the possibility of attaining the highest good can only be actualized through the relationship with God. For Taylor's argument, see pp. 96-116.

70 Barnett, From Despair to Faith, p. 48
dialectical tension and instability in the life of the human being, and so is a main factor in leading up to despair.

In section 1.4.3, I will explain the capacity of the self to shape itself through self-relational activity involving these two conflicting poles of existence. But before examining what it means to be self-relating, in this section, I will explain how the self is originally given to itself as constituted by the elements of these poles, and how they are united in human consciousness. Unfortunately Anti-Climacus discusses these ontological constituents in minimal detail, so the task of this section will be to provide a fuller account of their characteristics by drawing on other material from Kierkegaard’s corpus, which can be shown to consistent with his position.

1.3.1 The Eternal and The Temporal

Unfortunately, despite its tremendous significance for human life, the eternal is one of the most obscure concepts in Kierkegaard's authorship. Nevertheless, it is not a term that is entirely without sense. The eternal is the divine and otherworldly aspect of the self, and is that which makes the human being spirit. It is in no way to be understood solely as a feature of human beings, however. According to Climacus, its purest expression is in the being of God, who is the eternal simpliciter (CUP: 217). To disambiguate these two senses of the eternal, I will distinguish between "the eternal" within the self, or the image of God in us, and "the Eternal" in its original form, or God. Kierkegaard believes that the Eternal is that which essentially is, and so is the ground of all being (WOL: 261). Supposing that the Eternal, or God, does in fact exist and is not only an idea, which Kierkegaard does not think can finally be proved, it would exist by its very essence, and so it would be impossible for it not to be. Kierkegaard also describes it as "changeless" in contrast to objects or states of affairs in the world (CUD: 52). Because these are

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71 In her discussion of the concept of the eternal in Kierkegaard's writings, Hemati, for instance, agrees: "Although Kierkegaard does not offer a clear and unambiguous explanation of the concept and its significance, the notion of eternity is undoubtedly an essential element of his philosophy." The Concept of Eternity in Kierkegaard's Philosophical Anthropology, p. 1. Taylor also notes that "Kierkegaard uses the word "eternal" in a bewildering variety of ways," and that ascribing eternity to both man and God is a lingering source of confusion in his writings. See Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship, p. 91.

72 It is debatable whether Kierkegaard believes the eternal is a substance. Clearly it shares some of those features typically associated with a substance, such as changelessness and permanence, and as self-sufficient, its existence in no way depends on the existence of anything else. Kierkegaard does not refer to the eternal as a substance in any of his works, however. This might be because he emphasizes its active and creative qualities, which end up being lost when using the term. He also does not intend to speak of God or the self as containing accidents, properties, or attributes in the manner of material substances, which are generally regarded as paradigmatic instances of them. Other Kierkegaard scholars have been more comfortable making this interpretative move. See for instance Hemati, p. 66.
liable to change over time, and it is possible for them not to be, it is not in their essence to exist like it is for God, who in his divine immutability is eternally the same. For this reason, Climacus can describe God as the One who "himself is outside existence and yet in existence, who in his eternity is forever concluded and yet includes existence within himself" (CUP: 119). The air of paradox in this statement makes interpretation difficult, but in it, Climacus is distinguishing the eternal existence of God from the temporal existence of creation. The idea is that God, as a supremely perfect being who is fully eternal, exists apart from any entity or process of becoming in the world, and so remains unaffected by any change or condition that occurs in existence in time. In his omnipotent and omniscient oversight of existence, He can be said to include existence within Himself, while withdrawing or detaching from it in order to give the multiplicity of created beings independence in relation to Him.

In section 1.1, I explained that God is absolutely and qualitatively different from that of human beings, who have only a trace of the eternal within them in being created by God as spiritual beings, or subjects. While we are certainly affected by change as we experience the world as thinking, acting, and embodied beings in time, Anti-Climacus believes that, in possessing something eternal in us as selves in virtue of our relation to God, there is nevertheless a part of our identity that remains the same throughout every change (SUD: 21). In contrast to visible or sensible phenomena in the world, Kierkegaard calls this changeless aspect of the human being its "invisible glory," as it signifies a likeness to God and kinship with him (UDVS: 193). The changelessness and rest of the eternal should not be confused with inactivity or indolence, however, whether it is with respect to its presence in God or the human being. Kierkegaard believes that, in constantly putting His creative powers to work in existence, "God is pure act" (JP II: 2008). While the effects of God's continuous activity leads to manifold changes among objects and states of affairs in the world, His activity itself, as an expression of

73 Because of the infinite qualitative difference between God and the human being, Kierkegaard has a paradoxical notion of what it means to bear likeness to God in truth. He claims that the glory for the human being is to humble himself before God in worship, rather than to exalt oneself. "To worship is not to rule, and yet worship is what makes the human being resemble God...The pagan was not aware of God and therefore sought likeness in the ruling. But the resemblance is not like that...The human being and God do not resemble each other directly but inversely, only when God has infinitely become the eternal and omnipresent object of worship and the human being always a worshipper, only then do they resemble each other" (UDVS: 193).

74 As Kierkegaard puts it: "Wherever the eternal is, there is rest; but there is unrest where the eternal is not present. There is unrest in the world, but above all there is unrest in a person’s soul when the eternal is not present in it and he is only “full of unrest” (UDVS 258). Kierkegaard uses the term "soul" in this discourse, but he is referring to what Anti-Climacus means by "self."
his immutable will, does not change, and He is in no way affected by external influences in the way that human beings are. For this reason, Climacus cites approvingly Aristotle's characterization of God as the unmoved mover of existence (PF: 24). Similarly, with respect to the eternal in the human being, Anti-Climacus states: "In the life of the spirit there is no standing still (really no state, either; everything is actuation)" (SUD: 94). This will be expanded upon in the course of this project, but the basic idea is that the human being lives more spiritually as his own reflective, imaginative, and volitional activity increases, and he lives less spiritually when his actions are dictated by outside forces that he is passive towards, such as sensual desires that the world provokes, or the influence of other people. The continuity of our activity as selves is therefore frequently disrupted by external factors that emerge in time, which cannot happen to God, since He is non-temporal.

Kierkegaard also associates the Eternal with plenitude and possibility. Under the pseudonym of Vigilius Haufniensis, Kierkegaard identifies the Eternal with presence, stating, "The present is the eternal, or rather, the eternal is the present, and the present is full" (CA: 86). Haufniensis also claims that the Eternal should not be understood abstractly, as the idealists of his age had been accustomed to do, but "concretely" (CA: 151). This concrete presence of the Eternal in existence must not be understood as being equivalent to the present moment of time in human life, however. Because the human being has a past and future in being constituted by the temporal, he cannot appreciate the constant presence of the Eternal outside of time in its richness and fullness. Commentators have tended to avoid interpreting this passage, probably due to its opacity. I believe, however, that this sacred fullness ought to be understood as a plenitude of being, much like the Parmenidean conception of being. In a passage that describes the being of God as both absolute subject who oversees all of existence and as the fullness of being, Kierkegaard writes:75

In a truer sense than the most watchful human justice is said to be everywhere, he, never seen by any mortal being, is omnipresent, everywhere present, at the least and at the greatest, at what can only

75 Earlier in this chapter, I explained how Kierkegaard, in a journal entry, defined God as "pure subjectivity" or "the unconditioned" who has "nothing of objective being in himself" (JP II: 1449). Yet this conception of God as absolute subject does not seem compatible with Kierkegaard's conception of the eternal as the fullness of being, since it is a contradiction that an unconditional subject with no objective or finite being in itself nevertheless contains all of being within itself. Kierkegaard would likely respond to this paradox by admitting that the nature of God simply cannot be grasped clearly and distinctly by human thought, although we can get a sense of what sorts of features He would have if He does exist in obtaining a concept of Him.
figuratively be called an event and at what is the unique event, when a sparrow dies and when the Savior of the human race is born. At every moment he holds all actuality as possibility in his omnipotent hand, at every moment has everything in readiness, changes everything in an instant, the opinions of people, judgments, human loftiness and lowliness; he changes everything—himself unchanged. (MLW: 271)

Departing from Parmenides, who could make no sense of something coming into being ex nihilo due to his inability to conceive of nothing, Kierkegaard believes that possibilities of all kinds come into being from nothing through God's omnipotent activity, and that this nothing can be thought about. He thereby joins Aristotle in admitting change into existence based on the actualization of possibilities. As Kierkegaard puts it, in constructing the world and its objects from the infinite possibilities He has at his disposal, God "put on the visible world as a garment; he changes it as one changes a garment—himself unchanged" (MLW: 271). Although we cannot perceive the invisible God directly in experience, we can recognize his work by looking towards visible or material things through which he might be said to "clothe" or conceal himself. Similarly, we cannot perceive the eternal element in ourselves directly, but we can discern its continual presence on the basis of our life in the world, through which we can recognize ourselves to be the same self despite undergoing various changes in time.

In contrast to the Eternal, the temporal is the realm of all change, flux, and multiplicity in existence. It encompasses everything that exists in a process of becoming, which transitions between potentiality and actuality. Like the Eternal, it is also not to be understood solely as a feature of human beings. Kierkegaard takes it to be what situates the human being and other entities in the world, and so he treats it as synonymous with worldly or earthly existence. The temporal is the medium through which one comes into being as a self, but it is not that through which one is a self. Kierkegaard argues that the temporal is a "self-contradiction," and so it cannot exist in the fullest sense (EUD: 163). Elaborating on this point, he writes: “The temporal has three times and therefore essentially never is completely nor is completely in any one of the periods; the eternal is” (WOL: 261). The suggestion is that the temporal, in consisting of past, present, and future, both is and is not; since the past no longer exists and the future does not yet

76 There is ample evidence of this throughout Kierkegaard's corpus. For instance, he writes that those who love things in the world while lacking self-reflection in the relationship are "in an earthly, in a temporal sense, dependent" (WOL: 52). Elsewhere, he writes that death liberates the human being from the temporal, where he is imprisoned in a "fragile earthen vessel" and has "the status of an alien," and releases him into the eternal and infinite, which is the true home of spirit (EUD: 337).
exist, and these modes must be fused with the existent present in order for transition to occur, the
temporal must consist of a union of being and non-being. This, however, is a contradiction, since
it requires an identity of opposites. Nevertheless, Kierkegaard believes that human life, as
dialectical, takes place precisely within this contradiction. In his Journals, he writes, “As long as
I live, I live in contradiction, for life is contradiction” (JP I: 705). Climacus explains that the
Eternal itself is not a contradiction, but that a contradiction arises from the unity of the eternal
and the temporal in the human being (CUP: 205). As we will see in the next section, rather than
accept this Heraclitean thesis as the ultimate truth of existence, he believes that the task for the
human being is to get out of contradiction by becoming eternal.

Like Plato, Kierkegaard often disparages the temporal by suggesting that it has no real
evidence, value, or meaning apart from its relation to the Eternal.77 Under the pseudonym of
Vigilius Haufniensis, for instance, he writes:

The Christian view takes the position that non-being is present everywhere as the nothing from which
things were created, as semblance and vanity, as sin, as sensuousness removed from spirit, as the temporal
forgotten by the eternal; consequently, the task is to do away with it in order to bring forth being. (CA: 83)

The temporal contains the world and everything that arises and perishes within it. In originating
ex nihilo by God's will, these things come into being from nothing, and are liable to pass out of
being into nothing. Although temporal phenomena are not illusory so long as they are grounded
in the Eternal (or are "remembered" by it through God's omniscience), they have an insubstantial
or transitory nature that makes them lack existence in the fullest sense. In advancing this
immaterialist thesis, Kierkegaard therefore claims that a temporal object "exists only in its
characteristics" and not in itself, while the Eternal "exists in itself" in having the characteristics it
has (WOL: 261).

77 Plato's influence on Kierkegaard's thought can be readily seen on several different occasions in his authorship. For
instance, he compares the individual seeking communion with God to the individual aspiring to knowledge of the
eternal realm of forms in Plato's allegory of the cave: “But the person in whose soul the eternal is implanted seeks
and aspires. If the visible does not deceive him, as the person is deceived who grasps the shadow instead of the
form, if temporality does not deceive him, as the person is deceived who procrastinates along the way—if this does
not happen, then the world does not quiet his longing. Then it helps him only by means of repulsion to seek further,
to seek the eternal, God’s kingdom, which is above in the heavens” (UDVS: 209). But ironically, for Kierkegaard,
the individual must pursue God in time from within his concrete situation as an individual, even though recollection
and abstract thinking are involved in this search. As we will see, this is a source of great tension and conflict in his
writings.
One should note that in describing the temporal in the above passage, Haufniensis makes the seemingly paradoxical claim that non-being, in some sense, exists. To better understand how this might be so, one can consult the account Climacus gives of what it means for something to change in the manner of coming into existence:

“If, in coming into existence, a plan is intrinsically changed, then it is not this plan that comes into existence; but if it comes into existence unchanged, what, then, is the change of coming into existence? This change, then, is not in essence but in being and is from not existing to existing. But this non-being that is abandoned by that which comes into existence must also exist…for every change has always presupposed a something” (PF: 73-74).

Here Climacus draws a distinction between the essence of a thing and its existence, and claims that a thing can have an unchanging essence without actually existing, and without existence being a necessary feature of its essence. For example, the essence of a unicorn is that of a horse with a horn protruding from its head, but this does not entail that any unicorn actually exists. As a matter of fact, they do not, although it is possible they exist in a world different from ours, or if God willed it. To explain how one and the same thing could come into existence by transitioning from non-being to being, Climacus ascribes to possibilities a derivative ontological status. He does not want to claim that a possibility is a thing that does not exist in any respect, since then there would be no thing to come into existence, or to think about as possibly existing. If non-being were considered as nothing at all, then Parmenides would be right to say that non-being is unthinkable for us. Climacus claims, "such a being that nevertheless is a non-being is possibility, and a being that is being is indeed actual being or actuality, and the change of coming into existence is the transition from possibility to actuality” (PF: 74). It is this indeterminate nothingness of possibility that permeates existence in the temporal, as possibilities become actualized by the will of God in the event that anything comes to exist in time as determinate. I will elaborate on this idea in the next chapter when discussing how the domain of possibility begets anxiety or even despair according to several of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms.

Kierkegaard also believes that, because the world is a temporal phenomenon, "the worldly in its essence is not one thing since it is the nonessential; its so-called unity is no essential unity but an emptiness that the multiplicity conceals" (UDVS: 29-30). The world for Kierkegaard encompasses everything that exists in time as we experience it, but it should not be
conceived in a logical way as "everything that is the case" or "the totality of facts" as it is for Wittgenstein. It should also not be thought of as a determinate thing. It is rather to be interpreted phenomenally as the empty region surrounding the individual in which determinate objects appear before consciousness. Alternatively, it can be understood as the spatiotemporal framework that contains determinate objects, without being one itself. Because the temporal is a component of the human being, he is ineluctably bound to the world. It might be conceived as a correlate to human consciousness, since it attends human consciousness throughout its entire duration. As a groundless domain that lurks beyond the fullness and unity of the eternal, it can be described as a kind of "nothingness" that imperils human beings in actuality, and ultimately brings them to their death (CUD: 47). While he criticizes those who succumb to this nothingness by being absorbed in fleeting affairs that draw them away from the Eternal, he praises spiritually-minded persons who persist in existence by renouncing the vain pursuits and empty pleasures of worldly life or sensuality. Adamant about actualizing themselves rather than disappearing into nothingness, they live with a lasting awareness of the Eternal in existence.

While the eternal aspect of the human being corresponds with infinitude and possibility, the temporal aspect corresponds with finitude and necessity. The finite consists of the multiplicity of factual givens that comprise our changing condition in the world. It would include things like our earthly environment, our perceptions, our social or cultural context, our political institutions, and so on. Anti-Climacus recognizes that the finite is an important aspect of human existence, but he also believes that the self can be "tricked out of its self" when it becomes overly attached to anything finite (SUD: 33). For instance, in one's association with others, he claims that one can easily be too caught up in the behavior of the crowd and become "a copy, a number, a mass man" instead of being one's own person (SUD: 34). Similarly, necessity consists of the basic regularities and principles that play a significant role in determining our finite circumstances as human beings. Necessity is a constraining factor, and limits the scope of human action by inscribing one’s existence within an infinite range of possibilities (SUD: 36). It therefore provides the self with a definite "place" or foothold within the temporal insofar as this is allotted by the Eternal (SUD: 36). Kierkegaard never suggests that we should understand

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79 Kierkegaard repeatedly associates the worldly and temporal with nothingness in his authorship, indicating his belief that what occurs in time lacks genuine being in contrast to that which is eternal, although the eternal is able to preserve things in time as they come into being from nothing. See section 2.3.
necessity as pertaining to inviolable laws that govern human action or events in the natural world, and that can be discovered through reason. The necessity he describes pertains to existence in the natural world, and is imposed in creation by God's will through an act of divine freedom (UDVS: 205). On this point, he claims that all of nature is subject to the necessity ordained by God, and so non-human animals and natural entities cannot do otherwise when they act. But because human beings are endowed with freedom as derived spirits, and proceed through existence dialectically as a synthesis of freedom and necessity, their actions are not fully necessitated in the way that those of other natural or living beings are. Through our capacity to negate our given position in existence, we are able to oppose God's will if we want. The temporal is therefore part and parcel of our conditioned existence, as opposed to the unconditioned being of the eternal component in us.

Considered as a feature of the human being, the temporal consists of a relation psyche and body. This relation is distinct from the relation between the eternal and temporal, and is contained within the temporal aspect of it. It is through having a psyche and body that we encounter living and non-living things as creatures in the natural world. Haufniensis and Anti-Climacus believe that the body is intimately associated with the psyche, and so they tend to consider them together by characterizing the human being as a psychosomatic unity. Unfortunately, in these works, Kierkegaard does little to clarify what he means by psyche, except to suggest that it is closely aligned with the "sensate" aspects of the human being as opposed to the more spiritual aspects, such as man’s capacity for self-reflection or volition (SUD: 43). In light of this omission, I suggest that the psyche be understood as a primitive, non-cognitive mental faculty that humans share with other living things. It is what allows the living being a perceptual awareness of its physiological condition, along with characteristics of objects in its

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80 One prevalent approach in the secondary literature has been to conceive of the psychical as an expression of the eternal pole of the synthesis and the infinite, and the body as an expression of the temporal pole. See for example Beabout, *Freedom and its Misuses*, p. 87. On this view, the self consists of only a single relation. In his definition of the self, however, Anti-Climacus suggests that there is a second relation that relates to the primary relation between the eternal and temporal. He states that these two basic components "relate to the relation and in the relation to the relation; thus under the qualification of the psychical the relation between the psychical and the physical is a relation" (SUD: 13). Haufniensis more clearly characterizes the eternal-temporal and psyche-body relations as separate syntheses that are formed different in different ways (CA: 85). Because psyche and body are associated with our creaturely existence and not our spiritual form, which human beings alone have in common with the Creator, it would be a mistake to include their relation under the aspect of the eternal.

81 Anti-Climacus, for instance, claims: "Every human being is a psychical-physical synthesis intended to be spirit" (SUD: 43). Haufniensis argues that human freedom is lost "somatically-psycheically" if spirit does not rein in psyche and body, where the body is the organ of the psyche, and the psyche is the organ of spirit (CA: 136).
surrounding environment, but not reflective self-awareness. Sensations, desires, impulses, the ability to feel pleasures and pains, and the system of drives and instincts would all occur in the psyche, which operates in response to natural events. The psyche is engaged with states of affairs in the natural world, and is constantly in flux as a result of this outward directedness toward temporal events. Because they are constantly changing relative to external conditions, psyche and body exist outside of the realm of the eternal, although they are nonetheless incorporated in the human being through the self's synthesizing activity. As we will see in section 1.4.3, they can perhaps best be understood as the "raw materials" of human life that the self works with in relating itself to itself.

Because the human being harbors a trace of the eternal within him as a synthesis of spirit-psyche-body, he can surpass the natural limitations of his temporal condition to a considerable degree, and open himself to new and practically infinite possibilities in existence. Anti-Climacus claims that human beings generate ideas and possibilities through their imagination, which he describes as an "infinitizing" power (SUD: 31). He refers to it as the fundamental capacity of spirit, or more specifically, “the capacity instar omnium” (SUD: 31). Kierkegaard elaborates on this in another pseudonym when he suggests that the imagination mediates between the "ideality" associated with the eternal aspect of the self and the "reality" of the temporal aspect, or what I will sometimes refer to as "actuality" (PF: 168). We use the imagination to imagine ideas and possibilities, but we also employ it in realizing them in existence. In performing these acts, we bring the infinite, or "ideality" into relation with the finite, or "reality." One might consider a thought or idea to be finite, since these are determinate things, but the claim is that they originate from an indeterminate state, and so are not a part of the furniture of reality in the way that concrete things are. In this sense, they are infinite, and must be brought into relation with the finite to become concrete and real. Conversely, we also use the imagination in conceptualizing the world and forming ideas, judgments, and beliefs about things in it, which involves bringing the finite into relation with the infinite. Of course, as a synthesis of necessity and possibility, human beings cannot live purely out of the imagination in a realm of sheer possibility, and our concrete situation typically shapes or influences our thinking. Furthermore, the finite condition

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82 Other tripartite theorists of man have given a more complete account of the psychical that seems roughly consistent with that of Kierkegaard. See for instance Scheler, *The Human Place in the Cosmos.*
of human beings restricts what kinds of possibilities can be actualized in existence, although we are able to imagine innumerable possibilities that might not be realizable for us.

The self is therefore a relation consisting of eternal and temporal poles that interact while retaining their distinctiveness. It synthesizes the infinite and finite, freedom (or possibility) and necessity, and psyche and body so that they are gathered together in a single consciousness. Anti-Climacus claims that the finite aspect is the “limiting” constituent while the infinite aspect is the “expanding” constituent of the self as a synthesis (SUD: 30). By possessing a trace of infinitude within itself, the self can surpass the limitations of its finite condition through its ability to imagine possibilities without particular limit. By possessing finitude within itself as a unity of psyche and body, the self can actualize many of these possibilities in existence, while being restricted in this by the necessary component of its existence. In the next section, I explain how these different constituents of the self attain a unity in consciousness.

1.3.2 Consciousness as a Paradoxical Unity of the Eternal and Temporal

Kierkegaard holds that the eternal and temporal are united in consciousness, which, as he states in an unfinished pseudonymous work, "is spirit" (PF: 169, trans. modified). He defines consciousness as the site in which the eternal and temporal coincide, and compares the spiritual existence of the human being to the merely natural existence of the bird, which lacks consciousness or an awareness of duration:

Since, then, the human being is consciousness, he is the place where the eternal and the temporal continually touch each other, where the eternal is refracted in the temporal. Time can seem long to the human being because he has the eternal in his consciousness and measures the moments with it, but time never seems long to the bird. This is why the human being has a dangerous enemy that the bird does not know—time, an enemy, yes, an enemy or a friend whose pursuits and whose association he cannot avoid because he has the eternal in his consciousness and therefore has to measure it. (UDVS: 195)

In order to make better sense of this passage, one must first consult the writings of Haufniensis, who elaborates at length on the point of contact between the eternal and temporal in the human being through his Christian conception of time. Haufniensis notes how time, when it is considered abstractly as an "infinite succession" of moments, is usually described in terms of present, past, and future. However, he argues that this distinction "is incorrect if it is considered
to be implicit in time itself, because the distinction appears only through the relation of time to eternity and through the reflection of eternity in time” (CA: 85). His reasoning is that in order for past and future to be distinguished in time, they must stand in relation to a present moment. But in time itself, there is never a present moment, not only because it is outside of the Eternal, but also because each moment of this empty or "infinitely contentless" succession vanishes just as quickly as it arises. This means that for human beings, no moment ever truly is (CA: 86). Yet when this infinitely rapid succession and the eternal, or the present, "touch each another" in consciousness, a pivotal moment is established that can serve as a dividing line through which time is measured in terms of past, present, and future (CA: 86-87). Haufniensis calls this moment of contact "the instant," and he describes it as "the first reflection of eternity in time, its first attempt, as it were, at stopping time” (CA: 88). For Haufniensis, the instant is a Christian category that signifies the incarnation of God in Christ, or the apprehension and penetration of time by the Eternal. He therefore describes it as "the fullness of time" in comparison to the fleeting moment of the sensuous life, which he regards as emptiness and vanity forgotten by the Eternal.

Haufniensis believes that the instant, as a transfiguration of the moment of sensuality, gives rise to temporality and duration in human life. He defines temporality as what eventuates when "time constantly intersects eternity and eternity constantly pervades time" (CA: 89). As the Eternal continually disrupts the infinite succession of time in the instant, we are provided with an intimation of the Eternal in existence. The instant is not the full presence of the Eternal, however, since we are still situated within time in a process of becoming. For this reason, he states that the instant is an "atom of eternity" rather than the whole of it, which the Christian who believes in eternal life seeks to be ushered into at the end of his earthly life (CA: 88). For this reason,

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83 To distinguish this pivotal Christian event from the moment of sensuous life, I will use "the instant." Translation modified from original.
84 Haufniensis claims to be adopting a Pauline notion of time in his account of the instant (CA: 88). In Corinthians 15:51-52, Paul writes, "we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable." For Haufniensis, the instant therefore has apocalyptic implications, signaling the impending destruction of the world.
85 Peddlers of traditional wisdom often say that one should live in the moment, meaning that one should embrace the experience of the present while paying little heed to the past or future. It has consequently become a popular view in New Age thought. This, however, is certainly not the moment that Haufniensis has in mind in his Christian conception of the instant. Haufniensis refers to the moment of sensuous life as a "parody" of the presence of the eternal, which is to come in the future (CA: 86). In his view, the moment of the sensuous life is meaningless, while the instant, in signifying the "fullness of time" for those of the Christian faith, demands hope and repentance in an expectation of salvation from such meaninglessness (CA: 90). Elsewhere, Kierkegaard writes, "compared with eternity, this beautiful moment of temporality is nothing but the silver flash of imitation metal" (EUD: 266).
Haufniensis believes that with respect to temporality, the Eternal resides in the future rather than the present or past, which both spring from it. Kierkegaard offers a clearer explanation of this point when he writes:

The eternal is, but when the eternal touches time or is in time, they do not meet each other in the present, for then the present would itself be the eternal. The present, the moment, is so quickly past, that it really is not present; it is only the boundary and is therefore transitional; whereas the past is what was present. Consequently if the eternal is in the temporal, it is in the future (for the present can not get hold of it, and the past is indeed past) or in possibility. The past is actuality; the future is possibility. Eternally the eternal is the eternal; in time the eternal is possibility, the future. Therefore we call to-morrow the future, but we also call eternal life the future. (WOL: 233-234)

Like Haufniensis, Kierkegaard argues that the present moment of time for human beings is not truly present at all, since it is so fleeting, and so what is truly present must originate in the future. We cannot rest in the total presence of the Eternal so long as we are in the world, but we can expect it as a possibility on the horizon through consciousness, which reaches beyond the present moment of time when the imagination projects future possibilities for actualization. In this way, the Christian can hope that he will be saved from the menace of nothingness and perishability by becoming eternal in time. On this view, redemption is to come and not yet immanent for us.

Just as in the case of non-being, the human being is not aware of the eternal as a definite item in existence, or as a determinate being amongst other beings. Considered as a feature of consciousness, it is the invisible, unchanging, and unconditional aspect of existence that sets into relief all visible change amid external conditions or worldly phenomena. To put the matter dialectically, we would not be able to register changes among objects or states in ourselves, or measure time, if there were not an enduring aspect of existence that we could use as a point of reference in remembering how things in the world have changed from one moment to the next. Philosophers had commonly located this changeless aspect in material substances that persist in being while undergoing modifications in time, but Kierkegaard does not believe that temporality, in its association with non-being, could contain things that bear their own separate and original existences. For this reason, he locates the changeless aspect of existence in the self and not the world. The self has the eternal within it in the form of possibility as it moves forward into the future in the instant.
Now, unlike the human being, the bird has no awareness of the eternal in existence, and so it has no way of registering the succession of time or its tenses. Since it is not spirit, there is no real continuity or duration in the bird's existence—it lives entirely in the moment without being conscious of the different moments of its life. The eternal, on the other hand, is "the essential continuity" in consciousness, which means that it functions as the stronghold of the self in providing it with a stable identity over time (SUD: 105). By possessing the eternal in his consciousness, which continually disrupts the ephemeral succession of time in the instant, the human being is able to apprehend time and integrate the different moments of his life. In doing so, he is able to comprehend the duration of his life as a unified whole, and arrive at a sense of his own identity as a person. He achieves this unity by actively relating the present moment to the past and future through recollection and imaginative anticipation. The continuity generated by the eternal in its relation to time gives one's life substance and meaning that it would not have if it were a series of fragments or disconnected moments, as it is for the bird. As Taylor puts it, only for human beings can time be "a synthesis of persistence and change."

The life of the human being is capable of attaining diachronic coherence through the realization of one's spiritual capacities, wherein one relates past, present, and future in consciousness. Climacus, however, does not think that we are capable of maintaining an absolute continuity in our existence due to the manifold changes we experience as psychical-physical beings in time (CUP: 313). Time disrupts continuity as different moments succeed one another throughout the duration of our lives. With respect to our actual condition in the world, in which we are constantly in a process of becoming as changing persons, our identity is never fixed or settled, even if it becomes relatively stable through our anticipation of the Eternal. On the other hand, both he and Kierkegaard acknowledge that unity is the basis of the contradiction inherent in human existence, and that identity underlies our nature as spirit. In the foregoing journal entry where Kierkegaard refers to human life as contradiction, he likens the principle of identity to "the line the etchers call the base—the drawing is the main thing. As long as I live in time, the principle of identity is only an abstraction" (JP I: 705). As Løkke and Waaler note in their interpretation of this passage, the base line of a drawing fundamentally shapes it without being visible in the final product, and is an image of essence in contrast to the existence of the

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86 See Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship, p. 124.
87 I am borrowing the term 'diachronic coherence' from Frankfurt. See Taking Ourselves Seriously, p. 18.
drawing. In this entry, Kierkegaard is suggesting that each individual originally possesses an abstract identity or essence as spirit, and that this is conceptually prior to his concrete existence as a human being. However, this identity does not carry over into temporal existence smoothly due to the contradiction and tumult present in it. With this plan or "blueprint" that God has given him in mind, the individual is tasked with realizing his spiritual identity concretely, and forging continuity and consistency by living in the way God commands of him. In privileging existence over essence as a higher form of truth, and criticizing the abstract or objective thinker who, in his essentialist thinking, remains aloof from his life as an individual, Kierkegaard puts greater weight on practice, or how the individual accomplishes the "drawing" of his life by living out his thought. As we will see, by living in a self-disciplined and self-abnegating way, Kierkegaard believes that one is capable of achieving a stable identity in existence under the auspices of the eternal. However, he believes that in this life, temporality inevitably blocks individuals from fully realizing their spiritual essence and finalizing their identity, and as free beings, we do not have to strive for this if we do not want to. But in this case, as Climacus says, one would be refusing to do his part to "become what one is" (CUP: 130).

The Eternal and temporal are related insofar as they continually touch one another in consciousness in the instant, but they otherwise remain separated by an ontological gulf. The Eternal is not the infinite duration of time, since that would mean it is situated entirely within time as an everlasting process. Kierkegaard stresses that the Eternal must instead be understood as existing outside of time:

Eternity…is the opposite of the whole of temporality, and with all the powers of eternity it resists temporality’s becoming more. Just as God said to the water “Up to here and no further,” so eternity says to temporality, “Up to here and no further; you are, no matter how long you continue to be, a moment, neither more nor less; this I, eternity, guarantee, or this I, eternity, compel you to be. (CD: 98)

The Eternal and temporal are in conflict as opposing and even contradictory forces. However, Kierkegaard believes that the worldly or earthly powers of the temporal that root themselves in one's being as a psyche-body unity exhibit a radical dependence on the Eternal, since God ultimately presides over all temporal affairs; they can do nothing that He does not permit. The convergence of the eternal and the temporal in the human being therefore produces great

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88 See Løkke and Waaler, "Organon and Metaphysics IV," p. 21

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dialectical tension, and signifies that we are *not yet* what we essentially are. This paradoxical union generates movement in our lives, as we are in the process of becoming what we are by negotiating between them in the activity of synthesis. While defining human existence as contradiction in this way might seem to pose an insurmountable difficulty for his view, Kierkegaard believes that it suits the many dualities that feature in human life, including those already outlined. He writes: “The view which sees life’s doubleness (dualism) is higher and deeper than that which seeks unity” (JP I: 704). For the Christian, union with the Eternal is, of course, an ultimate ideal to be realized. But because we have severed ourselves from God through sin, this union with the ground of being requires the incarnation of God in Christ, even though the individual can aspire toward it by living as Christ taught.

As we can see, although the human being exists temporally, Kierkegaard disparages temporality throughout his authorship. Kierkegaard claims that the temporal, like a creeping plant with a “parasitic” and “insidious” nature, has the ability to ensnare the individual and corrupt the self (CD: 98-99). However, it can only take the upper hand over the eternal in the individual if he, by his own neglect, allows this to happen:

> When a person does not draw his power from the eternal and acquire by communion with the eternal the power to hold temporality down, temporality steals his power from him and through this stolen power it now becomes some enormous something; it becomes his impatience, his despair, perhaps his downfall. Pride strikes its own master, but temporality is just as ungrateful; it becomes something by stealing the power of eternity from a person and then in return remains with him and makes him its slave. (CD: 99)

The temporal consists of the totality of earthly forces, but the potency of these forces ultimately derives from the activity of the eternal. In its association with nothingness or non-being, the temporal attempts to infringe upon the eternal in the human being and draw him away from it, but it ultimately cannot so long as he keeps it borrowed power in check. If he does not resist its temptations, the temporal threatens to compromise his underlying unity and integrity as a self, as he disregards his eternal calling by being immersed in the interminable succession of worldly events, or succumbs to the nothingness of sensuality and insubstantiality. As Kierkegaard puts it under the pseudonym of Johannes Climacus, the life of temporality is "piecemeal" (CUP: 491); the episodes that constitute a life lived away from the eternal are disparate and atomistic, and have no coherence in themselves. Through the eternal, however, the self can gather itself out of
its dispersion and fragmentation in the play of the temporal, and bring itself into a unity that it otherwise loses in being absorbed in the multiplicity of worldly phenomena.

Passages of this sort are by no means isolated occurrences in Kierkegaard’s work. In a separate discourse, for instance, he describes the individual located in the midst of the temporal as being in the “the hands of an alien power,” which they must gain themselves away from by cleaving to God, their ultimate possessor (EUD: 172). Although the self is a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal, one can see that he vastly privileges the eternal component of the self. But paradoxically, one does not align oneself with this eternal component by abstracting from existence and maintaining a cool distance from it, as speculative thinkers, Platonists, and the like have done in attempting to relate to the world sub specie aeternitatis; since the eternal is concrete, this must be accomplished by humbling oneself as an individual through action and commitment in life in the world, and admitting the temporal as an essential aspect of oneself. For Kierkegaard, Christ demonstrated through his incarnation that God wants to meet us on earth, in all our fragility, poverty, and brokenness as human beings, and not in exalted mystical or philosophical contemplation.89 However, in his endorsement of the asceticism of Christ, he believes that one ought to be cautious about how one responds to things in the world and the desires they provoke, and in this sense, a certain distance should be maintained. It is therefore important that both poles of the self are in balance as one relates to the Eternal in existence.

The eternal component within consciousness bears important normative implications for human life. As a Christian, Kierkegaard insists that it is our existential "task" (or telos) to become aware of the eternal within ourselves and to develop this greater part of our nature in order to gather ourselves out of wretched contradiction in the temporal (WOL: 236). Although we each essentially possess an invisible image of the eternal as living subjects, it is initially present in us as potential to be realized in existence. Climacus puts this by saying: "A human being according to his possibility is eternal and becomes conscious of this in time" (CUP: 579). Hence, although we are endowed with the eternal in consisting of possibility and infinitude, since we are situated in the temporal, we do not yet actually exist as eternal, and our existence is not yet concluded so long as we are not so. We are heading toward completion as selves, however, insofar as we exist in a process of becoming what we essentially are through the imagination's

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89 In admonishing the individual not to become enamored with speculations on the infinite, Kierkegaard states: "Admittedly it seems very natural that in order to love God one must soar high up into heaven where God dwells, but in loving God humbly it is most fitting and sure to remain on earth" (CUD: 188).
mediation between ideality and reality in the instant. While the eternal resides in our consciousness in the form of possibility and gives continuity to our lives in its association with time, the presence of the Eternal awaits us as a future outcome that could only become actualized for us after death.

For Climacus, the eternal life the self aims at through its development does not include any temporal unfolding or movement, although the self is a paradoxical synthesis of temporality and eternity in this life. He explains that it would be a mistake for a person to think that this synthesis is retained in eternity, since the purpose of the process of becoming (or coming into being) is to eliminate the temporal aspect of the self. “As an existing person, then, he need not form existence out of the finite and the infinite, but, composed of the finite and the infinite, he, existing, is supposed to become one of the parts, and one does not become both parts simultaneously, because one is that by being an existing person" (CUP: 420). Kierkegaard often disparages the temporal, and considers it a stepping-stone or building block on the way to eternal life. However, if the individual renounces the temptations of sensuality and worldliness, and lives up to his spiritual nature by holding fast to God from within his concrete position in the world, the temporal has the positive value of being the channel through which the individual can actualize himself and win changelessness by becoming eternal. Kierkegaard does little to elaborate on what it means to become changeless, but minimally, Haufniensis suggests that is a final state of rest achieved only after death, once the temporal process of the human being has

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90 Climacus understands changelessness to be the purpose of development or change: “The motionless belongs to motion as motion’s goal [Maal], both in the sense of τέλος [end, goal] and μέτρον [measure, criterion]” (CUP: 312). He also clearly attributes immortality to God and the human being (CUP: 171). Given these claims, it seems problematic to suppose that what is changeless or motionless can be alive. Life would seem to require movement, changing states, and responsiveness to an environment at the very least, but these traits are not characteristic of the eternal. Kierkegaard therefore has the difficulty of how explaining how the eternal can be a form of life, which he never seems to resolve. The same problem arises when he defines life as contradiction, while claiming in the pseudonyms that the eternal is free of all contradiction. In this case, the eternal should be free of all life. The account that he gives of immortality throughout his authorship sounds much like a state of inertia, and not of perpetual vitality. This is not too surprising, given that he believes "Christianity means precisely that death is a person’s essential consolation" (JP I: 723). It is therefore not obvious that the culmination Climacus describes is compatible with the Christian idea of eternal life, although he believes it is.

91 There is the difficulty that if the self were to actually become eternal in time, it would seem that it already must have been eternal, since it is inconceivable that what is timeless has a beginning in time. Climacus acknowledges this worry and simply claims that how this is possible is "inaccessible to all thinking" (CUP: 573). This paradox does not lead him to abandon his position, however, since it reflects the paradoxical structure of the self as a synthesis. If Kierkegaard can show through these pseudonyms that the self is constituted in such a manner, then it is less surprising that what is impossible or inconceivable by any human stretch of the imagination might take place if God willed it. To his credit, it is difficult to conceive of how what is timeless can take form and shape in time, or how what is eternally one and simple can give rise to a multitude of objects and complexity, without this being paradoxical. Nevertheless, this is the strategy adopted by many of his opponents, such as the Neoplatonists.
concluded (CA: 152). Referring to the incarnation of the Eternal in Christ, which he believes has made salvation from the temporal possible for human beings by engendering the fullness of time, he writes: "In eternity...all contradiction is canceled, the temporal is permeated by and preserved in the eternal" (CA: 154). Climacus calls this state of salvation from contradiction "an eternal happiness" (CUP: 27). In resting in the fullness of the divinity as eternal, without suffering the pains, unsatisfied desires, and turmoil of time as we do here, he says that one "must be assumed to possess everything essentially" (CUP: 73). In having attained its end and the highest good by becoming itself before God, the self would no longer exist as a troublesome synthesis as it does in this life, and would be safe and secure in blessed union with Him.\(^92\)

1.4 Becoming a Self: Freedom, The Will, and Reflection in the Self

Anti-Climacus claims that the relation between the eternal and the temporal constitutes the human being in its existence in the world, but that this relation is not the self *per se*. He states, “the self is not the relation but is the relation’s relating itself to itself” (SUD: 13) For Anti-Climacus, to be self-relating, and therefore a self in the truest sense, is to be capable of reflection on oneself as a conscious being, to use one's will to shape who one is, and to commit to a certain way of life with knowledge of oneself (SUD: 29). Before delving into a more precise account of what he means by self-reflection, a careful reader of Kierkegaard might recognize an apparent inconsistency between Anti-Climacus' view and that of Haufninsen on the nature of the self as a relation. Anti-Climacus appears to suggest that spirit emerges through self-reflection, and hence is not an original feature of the relation, while Haufniensis claims that any relation between two contradictory elements originally requires a third, bridging element to sustain it, and that this third is spirit (CA: 85). These views are not incompatible, however, if we follow Anti-Climacus in making the distinction between spirit *in potentiality* and spirit *in actuality*

\(^92\) If the self attains changelessness by becoming eternal, and is no longer a synthesis, then one might think that Kierkegaard is suggesting that the self becomes God when it reaches its end, and that its individuality is annihilated. In that case, the infinite qualitative difference between the human being and God would dissolve after death. This is not, however, what he intends to claim. He reiterates, "between God and a human being there is an eternal essential qualitative difference, which only presumptuous thinking can make disappear in the blasphemy that in the transitory moment of finitude God and a human being are certainly differentiated, so that here in this life a human being ought to obey and worship God, but in eternity the difference will vanish in the essential likeness, so that God and human beings become peers in eternity, just as the king and the valet" (WA: 100). Yet Kierkegaard does not explain what this differentiation in eternity would consist in. Perhaps his point is that our temporal aspect of the self would be neutralized in eternity, but would not be eradicated or completely forgotten by God. But as Climacus explains, an eternal happiness must remain an elusive notion for us in this life: "nothing else can be said of eternal happiness than that it is the good that is attained by absolutely venturing everything” (CUP: 427).
A human being that is not self-reflective is originally spirit, but in potentiality. She has the potential to become reflective and to will as a self, and indeed has a spiritual essence, but she has not yet realized her essence in existence so as to become spirit in actuality.

For Anti-Climacus, becoming one's essential self is a task, and is indeed the telos of every human being. As he puts it: "every moment that a self exists, it is in a process of becoming, for the self κατά δόναμον [in potentiality] does not actually exist, is simply that which ought to come into existence" (SUD: 30). By distinguishing between a human being and a self, he wants to stress that an individual does not begin to exist as a full-blooded self as a matter of course, but that this must be achieved through a lived process in which one, in becoming self-reflective and imagining possible ways of being, wills to be who one essentially is. The more one does this, the more consciousness intensifies, and as this occurs, one becomes more of a self.93

This section will contain a phenomenological examination of this process of arriving at self-knowledge and becoming a self in Kierkegaard’s work. In reconciling the views of Haufniensis and Anti-Climacus, I intend to show that, in a paradoxical way, the self both emerges in time through the process of human life and has an eternal nature through consciousness as it moves forward into the future.

### 1.4.1 The Latency of Spirit: Unreflective Self-consciousness

Anti-Climacus contends that a human being who is spirit in potentiality but not in actuality occupies an elementary or non-dual state of consciousness that he refers to as “immediacy.” This is a Hegelian concept that Kierkegaard adopts for his own purposes throughout his works. Mackey nicely defines this concept as Kierkegaard uses it as “direct experience, experience as it is simply given and simply had before the onset of reflection.”94
Although immediacy is typically conceptualized and differentiated into discrete objects through reflection, in his initial state, the human being is inseparably united with immanent conditions in his environment in a state of awareness unmediated by conceptual thought. He perceives fluctuating states occurring within himself as a psyche-body unity, along with changing conditions in his environment, but he has not distinguished himself from them so as to become aware of himself as a self in relation to them. Describing this state, Anti-Climacus writes:

The man of immediacy is only psychically qualified...his self, he himself, is an accompanying something within the dimensions of temporality and secularity, in immediate connection with “the other”, and has but an illusory appearance of having anything eternal in it. The self is bound up in immediacy with the other in desiring, craving, enjoying, etc., yet passively; in its craving, this self is a dative, like the “me” of a child. (SUD: 51)

In immediacy, the self is outside of itself in doing things like desiring, seeking, or fleeing various things in its environment. There is no real differentiation between self and other within consciousness, and the self does not understand itself as a unified subject that retains sameness of identity over the different moments of its life. In its entanglement in the surrounding world, the self is a passive witness of events, while psyche and body are active in being moved by natural events unfolding by necessity.

Although spirit does not act on psyche and body at this early stage of consciousness, this does not mean that the self in immediacy does not exist or that the eternal is not present in consciousness. In this passage, Anti-Climacus says that the self is there to accompany psyche and body in the realm of temporality, which it is able to do qua human being. Because the self exists in immediacy in harmony with psyche and body, consciousness is present in the human being, albeit in a latent form. Anti-Climacus does not believe any distinction can be drawn between consciousness and self-consciousness, and so it can be assumed that consciousness of phenomena at this stage entails a dim consciousness of oneself as a bare subject of awareness (SUD: 29). One might call this bare awareness of the multiplicity of phenomena being joined together into a single experience the immediate unity of apperception.95 Because the self has not

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95 In referring to the unreflective form of self-consciousness as "the immediate unity of apperception," I am drawing on Kant's notion of "the transcendental unity of apperception" while modifying it in certain ways. See Critique of Pure Reason, A107-A11. Unlike Anti-Climacus, who understands spirit as wholly passive in its initial state, Kant conceives of the self in this state as actively combining the manifold of representations under a priori concepts and
yet become aware of itself as being aware of itself and the surrounding world over time, this is
not yet a reflective form of self-consciousness. Hence, the original state of immediacy involves
only an unreflective form of self-consciousness.

Kierkegaard argues that a young child would be an example of someone who lives in this
state of immediacy, or as spirit in potentiality. Although the psychical and physical constituents
of the child are actively embroiled with conditions in the natural world, it is not yet capable of
self-reflective activity, and so there is no separation between the self and the psyche-body
relation. As Haufniensis explains, in this state, which he refers to as the state of innocence,
“spirit is present, but as immediate, as dreaming” (CA: 43). Describing this condition,
Kierkegaard writes,

…the life of childhood and youth is a dream-life, because the innermost being, that which
in the deepest sense is the person, is sleeping. The child is turned entirely outward; its inwardness
is outwardness, and to that extent it is wide awake. But for a person to be awake is to be turned
inward eternally in inwardness; therefore the child is dreaming, and it dreams itself sensately together
with everything, indeed, almost as if it confuses itself with the sense impression. (CD: 108)

The child is outside of itself in being immersed in the flow of sensuous life. As psyche and body
interact with entities in the surrounding world, the child enjoys "the interplay of the powers of
feelings, of urges, of inclinations, and of passions, in short, the interplay of the powers of the
spontaneous life" (WOL: 41). In its natural spontaneity, the child is an instrument of external
forces and events, without these being disturbed by the intervention of spirit or self-reflection.
Due to its lack of spiritual activity, it does not have a sense of its identity as a self. For example,
it does not critically examine what kind of person it is or what it is doing, and it is not yet in a

rules, in such a way that it beholds its own identity before it. Anti-Climacus suggests that this endeavor occurs when
the self becomes reflective and volitional, but not when it is in its initial state as spirit in potentiality. Against Kant,
he suggests that in this initial state, the manifold of appearances is being actively combined into a single experience
through temporal processes, but not through the self's own activity. The self is therefore not conscious of its own
identity as a self at this point, and is being created by external forces that endow it with any identity it might be said
to have. In his study of narrative self-identity in Kierkegaard, Davenport offers a typology of levels of consciousness
suggested by Kierkegaard, with the transcendental unity of apperception at the baseline. Davenport believes animals
and human beings possess this form of consciousness insofar as they are able "to recognize experiences across time
as belonging to the same animal" (Narrative Identity, Autonomy, and Morality, p. 46). Since Kierkegaard does not
believe that non-human animals are spirit, I do not believe he would agree with Davenport's suggestion that they
could be endowed with consciousness, much less a transcendental form of it. Consciousness would require that they
possess an aspect of the eternal within them to measure the different moments of time, but Kierkegaard believes
animals lack this.
position to evaluate its desires and decide whether or not it should resist or endorse some of them. Having recognized no real distinction between self and the external world, it perceives itself to be the world, to the extent that there can be said to be any world at all for a being who has not yet conceptualized the world as such.

Haufniensis compares the state of consciousness in innocence to that of dreaming. He points to a crucial difference between dreaming and wakefulness, saying, “Awake, the difference between myself and my other is posited; sleeping, it is suspended, dreaming, it is an intimated nothing” (CA: 41-42). He has the insight that in the experience of dreams, we do not normally draw a strict distinction between our own acts and what merely happens to us. Events occur randomly and without reason, and although we might be doing things or making choices during these events, we do not experience ourselves as being firmly in control of what we do. Until the individual “awakens” from this state of immediacy by learning of the difference between self and world, and becoming actively involved in his own personal existence through his capacities for reflection and willing, he is only spirit in potentiality.

1.4.2 Self-Discovery: Reflective Self-consciousness

Eventually in the course of human development, a human being is separated from immediacy and becomes self-relating, or spirit in actuality. Anti-Climacus generally refers to this capacity of the self to relate itself to itself as reflection, although reflection importantly includes the work of the imagination, recollection, and the understanding. These capacities are especially important in allowing the self to retain a continual identity over time, and in discriminating between objects in immediacy. Whereas the young child identified itself with things in the surrounding environment, when the self becomes active through the awakening of reflection, it begins to realize that it is “essentially different from the environment and external events and from their influence upon it” (SUD: 54). He believes that through reflective self-consciousness, the self understands, however vaguely or dimly at first, that there is “something eternal in the self” through which it can step back from its immediate situation and gauge itself.

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96 One exception could be made in the case of lucid dreaming, when an individual realizes that they are dreaming within a dream, and so experiences a kind of awakening within it. When this happens, the "awakened" person is able to exercise control over what occurs within his dream. It seems that awakening is associated with the feeling that we possess a will, and so have some control over our actions and what is happening. There is also continuity and rational coherence among events proceeding in waking life, which is rarely the case in dreams.

97 Anti-Climacus identifies the imagination with reflection. "The self is reflection, and the imagination is reflection, is the rendition of the self as the self's possibility" (SUD: 31).
against temporal phenomena, including itself as a human being (SUD: 55). In the first phase of reflective awareness, the self delineates itself from external objects, while in the second and preeminent phase, the self delineates itself from itself. Through this capacity for detachment, or what I will sometimes refer to as transcendence, the self is able to engage in abstract or conceptual thought about the world and its contents, and finally is able to think about itself, its actions, and even its own thoughts critically. In performing these acts, it arrives at a sense of its identity as a self.

The separation from immediacy that occurs through the self's activity of reflection generates distance between self and world, and correspondingly, between the self and itself as a human being in the world. This opens up a dimension of inwardness through which the self can gain a hold of itself in its earthly existence, and win continuity, consistency, and independence in relation to the temporal flux of the outside world. This sphere of inwardness, which puts the self in relation to the realm of ideality and possibility, provides a space for thought and the imagination to roam separately from the reality of the world, instead of being naively immersed in it. The reflective distance engendered does not mean that the self closes in on itself in thought and has no further contact with the world. Although a rupture between self and world has commenced, the self continues to relate itself to the world and others as a thinking and embodied being, while relating itself to itself in its thoughtful concern for itself. When this separation between self and world occurs through the self's own activity, duality is experienced within consciousness for the first time.

Through reflective self-consciousness, the self knows itself as an object of its own awareness, but in a peculiar sense. Because the self exists as a subject with the invisible aspect of the eternal within it, it does not cognize itself as an object amongst visible, temporal objects, whether these objects are regarded as material entities, sensory representations, mental images, or the like. Anti-Climacus describes the self as it is experienced phenomenally from the point of view of the individual not as a definite entity, but as a "naked abstract self" or even an "infinite self" in order to signify its pure and indeterminate character (SUD: 55). Anti-Climacus opposes the "abstract self" that reflection produces in the domain of ideality and possibility to the "concrete self," or what he refers to as the “fully dressed self” of immediacy (SUD: 68). This is the determinate aspect of the self through which it is situated in the world as a psyche-body unity, and would consist of natural predispositions, preferences, skills and abilities, relations to
society and the external environment, a personal history, and so on. This manner of speech is indeed confusing, and might lead one to think that Anti-Climacus is suggesting there are two different selves contained within a single individual.\footnote{In recent times, Patrick Stokes has argued that Kierkegaard distinguishes between a phenomenally given self and a narratively constituted person, and that these are separate forms of selfhood that interact with each other. While the phenomenal self is eternal and exists only in the present moment, or synchronically, the person (or human being) exists over a span of time, or diachronically. See The Naked Self, Chapter 7. In awkwardly positing two different selves that somehow interact to make up the life of the single individual, Stokes appears to want to downplay the paradoxical nature of the self, or even to show how this paradox might be resolved. He also ignores that for Kierkegaard, the self becomes eternal in time, rather than beginning to exist as eternal (even though it is essentially that). In this life, the eternal resides in consciousness as a possibility that the human being is tasked with actualizing.}\footnote{See Louis Mackey, "The Loss of the World in Kierkegaard’s Ethics," p. 613.} Although the self is a fundamentally divided self as a synthesis of the eternal and temporal, or the infinite and finite, there is little reason to believe that this is the case. He alludes to different selves in order to describe different aspects of a single self that, in relating itself to itself, is both the subject and object of its own awareness. The abstract self refers to the self as a pure subject of awareness that transcends its finite condition at any given moment in order to think about it or influence it through the will. This aspect of the self is not original or discovered, but is generated through reflection that proceeds from within one's concrete existence. The concrete self, on the other hand, refers to the self in its empirical character, or as it exists as an object of thought for the abstract self. For this reason, Anti-Climacus generally refers to the individual as a single self, unless he intends to draw attention to one of these aspects over another in examining its self-relational activity.

It is important to note that, in his discussion of a naked or infinite self, Anti-Climacus is not claiming that the self exists as a pure abstraction, although in its transcendental capacity, it is phenomenally figured as such in consciousness. Sometimes Kierkegaard scholars make the mistake of interpreting him in this way by taking the infinite self to be the true form of the self. As a result, they accuse him of offering a vision of a self that exists in total isolation, whether it is from God, other individuals, or the world in general. Mackey, for instance, has forcefully advanced this criticism, stating, “it often seems that Kierkegaardian subjectivity—far from being concrete and existential, is but an abstraction vibrating in a vacuum.”\footnote{See Louis Mackey, "The Loss of the World in Kierkegaard’s Ethics," p. 613.} This interpretation, however, clashes with Anti-Climacus's relational account of the self, in which the self exists concretely in relation to the world, God, and other beings. In his view, the single, "actual self" is not finite or infinite, for as a synthesis of both, it possesses both finite and infinite aspects (SUD: 55). Anti-Climacus stresses that the infinite self “is really only the most abstract form, the most
abstract possibility of the self,” and that the individual who has not accepted the finite and concrete aspect of himself has failed to exist as a self (SUD: 68). The abstract self corresponds with essence in the realm of ideality and possibility, and is like the "base line" of the artist's drawing, in which the actuality of the drawing is what truly matters in the end.

In the same way, Kierkegaard prizes the individual who, through an awareness of his essence or the image of eternity in him, aims to existentially transform himself into the person he ought to be by living well, or producing the right kind of "drawing" of his life. It would be a mistake to identify entirely with one aspect of the self, which the man of immediacy does when he identifies himself merely by externalities or finite conditions, or as Anti-Climacus puts it, by “the clothes he wears,” instead of taking into account the more abstract qualities of the self and its capacity for transcending these conditions (SUD: 53). But it would also be wrong to conceive of oneself altogether abstractly, as speculative thinkers often do. Nevertheless, the self cannot become actualized as spirit to any appreciable extent until it becomes able to understand itself at the level of ideality, rather than only understanding itself as a psychical being that is embodied in the world. Only in this way will one be able to break free from mindless social conformity and the snares of sensuality or worldliness, so that one can come to know the extraordinary potential one has as an individual before God. For Kierkegaard, the hope is that in knowing oneself in this way, the individual will resolve to live a genuinely Christian way of life apart from these damaging influences.

There are different gradations of reflective self-consciousness, depending on how fully the separation from immediacy has progressed. For instance, Anti-Climacus believes that most people live mostly within immediacy, and so only have what he describes as “an admixture of a little dash of reflection” (SUD: 58). Their thinking is generally directed toward states of affairs in the world and more mundane concerns about themselves and the community, rather than toward deeper and more spiritual concerns. In this case, one would have a vague idea of being an enduring self with an eternal and infinite aspect while engaging in this kind of thinking, but this would not be brought to heightened awareness or scrutiny. The kind of objective reflection Climacus discusses would also seem to fit broadly within this category. It takes the form of calculation, scientific reasoning, problem solving and the like, and so would require a tremendous amount of abstract thinking about the world in general. It would also demand a degree of detachment from one’s immediate situation in order to consider ideas, theories, and
possibilities in existence. Because objective thought is disinterested, however, none of this would involve a significant appreciation for himself as an existing subject, or an application of these ideas to his personal life. Without this kind of self-awareness or appropriation of one's thought, the objective thinker takes his own personal existence to be insignificant with respect to proceedings in the universe or the world at large, and so does not feel the gravity of being a single individual within it.

Climacus refers to the type of reflective self-consciousness that involves a deepened awareness of oneself as an individual as subjective reflection. In expressing the difference between objective and subjective reflection, he explains:

Whereas objective thinking is indifferent to the thinking subject and his existence, the subjective thinker as existing is essentially interested in his own thinking, is existing in it. Therefore, his thinking has another kind of reflection, specifically, that of inwardness, of possession, whereby it belongs to the subject and to no one else. Whereas objective thinking invests everything in the result and assists all humankind to cheat by copying and reeling off the results and answers, subjective thinking invests everything in the process of becoming and omits the result... (CUP: 72-73)

Climacus believes that the subjective thinker will be interested in learning about truths that pertain to him as an individual, rather than objective truths that overlook this. Although she will be self-interested in a spiritual sense, her reflective activity is not in service to the self-interest of immediacy, which would include egotistical desires for material wealth, power, status, pleasure, and so on. In her continual spiritual seeking, the subjective thinker will instead consider existential issues related to discovering her purpose in life and the meaning it has for her. Because she is in a process of becoming, she will do this without coming to a firm conclusion or being certain about having a final answer. The self-interest of the subjective thinker could involve, among other things, rumination over questions about her death, immortality, and salvation, a focus on ethical action, thoughts about her relationship with God, and an acknowledgment of guilt and a resolve to do better. Anti-Climacus laments that many people are not consistently mindful of these crucial issues, although he believes that all human beings are capable of living with this type of self-concern if they so choose (SUD: 107).
1.4.3 The Awakened Self: Freedom and the Will in the Self

When the individual knows himself in his infinite aspect and engages in subjective reflection, he recognizes that, in an important respect, he is essentially free from any external condition that would determine him or define him as a self. Anti-Climacus claims: “The self is freedom,” where freedom is understood as the activity of relating oneself to oneself (SUD: 29). In the last section, I explained that this self-relational activity involves reflection, which along with the imagination, is "the first condition for what becomes of a person" (PC: 186). But for Anti-Climacus, the will is just as important to selfhood as self-relational activity, and is "the second and in the ultimate sense the decisive condition" (PC: 186). In other words, a person is spirit in actuality if and only if he or she has reflection, imagination, and a will, along with a being a subjective thinker. In this section, I will discuss the way in which the self can exercise its will in existence upon discovering its freedom as an "infinite self." This is not only an expression for the self as a pure subject of awareness, but also for the self as a free agent that is able to imagine possibilities and realize them in existence as spirit in actuality. In other words, as an infinite self with a capacity for transcendence, one is able to act upon oneself in one's concretion, or to mold or shape oneself in existence in a manner of one's choosing. For Anti-Climacus, the realization of selfhood does not arrive by necessity or come naturally "as a matter of course," and so the will is needed to push the self into higher stages of existential development (SUD: 58). Only in freedom does he believe that one can become one's true self by willing to be oneself before God.

In Anti-Climacus' view, the will develops later in human life after the emergence of reflective self-consciousness, and does not feature in the earlier stages of selfhood when the individual is spirit in potentiality.100 With the unreflective form of self-consciousness, the self is passively absorbed in the world in a state of immediacy, and so it does not act of its own accord. The psychical and physical aspects of the human being are mobilized by objects and events unfolding in the world, which means he has certain desires, feelings, and natural dispositions that move him to act. These are stimulated by external conditions, rather than purposefully selected by him as an agent who has come to himself in self-knowledge. Anti-Climacus therefore

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100 Anti-Climacus appears to adopt this position when he writes that consciousness is "decisive with regard to the self. The more consciousness, the more self; the more consciousness, the more will; the more will; the more self. A person who has no will at all is not a self; but the more will he has, the more self-consciousness that he has also" (SUD: 29). As I explained in the last section, those in the earlier stages of immediacy are only conscious to a minimal extent, and so would have little to no will to speak of, even though they have desires.
suggests that a distinction can be drawn between desires, which are involuntary affects that convey a physical or psychological need of something temporal, and the will, which is a self-relational activity through which one decides what he will desire and what he will make of himself as a person. The will might be thought of as a non-naturalistic form of desire, but these are nevertheless categorically distinct, since only spiritual beings have a will. To avoid confusion and keep these terms separate, I will refer to naturalistic desire as "desire" while referring to non-naturalistic desire as "will."

To better understand this distinction I am making between desire and the will, it will be helpful to consult the works of Harry Frankfurt, who in writing on persons in recent times, has brought themes intimated in Kierkegaard to remarkable clarity. Frankfurt achieves this by drawing a distinction between wantons and persons, which closely parallels Kierkegaard's distinction between what I have referred to as spirit in potentiality and spirit in actuality. For Frankfurt, the wanton is someone who, like the young child described earlier, "does not care about his will," and whose "desires move him to do certain things, without its being true of him either that he wants to be moved by those desires or that he prefers to be moved by other desires." Frankfurt distinguishes the wanton, who only has such "first-order desires," from a person, who has "second-order volitions" when he wants or does not want certain desires to be his will. Frankfurt argues that second-order volitions are a type of desire made possible by the reflexive structure of the mind of persons, which allows us to desire that certain desires move us to act, while desiring that others do not. This reflexive structure, he claims in a move strikingly similar to the one made by Kierkegaard, is evident in "our peculiar knack of separating from the immediate content and flow of our own consciousness and introducing a sort of division within our minds...which enables us to focus our attention directly upon ourselves." Describing how consciousness enables this type of "monitoring oversight," he writes:

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101 In contrasting spiritual inwardness with desire, Kierkegaard writes: “Inwardness is the eternal, and desire is the temporal, but the temporal cannot hold out with the eternal. Desire grows less and less fervently, and at last its time is over, but the time of inwardness is never over. Inwardness, its need for God, has then conquered, and the supplicant does not seek God in the external world, does not create him in his desires, but finds him in his inner being” (JP II: 2114). As we will see, inwardness consists of an intensification or empowerment of the will, rather than its dissolution.

102 Frankfurt, The Importance of What We Care About, p. 16.

103 Ibid.

104 Frankfurt, Taking Ourselves Seriously, p. 4
When we divide our consciousness in this way, we objectify to ourselves the ingredient items of our ongoing mental life. It is this self-objectification that is particularly distinctive of human mentality. We are unique (probably) in being able simultaneously to be engaged in whatever is going on in our conscious minds, to detach ourselves from it, and to observe it—as it were—from a distance. We are then in a position to form reflexive or higher-order responses to it. For instance, we may approve of what we notice ourselves feeling, or we may disapprove; we may want to remain the sort of person we observe ourselves to be, or we may want to be different. Our division of ourselves situates us to come up with a variety of supervisory desires, intentions, and interventions that pertain to the several constituents and aspects of our conscious life.\textsuperscript{105}

In a similar way, for Anti-Climacus, one's consciousness is divided and the self and its desires are objectified with the awakening of reflective self-consciousness. In his terms, the "infinite self" separates itself from the immediate contents of consciousness or its "finite self" in order to monitor what is happening within it and in the world in general, and to respond in a manner that it sees fit. The infinite self is \textit{not} the universal subject of German Idealism, although by separating itself from particular conditions in its internal and external environment, it becomes capable of conceiving of them under universal concepts, ideas, and rules. For Anti-Climacus, the infinite self is an individual agent that thinks about its situation from a universalized perspective and decides what it will desire and how it will act. "With the help of this infinite form," he writes, the self can contemplate its condition and use its will to "make his self into the self he wants to be, to determine what he will have or not have in his concrete self" (SUD: 68).\textsuperscript{106} The concrete self would include what Frankfurt describes as the ingredient items of one's mental life, such as one's first-order desires, psyche and embodied condition. For both Frankfurt and Kierkegaard, the self can therefore transform or shape itself in a manner of its choosing through its reflective capacity, while continuing to engage with its concrete existence as a human being in the world.

\textsuperscript{105} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{106} It should be noted that Anti-Climacus says this of the self in despair, who in defiance, wills to be "master of itself or to create itself" by using his will to transform himself into whatever he wants to be. It might, then, seem like using the will to shape oneself as a human being is what one ought \textit{not} to be doing in avoiding or eliminating despair. However, this is not correct, since not willing to be oneself (which means living as the wanton or spirit \textit{in potentiality}) is also a form of despair. It must be recognized that for Anti-Climacus, those who despair in defiance are one step closer to eliminating despair, since they \textit{will} to be themselves. But this is still despair because in willing to be the self that they want to be, they do not will to be the self that God wants them to be. In order to overcome despair, then, one must willingly choose to be who God wants one to be, and this might not initially align with the ideas one has concerning who one wants to be. In this way, one accepts that God is ultimately the master over oneself, although this also takes a certain kind of self-mastery and a certain measure of will.
But while Frankfurt understands the "higher-order" volitional activity of persons to be a reflexive mode of desiring that originates from processes immanent in the natural world, for Anti-Climacus, the will of the person is non-naturalistic. As transcendent, it is genuinely of a higher order. ¹⁰⁷ In Kierkegaard's view, the reflective and volitional activity of the self is not a derivative mode of activity that originates in lower-level processes occurring in the natural world, although the self awakens in response to these conditions that affect it as a psyche-body unity. It is rather a separate, higher-level activity originating from the eternal component in the self that disrupts one's natural spontaneity, which had formerly swept up the self in it in the state of immediacy. As Haufniensis explains, the fact that spirit disrupts the immediate harmony between itself and the world in becoming active in reflection and willing makes it an ambiguous power:

Inasmuch as it [spirit] is now present, it is in a sense a hostile power, for it constantly disturbs the relation between psyche and body, a relation that indeed has persistence and yet does not have endurance, inasmuch as it first receives the latter by spirit. On the other hand, spirit is a friendly power, since it is precisely that which constitutes the relation. (CA: 43-44, trans. modified)¹⁰⁸

Spirit is originally inactive and abstract in holding psyche and body together as a unity, and for this reason, Anti-Climacus describes the relation between them as a "negative unity" (SUD: 13). However, once it awakens from its wanton slumber and begins to relate itself to itself through its own acts as an "infinite self," the relationship between spirit and the psyche-body unity becomes unstable. Rather than being moved to act by the strongest desires, earthly passions, or impulses that spring up in him, the individual now has possession of himself, and can decide which of these desires will move him to act. Since he has separated himself from his first-order desires as

¹⁰⁷ By taking the second-order volitions of persons to be reflexive desires, Frankfurt suggests that these volitions derive from events in the natural world. This allows him to avoid having to posit an irreducible distinction, or a genuine duality, between the will of persons and their first-order desires, or between the person and conditions in the natural world. However, this would mean that the "higher-order" activity of persons is something of a misnomer for Frankfurt, since first-order desires and second-order volitions can be said to occur from within the single order of the natural world. For Kierkegaard, who holds that existence is characterized by irresolvable duality, the will of persons arises at the level of the eternal, which is essentially different from the level of the temporal, where desiring and sensuality come into play.

¹⁰⁸ Ludwig Klages is an opponent of Haufniensis on this point. Like Haufniensis, Klages conceives of the human being as consisting of a tripartite division of spirit, body, and psyche, where psyche and body were intimately intertwined. However, he did not think that spirit constituted the relation between psyche and body, but instead conceived of it as an alien and destructive power hostile to it. In his view, spirit could be said to "hijack" the living unity of soul and body. See Spirit as Adversary of the Soul. For Kierkegaard, however, it would be more proper to understand the matter the other way around.
an infinite self, he can also decide not to allow any of these to move him to act, and to instead commit himself to some interest that is not already present in his motivational repertoire. With his naturalistic model, Frankfurt suggests that this is not the case, and that the individual is limited to the menu of options nature and culture offer him when deciding how he will act. But as an infinite self, Anti-Climacus suggests that he can use his imagination to choose an option that is not on this menu, and move himself to act based on a thought or idea that inspires him. For example, Kierkegaard thinks that in drawing its power from the eternal, it should be in the interest of spirit to "hold temporality down" by curbing sensuality and the pleasures of the flesh, which were previously enjoyed without inhibition (CD: 99). This commitment to suppress or extinguish at least some of one's first-order desires could not come from the faculty in the self that contains first-order desires, since then this faculty would contradict itself. It must therefore come from a different part of the self.

With the awakening of self-relational activity, the tripartite relationship between spirit, psyche, and body is marked by conflict because the human being acts at the intersection of time and eternity. There are now two competing levels of activity or spontaneity occurring within the self that are not in essential agreement. The lower spontaneity belongs to a temporal world-process that unfolds in the state of immediacy, which spirit in potentiality is in accord with. This natural process, which we are passively absorbed in during the first period of life, encompasses the psyche-body relation of the human being, and would include things like perception, desiring, and the vital functioning of its organic life. The higher spontaneity that emerges in reflection institutes a personal process driven by the will. This process attains its goal or telos when the individual becomes himself in truth as spirit in actuality. In using one's will to participate in the personal process of becoming oneself, the temporal world-process is momentarily disrupted and apprehended in consciousness. In cognizing objects and events in the world, and using one's imagination to consider ideas and possibilities that one might realize, one can decide what to

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109 Thanks to David Sussman for raising this idea in comments on this draft. I am also using his phrasing, which frames the issue nicely.

110 Plato makes this argument in defense of the tripartite division of the soul in the Republic. In determining whether the soul consists of one part or many parts, he claims that it is impossible for something to undergo opposites in the same part of itself, in relation to the same thing, at the same time (436a-b). Since the soul can desire drink while at the same time forbidding itself to drink, it cannot be that these actions take place in the same part of the soul (439b). Therefore, the soul must have at least two parts. For Plato, it is the rational part of the soul that opposes the appetitive part in cases of this sort, while for Kierkegaard, it is the spiritual aspect of the self that opposes the psychical-physical aspect.
make of oneself as a human being. In choosing what one will do in existence, or what one wants to desire, or what kind of person one will be, the temporal process can be disrupted in various ways. For instance, in occupying a detached position from oneself as an infinite self, one might resist certain desires, moods, or feelings that naturally arise, or shift one's attention away from certain thoughts in favor of others, or redirect one's energies toward a different course of action. Although such exercises of self-control that reflection enables can create discord within the self and be a source of unease, by exerting its will, the self takes a stance on its own existence as a human being, and "puts its foot down" by demonstrating its agency in the world. In becoming active through self-reflection and willing, the self is no longer a mere "negative unity," but makes itself concrete as a "positive third" in the relation (SUD: 13). The individual who reaches this stage of consciousness is capable of thinking critically about himself and living in the world as his own person, instead of being a mere instrument of temporal or societal forces who goes through life like a leaf blowing in the wind.

Kierkegaard would also disagree with Frankfurt's claim that the self creates or constitutes itself through its willing, since he believes that the self, in being given its existence by God, already exists as constituted prior to willing.111 Nevertheless, as I explained in section 1.1, Kierkegaard believes that God grants the human being freedom in creating him from nothing. Anti-Climacus defines the self's freedom as “the dialectical aspect of possibility and necessity” (SUD: 29). This suggests that there is a dynamic relationship between these two components of the self, as possibilities are realized in existence, and the necessary conditions that circumscribe his empirical existence are transferred into the realm of possibility through the self's synthesizing activity. Anti-Climacus believes that the imagination, as the fundamental capacity of spirit and the source of reflection, is the medium through which the self relates to infinitude, possibility, and ideality. Through the imagination, the individual can imagine different possible ways he might be or act, and can use his freedom as an infinite self to shape or mold his life on the basis of these ideas and possibilities (SUD: 31). In being interested in his existence as a subjective thinker, he might decide to become a different kind of person than the one he was in immediacy, when he acted out of his natural spontaneity or in imitation of others, and not in freedom. The

111 Frankfurt claims that when someone decides to desire something, "The decision determines what the person really wants by making the desire on which he decides fully his own. To this extent the person, in making a decision by which he identifies with a desire, constitutes himself... It is these acts of ordering and of rejection...that create a self out of the raw materials of inner life." The Importance of What We Care About, p. 170.
individual who has achieved reflective self-consciousness is therefore capable of demonstrating real and independent agency in existence, and can be self-determining on a regular basis if he takes up the task of becoming himself earnestly. However, although one has considerable room to use one's freedom to make of oneself what one would like, there is a particular kind of person God wants one to be, and this shape of the self is discovered at the end of the journey toward becoming one's true self.¹¹² As we will see later, if the person one wants to be does not align with the person that God wants one to be, then one is in despair.

Kierkegaard does not believe that self-determination means to be able to choose arbitrarily, or in isolation from the worldly conditions that determine our nature as human beings. He emphasizes that since the self is subject to necessity in being concrete, the will has a “continually progressive history,” and that a person "can go so far that he finally loses even the capacity of being able to choose" (JP II: 1268). He concedes that our actions and character is determined significantly by the temporal aspect of our nature, which includes a historical condition, a social context, our relationships with others, our physical and psychological constitution, and so on. Because of this, our character and behaviors can often be very difficult to change through acts of will. This view can be illustrated through the case of the compulsive liar who wants to reform himself. It would take diligent effort for him to break his habit, and he could not simply choose to become an honest person overnight upon realizing that it is a possibility for him. In fact, the desire to lie might be so ingrained in him that he finds himself unable not to lie, despite him not wanting this desire to move him to act.¹¹³ Supposing the exercise of freedom did not depend on necessary conditions that impact his life, or the lower spontaneity, the compulsive liar might become an honest person overnight without encountering

¹¹² Kierkegaard writes, "at every person’s birth, there comes into existence an eternal purpose for that person, for that person in particular. Faithfulness to oneself with respect to this is the highest thing a person can do" (UDVS: 93). This essentialist view of the self differs from the Sartrian view that the self is entirely what we make of it, and that it has no real essence apart from that. It also lends a kind of objectivity and normativity to Kierkegaard's account of the self, and keeps his notion of freedom from being entirely subjective. For Kierkegaard, there is a fact of the matter about who we are and how we should live, although as sinners, we are fleeing from it and engaging in self-deception to avoid becoming who we essentially are.

¹¹³ Frankfurt would say that in this case, the desire to lie would be a force that is not his own, just as the unwilling drug addict is overcome by a force that is not his own when he takes the drug he is addicted to. See The Importance of What We Care About, p. 18. He refers to desires that make us act in ways that we do not want as "alien intruders by which we are helplessly beset." See Taking Ourselves Seriously, p. 8. Kierkegaard would not agree with this assessment, however. In his view, we must take responsibility for what constitutes us as finite beings, and ultimately consent to these desires when they move us to act. He thinks we must accept all our desires as parts of ourselves, however ugly or unwanted they might be, and however much they should be resisted. In his account of personhood, Frankfurt therefore identifies the self too strongly with what Kierkegaard refers to as the "infinite self," while failing to identify it with the finite parts of the self that conflict with one's second-order volitions.
further difficulty. As it stands, part of his character is finitely determined in such a way that this would be impossible.

But by endowing the will with a history, Kierkegaard does not admit that temporal conditions fully determine our actions or character. While they influence reflection, imagination, and willing, and constrain them in various ways, Anti-Climacus does not believe that these higher faculties of spirit can be reduced to them. Since the self is free as a synthesis of possibility and necessity, it can use its imagination and choose among possibilities that do not eventuate out of necessity. Haufniensis explains that this includes the possibility of sin, or disobedience of the will of God. The kind of freedom the human being possesses, he states, “is infinite and arises out of nothing” (CA: 112). Hence, it does not originate from determinate processes occurring in the natural world, but rather from an indeterminate domain of possibility. In its infinitude, the self is, to a certain extent, free from external determination, and can shape itself in a manner of its choosing by surpassing what it is at the finite level at any given moment. As an infinite self, one causally influences events in the natural order from a position outside of it by deciding how he will act, or by committing to a certain way of life. As a finite self, however, one is also positioned within the natural order. The dialectical process of selfhood thereby unfolds successively in time as the human being oscillates between transcendence and immanence, without ever fully coinciding with himself or staying put at one of these positions for more than a moment.114 Because the self is divided in this way, it can be an object to itself, and both make itself and be made by itself.

Both in his own works and in the pseudonyms, Kierkegaard suggests that we should not understand ourselves as separated entirely from the world as free-floating selves, just as we should not understand ourselves as being entirely absorbed in it as mere things.115 Describing this state of being in-between worldliness and otherworldliness, Anti-Climacus writes:

To become oneself is to become concrete. But to become concrete is neither to become finite nor to become infinite, for that which is to become concrete is indeed a synthesis. Consequently, the progress of

114 Climonus appears to have this circular movement in mind when he states that a human being “thinks and exists, and existence separates thinking and being, holds them apart from each other in succession” (CUP: 332).
115 Kierkegaard emphasizes that the self remains in immediacy as long as it exists, and cannot reflect itself out of it or go outside of it. “Even the most persistent abstractedness in a human being still cannot wholly renounce immediacy; on the contrary, he becomes continually more conscious of it in trying to escape it, if for no other reason. The immediate is his foothold, and no matter how he may soar, no matter how extravagant he becomes in imagination, he can nevertheless never completely abandon his foothold” (JP II: 1348).
the becoming must be an infinite moving away from itself in the infinitizing of the self, and an infinite coming back to itself in the finitizing process. (SUD: 30)

The process of "infinitizing" occurs when the self detaches itself from the finite component of its being and ascends into ideality through the imagination, while the "finitizing" process occurs when the self descends back into reality to realize its ideas or possibilities concretely through an endeavor of the will. In this case, the infinite component of the self is the active principle in the relation, and it works upon the finite component of the self to impel change or movement within it. The finite component, in its correspondence with psyche and body, is not inert before being acted upon by the self, but is moved by forces and events in the world, and it continues to be so even when moved by the "infinitizing" of the self. In temporality, the self is therefore the site of its own internal self-relational activity as well as the external activity of the world that affects it as a psyche-body unity. The activity of the world cannot reach the infinite aspect of the self, but it can reach the finite aspect, just as the infinite self can.

Although the powers of the eternal and temporal are united in the self as a synthesis, they are nevertheless in fierce conflict within this union, vying for control over the concrete aspect of the human being, which is bound up in existence. The human being therefore occupies a precarious position. He must decide whether to live in worship, seeking God for consolation in a time of distress, or to relinquish the freedom God gave him by falling prey to sensuality or worldliness. Interpreting a key passage from the gospels, Kierkegaard writes:

You cannot serve God and mammon, not God and the world, not good and evil; and the reason a human being can serve only one master is undoubtedly that these two powers, even though the one power is the infinitely stronger, are in mortal combat with each other. This enormous danger...that a human being is placed between these two enormous powers and the choice is left up to him, this enormous danger is what entails that one must either love or hate, that not to love is to hate. These two powers are so inimical that the slightest leaning to one side is regarded from the other side as the unconditional opposite. (WA: 34)

Kierkegaard believes that the existing individual is pulled in two directions, between being and nothingness, and it is up to him to decide what power will prevail in their contest over him. His situation is especially difficult in that he must admit the worldly or temporal as a part of himself,
and ironically, even value it as the medium through which he becomes eternal. As a Christian, he believes that self-renunciation and self-discipline is needed to quench the passions and appetites that the world stirs, so that the individual can embody his faith in the midst of a hostile world as Christ did.

1.4.4 Pulling Oneself Together: The Integration of the Eternal and Temporal in the Self

Spirit synthesizes the different components that make up the self in such a way that they become concretized, or in other words, existentially realized in the life of the individual. The structure of the self is summarized in the chart below.

![Diagram of the Constitution of the Self](image)

**Figure 1: The Constitution of the Self**

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116 Kierkegaard states that the Christian should become aware of "precisely how valuable that is which is discarded in reflection" (POV: 93). According to his dialectical conception of personal development, life in the temporal is not discarded in the sense of being eradicated, but is preserved and transformed as one becomes a Christian and has one's faith tested amid life in the world. On his view, the self is built up in time, and so one needs the temporal to become eternal. Kierkegaard elaborates on this while condemning the meager, state-sponsored Christianity of his time: "One does not become a Christian through reflection, but in reflection to become a Christian means that there is something else to discard. A person does not reflect himself into being a Christian but out of something else in order to become a Christian, especially when the situation is Christendom, where one must reflect oneself out of the appearance of being a Christian" (POV: 93). But for Kierkegaard, the religious way of life is primarily characterized by existential action or practice rather than theoretical reflection on religious matters. He states that the goal of his authorship was to articulate "the religious completely cast into reflection, yet in such a way that it is completely taken back out of reflection into simplicity...the traversed path is: to reach, to arrive at simplicity" (POV: 6-7).
Before discussing the way in which spirit unites contradictory components in the act of synthesis, it would be helpful to compare the dualism Kierkegaard advocates to that of Descartes. The Cartesian view, which makes no distinction between soul and spirit, notoriously leads to difficulties concerning the nature of the relationship between soul and body. In her response to the *Meditations*, Princess Elizabeth objected that if soul and body are two essentially different types of substance characterized by thought and extension respectively, then it is difficult to conceive of how they can causally interact with one another. It would seem that they would have to be linked in some way, but the nature of this link would remain inscrutable. In recent times, this has been called “the problem of heterogeneity.” Critics of dualism argue that it must be addressed in any case where there exists an irreducible distinction between heterogeneous aspects of reality that nevertheless interact with one another.

In his correspondence to Elizabeth, Descartes responded to the problem by explaining that, through the understanding, we have a “primitive notion” of the union of soul and body. While we can conceive of soul and body clearly and distinctly, we cannot conceive of their union clearly and distinctly, although we experience it through our senses in daily life and otherwise take it for granted. The difficulty, Descartes says, is that to conceive of their union, “it is necessary to conceive them as one single thing and at the same time to conceive them as two, which is contradictory.” Although the precise mechanism of the union between soul and body remains a mystery to the understanding for Descartes, he considers it to be a brute fact of experience that we have an idea of, and does not believe it is worth puzzling over by attempting to conceptualize it any further than that.

Kierkegaard runs into the same difficulty as Descartes in accounting for the union between eternity and temporality on a conceptual level, and so has the same type of response at

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117 Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes, *The Correspondence between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and Rene Descartes*, p. 62
119 Kierkegaard appears to sympathize with the worry expressed by Elizabeth based on remarks he makes under the pseudonym of Vigilius Haufniensis, who conceives of man as a synthesis of the eternal and the temporal. He contends that such a synthesis is “unthinkable” if these two components are not united in a third element, since they are contradictory (CA: 43). He writes, “…a synthesis that is a contradiction cannot be completed as a synthesis without a third factor, because the fact that the synthesis is a contradiction asserts that it is not” (CA: 85). The third factor that reconciles the eternal and temporal and sustains the synthesis in existence, he says, is spirit (CA: 43). Yet Haufniensis does not explain how a third would be capable of uniting two contradictory things, which he would need to do in order to resolve the problem effectively. Thanks to David Sussman for raising this objection.
120 Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes, *The Correspondence between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and Rene Descartes*, p. 69
121 *Ibid.*, p. 70
his disposal. As Dunning points out, Kierkegaard endorses a dialectic of paradox when dealing with human existence, wherein “a genuine unity is achieved, but one that accentuates rather than supersedes the contradiction between the two poles.”\textsuperscript{122} This paradoxical unity that constitutes the human being is intractable to a logical analysis carried out in abstraction, and so would be anathema to the objective thinker. In Kierkegaard’s view, however, it is a fact of everyday life that can be discerned through a phenomenological analysis of the self like the one provided in this chapter. It would be fair to say that a large portion of Kierkegaard's authorship is an attempt to think through this contradiction as it works itself out over the different stages of human life. While Kierkegaard's dialectic is paradoxical, this does not mean that he is inconsistent when drawing connections among the various features of human experience. Malantschuck explains that Kierkegaard regarded consistency as a crucial component in his dialectical method, and that he strove for coherence in his thinking despite the complexities entailed by thinking through a paradox.\textsuperscript{123}

Kierkegaard follows Hegel in affirming a dialectical understanding of existence. Hegel does not subscribe to a dialectic of paradox, however, but rather a dialectic of mediation, in which the unity of the subjective and objective aspects of the human being can be understood through logical analysis.\textsuperscript{124} During the process of mediation, all contradictions between opposing principles of existence, such as infinitude and finitude or subject and object, are resolved or annulled as they achieve a higher unity in consciousness. Hegel contends that mediation occurs in the relationship between the subject and object of consciousness in three moments, as Spirit posits itself in its existence. In the first moment, Spirit negates itself as subject in order to make itself into an object of consciousness. In the second moment, Spirit negates itself as object and returns into itself as subject. He explains:

\begin{quote}
\ldots this positing at the same time contains the other moment, viz. that self-consciousness has
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{122} Dunning, \textit{Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness}, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{123} For a good exposition of Kierkegaard's dialectical method, see Malantschuck, \textit{Kierkegaard's Thought}, Chapter 2.
\textsuperscript{124} Unlike Hegel, Climacus assumes that the opposites that constitute the human being are synthesized rather than mediated. Taylor notes that Kierkegaard carefully chooses this term to distinguish his conception of the self from that of Hegel. In his \textit{Logic}, Hegel explicitly disavows the term as suitable for explaining his philosophy, writing, “the very expression \textit{synthesis} easily recalls an \textit{external} unity and mere combination of entities which are \textit{in and for themselves separate}.” See The \textit{Logic of Hegel}, p. 589. Yet as Taylor explains, Kierkegaard adopts the term because he believes that the self is precisely such a unity of separate and opposing elements. See \textit{Journeys to Selfhood}, p. 170. Kierkegaard believes this synthetic unity can be given a phenomenological analysis, but since thinking and being occupy different planes of existence, it cannot be understood through reason or logic in the way Hegel claims.
equally superseded this externalization and objectivity too, and taken it back into itself so that it is in communion with itself in its otherness as such. This is the movement of consciousness, and in that movement consciousness is the totality of its moments.\textsuperscript{125}

The “otherness” of the object described by Hegel is not a true otherness, but is one generated from the negative activity of self-positing. In the third moment, which is one of communion, the contradiction between the two poles is reconciled and new content comes into being. This leads to a new contradiction that ensues due to Spirit ceaselessly negating the content it produces in order to produce a more fully realized form of its existence. In this way, the cycle repeats itself, and internal contradictions within the being of Spirit continue to develop and resolve themselves throughout the act of self-positing. With this, Hegel claims to have given a logical explanation for his brand of dialectic.

According to Hegelian logic, although the object appears to the subject as radically other in the earlier stages of the development of consciousness, the man of knowledge, with rational insight into the nature of Spirit, learns that they are in truth identical. The object is the finite expression of the infinite life of the subject. For Hegel, this means that the inner ultimately is the outer, albeit in an inchoate and unrealized state.\textsuperscript{126} While the phenomenal appearance of differentiation or division between subject and object remains, with the attainment of absolute knowledge, these differences become mediated in such a way that the reflective subject comes to know itself through the object, along with knowing the object to be something posited by it. Through such knowledge, the subject no longer conceives of itself as separate from the object of consciousness, but rather recognizes its essential unity with it.

In his departure from Hegel's dialectic, Kierkegaard does not have recourse to the negative activity of mediation to explain how the opposing constituents of spirit are integrated in consciousness. Instead, in looking at the evidence gathered from his own experience as an individual, he believes that the unity between the eternal and temporal, infinite and finite, and

\textsuperscript{125} Hegel, \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}, p. 479.

\textsuperscript{126} See for instance this passage from Hegel: "The inner is determined as the form of \textit{reflected immediacy} or of essence over against the outer as the form of being, but the two are only one identity. This identity is first, the substantial unity of both as a substrate pregnant with content, or the \textit{absolute fact [Sachе]}, in which the two determinations are indifferent, external moments. By virtue of this, it is a content and that totality which is the inner that equally becomes external, but in this externality is not the result of becoming or transition but is identical with itself. The outer, according to this determination, is not only \textit{identical} with the inner in respect of content but both are only \textit{one fact}" (\textit{Science of Logic}, p. 524). Quotation borrowed from a footnote by the Hongs in \textit{Concluding Unscientific Postscript}, p. 54.
possibility and necessity is obtained through passion. As Climacus explains, "Only momentarily can a particular individual, existing, be in a unity of the infinite and the finite that transcends existing. This instant is the moment of passion" (CUP: 197). Rejecting Hegel's claim that, in the life of Spirit, a strict identity exists between the subject and object of consciousness, Climacus states: “An existing person cannot be in two places at the same time, cannot be subject-object. When he is closest to being in two places at the same time, he is in passion; but passion is only momentary, and passion is the highest pitch of subjectivity” (CUP: 199). Passion therefore binds the infinite or "abstract" aspect of the self to the finite aspect as the human being experiences different moments over time. As we have seen, the changes that occur at the level of finite existence in the world continually disrupt one's identity and keep one's actual self from being entirely the same from one moment to the next, despite one's retaining an identity or essence that ought to be actualized through the infinite aspect of the self. With the aid of recollection and the imagination, passion works to counteract this separation that arises between the two aspects of the self by helping to integrate the different moments of one's life, so that one understands them as forming a unified whole. This action taken by the self to gather itself and recover its losses from the nothingness of the temporal helps one achieve a stable and continuous identity in one's concrete existence, and keeps the self from drifting away from itself in the errant course of temporality. In passion, one becomes what one essentially is by being steadfast as a single individual, as opposed to losing oneself in the natural flux by taking leave of one's nature as spirit.

Kierkegaard explores the nature of passion, along with the connection between self and world that it establishes under the pseudonym of Johannes De Silentio in Fear and Trembling. Silentio describes passion as a volitional activity that is within the power of the human being. He provides an unusual definition of passion as "the power to concentrate the whole substance of his life and the meaning of actuality into one single desire" (F&T: 42-43). It is therefore an intense focus of attention on a specific idea, end, or purpose that one is interested in existentially realizing above all else. In the case of the Christian, for instance, this would involve a single-minded pursuit of an eternal happiness. Silentio argues: “If a person lacks this concentration, this focus, his soul is dissipated in multiplicity from the very beginning” (F&T: 43). His point is that a resolution to aim at a single good unifies the human being by integrating the eternal and temporal components in the self. It contributes continuity to his life by providing him with a
changeless criterion through which he can understand himself amidst the aimless confusion and vacillation of temporal existence.\(^\text{127}\) Anti-Climacus follows up on this idea when he claims that the individual who has several different or conflicting desires of comparable standing has little to integrate his life as a whole. Without a firm principle to dedicate himself to and order his life by, he is at risk of being disintegrated in the chaos of the temporal, and being a slave of immediate inclination or impulse (SUD: 107). In addition to being an activity of the individual through which it shapes itself in its existence, passion has a passive dimension. In passion, the self exerts itself upon being seized by an idea or possibility that mobilizes its activity. Passion is also passive insofar as the individual is delivered over into existence without having chosen it, and yet he finds himself compelled to act and freely choose how to live. This too has an air of paradox that "perfectly fits" the individual in the grips of passion, as contradictory elements are brought to a unity in his life (CUP: 230).

Silentio agrees with Climacus that passion constitutes "the essentially human" existence (F&T: 121). This view would seem to run into significant problems, since it is common for human beings to have many different and even competing desires without ceasing to be human or failing to have the sense of being the same person over time. In his Journals, Kierkegaard even acknowledges that a lack of pointed concentration is the rule rather than the exception:

\[\ldots\text{there are many people, surely by far the majority, who are able to live without any real consciousness penetrating their lives. For them it is certainly possible that they never come in passionate concentration to the decision whether they should cling expectantly to this possibility or give it up; they live on this way in unclarity. (JP III: 3130)}\]

Perhaps the best way to resolve this difficulty and admit passion as the binding power in human life would be to distinguish between earthly passion and spiritual passion. Spiritual passion would originate from the self's own will, and in having a stable, enduring character, it would be directed toward one single end throughout one's life. Earthly passion, on the other hand, would lack these features, and would consist in vacillating from one desire to the next depending on one's needs at the moment. Both types of passion would be concentrated on specific ends at a given moment, but only spiritual passion would be internally directed and continually

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\(^{127}\) Silentio claims that out of all the different passions that might unite a human life, faith is the highest (F&T: 67). Faith is therefore his primary concern in his discussion of passion.
One might worry that this dogged pursuit of one thing makes Kierkegaard's account of passion inhuman, and that it would mean obsession or monomania constitutes the authentically human existence. In his view, however, what distinguishes human beings from the inhumanity of the rest of creation, and gives us our dignity and integrity as individuals, is the eternal element in us. Since the Eternal is One and unchangeable, we can only approach it by being steadfast in willing one thing. By aligning oneself with the Eternal in this way, one can one muster up the energy needed to resist the pull of the temporal, along with the many distractions and diversions that keep one from getting a grip on oneself and gaining integrity as spirit. In other words, he would think the life that is absorbed in temporal affairs is inhuman, since worldly forces outside of the self are what primarily move the human being to act, just as they move what is not human to act. Without spiritual passion, one is not in possession of oneself, and so one is not able to become oneself.

### 1.4.4.1 The Actualization of Spirit Through Inwardness

Kierkegaard believes that human beings, as spirit, gain a greater degree of inwardness and become self-possessed as they become passionately committed to an idea, goal, or project that they want to realize in existence. Inwardness is perhaps the central concept in Kierkegaard's understanding of selfhood. His emphasis on this idea distinguishes his thought from many philosophers of human subjectivity, who often overlook this dimension of human life. Haufniensis explains that inwardness is difficult to delineate precisely due to its intangible and personal nature, but he roughly defines it as “earnestness” (CA: 147). Those with a high degree of inwardness are therefore wholeheartedly committed to a set of beliefs and values that they strive to live in accordance with. This resolution helps them integrate the infinite and finite aspects of themselves, and maintain balance in their life. They are not content in intellectualizing

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128 Kierkegaard stresses the importance of single-minded resolution at several points in his authorship, but nowhere is this position better formulated than in "Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing." In this edifying discourse, he argues that if a person is to will one thing in truth, he must will the Good rather than anything of this world. Only the good is one thing in its essence and the same in every one of its expressions...If a person is in truth to will one thing, the one thing he wills must indeed be of such a nature that it remains unchanged amid all changes; then by willing it he can win changelessness. If it is continually changed, he himself becomes changeable, double-minded, and unstable. But this continual changeableness is precisely impurity" (UDVS: 29-30). In his explicitly Christian works, he identifies this Good with God.

129 Thanks to David Sussman for raising this objection in a review of this chapter.
in a disengaged way as an infinite self that refuses to use its will, or accepting a position nonchalantly as a matter of propositional assent; they also do not allow themselves to keep an ironic distance from what they believe in. Inwardness therefore demands the activity of the will and the imagination, as the individual earnestly shapes his life under an idea or possibility that guides him in existence.

Inwardness would also require what was earlier referred to as subjective thinking, where existential truths concerning oneself as an individual are favored over objective or disinterested truths about states of affairs in the world. This would involve a rigorous mode of examining oneself and one's character, including, as Evans puts it, "the larger patterns of action in a person’s life that form a history."\textsuperscript{130} The heightened form of self-awareness that characterizes inwardness should not be confused with a withdrawn absorption into self, or a refusal of action that bears external results. The individual who maintains a deepened inwardness will likely exhibit signs of this outwardly through a fervent dedication to a certain way of life. Gouwens, however, errs in claiming that inwardness has “as much to do with the external actions and publicly observable dispositions of a person as with the alleged “contents” of private consciousness.”\textsuperscript{131} Climacus contends that inwardness is deeply subjective, and is hidden in one’s inner being "as an essential secret" (CUP: 80). Any visible signs suggesting the presence of inwardness within an individual, such as expressions of piety or a solemn demeanor, are no proof it is there.

While inwardness is gained in time as the self builds itself up in becoming itself, the temporal phenomena that would suggest a high degree of inwardness lack significance in comparison to the eternal element within the person, which is the site of inwardness. Haufniensis refers to inwardness as “constituent of the eternal in man” (CA: 151). He concludes this from the fact that those lacking inwardness end up preoccupied with finite concerns, or with objective thinking of all kinds, rather than with their own existence as an individual or their relationship with God. Climacus describes inwardness as the place where one forges a relationship with God in seclusion from the rest of the world. "Nature, the totality of creation, is God’s work, and yet God is not there, but within the individual human being there is a possibility...that in inwardness is awakened in a God-relationship, and then it is possible to see God everywhere" (CUP: 246).

\textsuperscript{131} Gouwens, \textit{Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker}, p. 57
This does not mean that God becomes known or understood by the individual, or that He becomes immediately present to him by revealing Himself in consciousness. Climacus insists that it is the idea or conception of God that the individual holds fast to in deepened inwardness and not the reality of God, as monists, mystics, and speculative thinkers often suggest (CUP: 483-485). Indeed, because of the infinite qualitative difference between them, the being of God must remain radically unknowable, and is an objective uncertainty for any person of faith. Haufniensis shares this view and expands upon Climacus' point when he explains that the "thought of God’s existence...has an omnipresence that for the prudent individuality has something embarrassing about it, even though he does not wish to do anything evil. To live in a beautiful and intimate companionship with this conception truly requires inwardness" (CA: 140).

For Kierkegaard, inwardness is the highest achievement of personal development. It arises in the fullest sense when the reflective individual becomes passionately engaged with existence through his relationship to God. Kierkegaard argues that the individual who lacks belief in God cannot truly possess a great degree of inwardness or earnestness. He writes, "all life and its greatest scene are basically still a game" when God is left out of the picture, but when he is included in the game, "then life is earnest" (UDVS: 336). The suggestion is that only God or the eternal can lend ultimate significance to one's dealings or projects. If human life is just a fleeting moment in an indifferent cosmos that will ultimately pass without remembrance or consequence, then earnestness is groundless. Someone who is committed to a political ideal or who lives under strong moral principles might have passion as Silentio defines it, but if he does not believe that God supports his efforts and keeps them from being undertaken in vain, he cannot be said to be earnest in the sense that the eternal demands of him.

Haufniensis claims that philosophers often make the mistake of considering spiritual qualities too abstractly, and as a result, they lack inwardness, despite their lofty and detached reflections:

Usually immediacy is posited in opposition to reflection (inwardness) and then the synthesis (or substantiality, subjectivity, identity, that in which this identity is said to consist: reason, idea, spirit). But in the sphere of actuality this is not the case. There immediacy is also the immediacy of inwardness. For this reason, the absence of inwardness is due in the first place to reflection. (CA: 142)
Speculative thought, such as that of the Hegel, tends to place inwardness under the category of reflection rather than that of immediacy, while proposing to bridge the gap between immediacy and reflection through a mediating factor. Haufniensis, however, believes that inwardness is, in truth, an attribute of immediacy in the individual who has become passionately involved in his existence through reflection on it. The individual who has cultivated inwardness does not remain aloof from life or himself by cozily perching himself in thought about all of existence or world history, as he believes objective thinkers are accustomed to doing. Instead, he draws closer to his existence as an individual by applying his thoughts and ideas directly to his life. Climacus describes the quality of the state of consciousness that this intimacy with existence yields when one has the passion of faith, stating, “the speculative thinker should make himself objectively light, but whoever is impassionedly, infinitely interested in his eternal happiness makes himself as subjectively heavy as possible” (CUP: 57). Because it is disinterested in the particular existence of the single individual, the contemplative or objective standpoint results in a state of consciousness that is thin, detached, and airy. Through this more impersonal mode of consciousness, the objective thinker attempts to take up occupancy in an ideal realm outside of his concrete existence, and maintain a perspective of strict universality toward things. On the other hand, the individual with inwardness enters a turbulent state of consciousness that is thicker and of greater intensity as a result of attaching himself to his particularity. With an idea passionately kept in mind, he immerses himself in existence rather than fleeing from his situation as an individual, which Climacus believes the objective thinker inevitably does in his abstract theorizing.

Climacus emphasizes that inwardness requires existential action, but this is not necessarily external action that has demonstrable results in the world. The action of inwardness primarily involves vigilance with respect to oneself and one’s relationship to God, such that an inner transformation can occur rather than an outer transformation. Climacus explains:

…the development of subjectivity consists precisely in this, that he, acting, works through himself in his thinking about his own existence, consequently that he actually thinks what is thought by actualizing it, consequently that he does not think for a moment: Now, you must keep watch every moment—but that he keeps watch every moment. (CUP: 169)
This vigilance is maintained in a passionate mode of self-reflection, in which one takes concern in living in the right way and determining one's action accordingly. The activity of inwardness therefore takes place in self-consciousness, and would include things like ethical concern, acts of self-renunciation or self-discipline, and thoughts related to spirituality. In his later religious writings, Kierkegaard makes a greater effort to stress the need for external expressions of inwardness through the imitation of Christ. He explains how self-sacrifice patterned on the life of Christ issues in acts of love and compassion that are likely to go unrecognized, or be derided by others in the world. In these works too, it is the “hidden” or invisible aspect of action that has ultimate significance for Kierkegaard, and not the visible aspect, or the external outcomes of one's actions.

The solitary pursuit of self-awareness that Kierkegaard outlines in his account of inwardness is by no means easy, and involves great suffering. Climacus contends that such religious suffering is an act of inwardness, and should not be understood altogether passively as suffering often is. He explains, “the action of inwardness is suffering, because the individual is unable to transform himself. It becomes, as it were, a feigning of self-transformation, and that is why the highest action in the inner world is to suffer” (CUP: 432). In Climacus' view, the religious individual suffers because, as an eternal being stuck in the tumult of time, he cannot make himself fully eternal and achieve a restful state of blessedness, despite his earnest intention to do so. He must therefore bear the paradox of living spiritually in a sinful world that is inhospitable to his spiritual needs, without being able to take himself out of temporality as he would like. As we have seen, for Climacus, the goal of the process of becoming oneself is to become eternal in time, and by doing so, to escape the clutches of temporality by dissolving it from within. The individual realizes that he cannot do this of his own limited powers, and so he must depend on God, who he believes to have entered the world through Christ to offer him redemption from his sin. Because the site of salvation is within existence due to Christ's incarnation, one is not able to escape temporality through contemplation, speculation, philosophical reflection, or the like, which are spiritual strategies that are sometimes pursued in the hope of finding inner peace or communion with God. In Climacus' view, rather than discovering the eternal in abstraction or otherworldly detachment, the Christian intends to achieve communion with the Eternal in a paradoxical way by attaching himself to his concrete

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132 This is a theme discussed throughout *Works of Love*, and is especially prevalent in *Practice in Christianity*. 
existence as an individual. In this way, he hopes to become eternal in time through Christ's atonement, admitting his faults as a lowly human being and waiting for the world to pass away.

1.5 Conclusion

A generally consistent account of the self’s structure and constitution emerges from Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works, which in no way undermines his own views as expressed in his self-authored works. These authors contend that God first creates the human being as a paradoxical synthesis of the eternal and temporal, the infinite and finite, possibility and necessity, and psyche and body. While the individual initially lives in sheer immediacy as spirit in potentiality, he is tasked with becoming spirit in actuality by using his freedom to relate himself to himself in the instant. When reflection begins, spirit gains the ability to realize itself in existence by shaping the constituents of this synthesis and converting possibilities of being into actuality. In exercising his will in existence, the genuinely spiritual person will cultivate passion and inwardness in order to integrate the eternal and temporal aspects of the self, and thereby become who he is in truth. The division between these two contradictory aspects of existence signifies a metaphysical dualism that pervades Kierkegaard’s work. Kierkegaard’s dialectic of paradox departs from Hegel’s non-dualistic dialectic of mediation, which proposes an identity between subject and object, along with a resolution of paradox.

Climacus vociferously attacks speculative philosophy and Hegelian logic throughout his Postscript. In a passage that recalls Parmenides' chariot ride to the abode of the goddess, where the truth of being would be revealed to him in its fullness, he makes a comment that he thinks would apply to these thinkers, or to those who have actualized their nature as spirit to only a minimal degree:

Eternity is infinitely 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. (CUP: 311-312)

We can think of the imagination as the seat the self occupies in conducting the movements of the infinite and the finite in its journey toward self-actualization—and by this means, to God. The vigilant individual who, in inwardness, has collected himself in his existence, steers toward
higher stages of self-development by centering his reflection upon an idea and realizing it in existence. The somnolent individual remains snagged in the lower stages of immediacy and crudely fails to live under ideals. The former driver expresses his freedom, while the latter betrays a lack of it in his dispersion in worldliness and sensuous living. In the following chapters, I examine Kierkegaard's claim that a person will pass through aesthetic and ethical stages in their journey, before finally arriving at the religious stage in a state of freedom before God. As we will see, the movement toward self-actualization that Kierkegaard describes in his account of the stages involves passing through despair.
Chapter 2
The Self in Ignorance

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we saw that Anti-Climacus believes that, unlike other living things in the natural world, all human beings have a spiritual essence through which they bear an affinity to the eternal. While temporal processes that unfold out of necessity determine the actions and growth of other animals, which are composites of psyche and body but not spirit, the freedom the human being possesses as spirit sets him apart from this natural development. His opposition to the world as spirit puts him on an alternative track of personal development, in which his activity of thought, volition, and imagination allow to be independent and self-determining despite living within the world as a psyche-body composite. It was explained how Anti-Climacus defines spirit, or the self, as a self-relating synthesis constituted by the eternal and temporal, infinite and finite, psyche and body, and possibility and necessity, whose existence depends upon a greater power that established it. In relating itself to itself through the will, the imagination, and reflection, the self must deal with the difficulty of integrating two contradictory components of its being on its journey toward self-actualization, while other animals, as purely temporal creatures, do not.

Anti-Climacus contends that when a person fails to negotiate this tension in the proper way by living in a manner unsuitable for a spiritual being, he falls into despair. As a dysfunction or misrelation of the self, it can fall under three general forms: (1) the despair of not being aware that one is a self, (2) the despair of not willing to be oneself, or (3) the despair of willing to be oneself (SUD: 13-14). He calls the first form despair in ignorance (SUD: 45). It occurs in the earliest stage of life in a state of immediacy, when an individual exists in harmony with his natural condition with an unreflective form of self-consciousness. The second and third forms of despair emerge through reflective self-consciousness, when an individual has matured to the point where he has become aware of himself as essentially different from objects in the surrounding world, along with his immediate desires, emotions, attitudes, and so on. The

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133 Beabout argues that these three forms of despair correspond with the three forms that the self can take in living in the esthetic, ethical, or religious stages of life. See Freedom and its Misuses, p. 86. This is incorrect, however, since each of these stages can include different forms of despair depending on how the individual conducts himself in it, as I will show. The esthetic individual, for instance, might despair in ignorance, or he might despair in not wanting to be himself if he has become more self-conscious.
knowledge of separation that occurs through reflection disrupts the harmony the self had enjoyed when in thrall to the psyche-body relation, and establishes the condition under which the self can exercise its freedom in existence through the will. That despair can be classified with respect to the categories of immediacy and reflection shows it is essentially a pathology of consciousness, whether in its unreflective or reflective form. Anti-Climacus' definition also entails that despair has a normative dimension. If a human being does not know himself as he should, or does not will to be the self he ought to be, then he is in despair. The only way for the self not to be in despair on this view is for it to know itself and will to be itself before the power that established it, and which makes these normative demands on it. As a Christian author, he believes this power to be God, while the state opposite to despair he calls faith.

Before examining the more advanced forms of despair that pertain to selves in heightened reflection, in this chapter, I explain why Kierkegaard seems to think that the life of immediacy, in which one is unaware of being spirit or a self, is despair. By looking at the phenomenological analysis of the self and despair he gives under the pseudonymous Anti-Climacus and the authors of Either/Or, I show that this way of life is despair because the self is disintegrated as a result of being submerged in the nothingness of the temporal, which means being in a state of separation from God, or the Eternal. This imbalance in the self is caused by the narrow pursuit of sensual pleasures in the earliest stage of human life, and later, by unreflectively following the crowd or other people instead of fulfilling one's essence as spirit. His account of despair therefore involves a teleological dimension that not all commentators have picked up on. On his view, the self is disintegrated because it has not achieved its telos, which is to integrate its contradictory components by attaining the proper relationship with The Eternal, or the power that brought it into existence. This telos stems from one's essence as spirit, and fulfilling it through knowing oneself and willing rightly would be an ultimate source of meaning and satisfaction in one's life.

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134 As Kosch points out in her analysis of despair in Either/Or, other commentators have also argued that the individual despairs because there is an ethical telos that he is thwarting in living in the way he does (Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling, and Kierkegaard, p. 146). She rejects this interpretation because she believes it means reconstructing Kierkegaard's view under Aristotelian or Hegelian lines, which is inherently problematic due to claims he makes under the pseudonym of Judge William that contradict their views. I claim that such a reconstruction is unnecessary. There is no reason to think that a teleological account of human life must follow the teleology of thinkers like Aristotle or Hegel to the letter, or that they have monopolized the concept. As I explained in the last chapter, Hegel and Aristotle were major influences on Kierkegaard's thinking, but Kierkegaard departs from them in significant ways through his own brand of dialectic.
Until the self attains proper balance by wanting to be itself in relation to God, it is without a stable identity, and to live in this way is to be in despair.135

After explaining the views on this early form of despair that Kierkegaard sets forward through the pseudonyms, I challenge many of his basic claims. Because those in ignorance are typically happy and do not believe they are in despair, there are major difficulties in calling it despair. In Either/Or, Kierkegaard hopes to erase any doubts by showing that human life is despair from its earliest stages, while employing minimal Christian presuppositions in order to persuade those unconvinced of its truth. However, I argue that his diagnosis will likely only appeal to those already willing to accept that all human beings are wretched due to some inherent flaw in their nature, whether it is because one is a Christian who believes in hereditary sin or for some other reason. It will also only be plausible to those who are already willing to accept a teleological account of the self that posits the realization of one's essence as a condition for functioning well as a human being. As a result, his strategy risks being question-begging; without ethical or religious presuppositions about the essence of the self, which those who endorse any kind of teleological account of selfhood are likely to hold, his argument loses much of its impact. I also argue that if the ignorant individual is in despair, it is implausible that he brings it upon himself through a choice as Anti-Climacus claims (SUD: 17), since the will factors trivially in human life at this stage of existence or is even absent. As it stands, Kierkegaard's own phenomenological findings suggest that the self is disintegrated from the moment of its inception, even before the onset of reflection, and so does not originally choose it. Because of this tragic defect, which is not their fault, it is inappropriate for Kierkegaard to view these individuals with contempt and animosity in the way that he tends to as a Christian author.

2.2 The Character of the Life of Immediacy

Anti-Climacus argues that human beings pass through three forms of despair on the way toward self-actualization, and that this process can be understood through dialectical thinking. In the first stage of life, we pass through the despair in ignorance, which unfolds smoothly and with

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135 I am in basic agreement with Rudd and his interpretation of despair in Either/Or. See Rudd, Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical, p. 139. However, in writing on the ethical stage of life in Kierkegaard's work, Rudd restricts his analysis to the Judge's conception of despair, and does not analyze this concept as it occurs throughout his authorship. While there are strong similarities between the accounts of despair given by the Judge and Kierkegaard (and his pseudonyms) in the religious portion of authorship, there are also dissimilarities that will be pointed out. The individual who lives ethically conceives of his telos differently than the individual who lives religiously, and as a result, they disagree about what it means to despair.
little conflict within "the dimensions of temporality and secularity" (SUD: 51). In this stage, the individual exists in a primitive state of immersion in the world as a psyche-body unity, drawing no firm distinction between self and other. In his view, immediacy does not proceed in a dialectical manner, since the immediate individual has not yet realized his freedom as spirit by negating his natural position and coming to himself out of the thralldom of worldliness. Drowned in the "noise of secular life" and unreflectively caught up in associations with externalities, there is little movement or activity within the self with respect to its reflective, imaginative, and volitional capacities (SUD: 27). He is therefore ignorant of being a self in despair. Although he has cares and desires for earthly things, because he has no concern for himself as a spiritual being, Anti-Climacus refers to this mode of existence as "spiritlessness" (SUD: 45). He claims that this form of despair "is the most common in the world," and Christianity teaches that the pagans and "the natural man" are under its spell in indulging in a way of life rooted in the pursuit of enjoyment or worldly pleasures (SUD: 45).

Because spiritless individuals do not possess a significant degree of self-consciousness, this is the least intensive form of despair. This might initially sound like an advantage, but it is not. In their ignorance, these individuals are further from being delivered from it than those whose despair has intensified to the point that they recognize it as a problem that needs to be addressed (SUD: 44). The spiritless person is therefore likely to radiate happiness in the midst of everyday life, without ever suspecting that his healthy-minded enjoyment is a facade that conceals his underlying despair. In this section, I offer a profile of the life of immediacy by drawing on portrayals Kierkegaard provides in *Either/Or* and *Sickness Unto Death*, while explaining how the self in immediacy is disintegrated and imbalanced. I begin by describing the type of individual who possesses the least amount of reflection, before explaining how reflection and self-consciousness gradually emerges in individuals within immediacy through the

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136 See also section 1.4.1.
137 Later on in *Sickness*, Anti-Climacus appears to contradict this by claiming that the despair of not willing to be oneself is the most common form of despair in the world (SUD: 57). These claims can be reconciled, however, upon noting that the despair of not willing to be oneself describes individuals who have become conscious of being in despair because they have lost some desired object or are facing some hardship. This is a despair that has surfaced to awareness and has made its presence felt in the world, unlike the despair of immediacy. Since Anti-Climacus contends that most individuals who are in despair do not know that they are, and would not admit to being so, this cannot be the most common form of despair among humanity in general. It would seem that, more plausibly, Anti-Climacus is claiming that this is the most common form of despair among individuals who have become conscious of being in despair. I explore this form of despair in the next chapter.
development of spirit. This results in a "public" form of life based on uncritical adherence to the beliefs and practices of the community, which for Anti-Climacus, is an intensification of despair.

### 2.2.1 Esthetic Immediacy: Don Giovanni

Through the pseudonyms A and Judge William in *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard delineates an "esthetic" way of life that closely resembles the life of immediacy described by Anti-Climacus. A’s papers portray two different kinds of esthetic figures: the immediate esthete, who lacks a significant degree of reflection, and the reflective esthete who does not, but who still has no real concern for himself as spirit. As other commentators have noted, these are two different phases that can be inscribed within the esthetic stage of life.\(^{138}\) As we will see in the next chapter on reflective despair, the reflective esthete tends to pursue contemplative pleasures obtained from observing novel or interesting situations, especially those that he has schemed in advance. A happens to be a reflective esthete who has outgrown the naivety of the immediate esthete. He has reached a point of intellectual development where he can observe the immediate esthete with fascination and marvel at his actions, but cannot participate in such thoughtless and impulsive behavior himself. A’s ruminations on this figure are captured in the “The Immediate Erotic Stages,” where he rhapsodizes about the whimsical life of Don Giovanni as presented in Mozart’s classic opera of the same name.

A eulogizes Don Giovanni as a paragon of the life of immediacy, although as we will see, few if any human beings would fit this model exactly. He explains that Don Giovanni is a seducer busily seeking sexual gratification, without being concerned about social norms and practices or making others unhappy. In fact, he has little regard for anything but the conquest of hapless women, who are drawn in by his exuberant vitality. After gaining possession of a woman through his romantic wiles, he soon tires of the love-struck victim and leaves her in the lurch so that he can quickly move onto someone else to take advantage of. According to the list of his servant Leporello, who keeps close track of his exploits, his number of erotic conquests is 1,003 and counting. Enchanted by life in its primitive form, Don Giovanni has no scruples about deceiving any of the women that attract him, and no concern for adhering to social norms and

\(^{138}\) See for instance Taylor, *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship*, p. 128. This is also suggested in Dunning, *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Inwardness*, chapter 2.
practices. He only cares about enjoying himself, and will stop at nothing to obtain the pleasure he seeks.

A explains that Don Giovanni seeks nothing else through his actions but the immediate satisfaction of desire, which arises in an unremitting cycle. Motivated by fits of erotic passion, he restlessly seeks to attain the women that are the primary objects of his desire. Once he gains satisfaction by consummating an affair, the woman is no longer capable of satisfying him, and he abandons her as if she were nothing so that he can take possession of someone new. Although he enjoys himself in this activity, he finds only momentary relief as the objects of his desire prove to be inadequate in satisfying him for any extended period. While he is not really aware of it, there is an emptiness that haunts Don Giovanni as he bustles about in the temporal. His life is driven by need and lack, and in the final moment, women are not able to make him feel whole. They only slip through his grasp once the seduction has been accomplished, which leaves him back at square one. In Gorgias, Socrates compares the minds of those with insatiable desire to leaky jars that they must constantly work to keep full, while those of the wise, who need little to be content, are like full jars that are of sound construction. Since Don Giovanni's seductions keep sensual pleasures pouring in, however, he has no interest in exercising the self-restraint needed for personal integrity of that kind.

A claims that, despite first appearances, it is more proper to speak of the object of his desire not as this or that woman, or even women in general, but rather “the sensuous and this alone” (E/O I: 98). A describes the sensuous as an elemental power that is most adequately expressed through the rhythms of music, which is the reason that Don Giovanni so perfectly embodies it. In a manner reminiscent of Haufniensis' conception of time regarded independently of the eternal, he states that like music, the sensuous unfolds in a "succession of instants" (E/O I: 56-57). He hesitates to call him a seducer because of this intimate entanglement with sensate existence, the glow of which he bathes in as a psyche-body unity. He writes:

139 Plato, Gorgias, 493a-494b
140 Levinas provides a rich phenomenological description of the sensuous with his notion of the "elemental," which he defines as a "non-possessable which envelops or contains" the human being, "without being able to be contained or enveloped" (Totality and Infinity, p. 131). This would include earth, sea, sky, light, and the like, or the elements that we are steeped in through sensibility, prior to representing them as objects for thought. He describes the elements that affect us as "qualities without support, without substance," and claims that we originally experience them in the mode of enjoyment (Ibid., p. 135). See Section II B, Enjoyment and Representation.
To be a seducer always takes a certain reflection and consciousness, and as soon as this is present, it can be appropriate to speak of craftiness and machinations and subtle wiles. Don Giovanni lacks this consciousness. Therefore, he does not seduce. He desires, and this desire acts seductively. To this extent he does seduce. He enjoys the satisfaction of desire; as soon as he has enjoyed it, he seeks a new object, and so it goes on indefinitely. Thus he does indeed deceive, but still not in such a way that he plans the deception in advance; it is the power of the sensuous itself that deceives the seduced… (E/O I: 99).

Because he is "qualified psychically" but not yet spiritually, Don Giovanni has perceptions and desires, but is without the kind of thought or intentions that would be needed to be a seducer in the strict sense (E/O I: 62). His deceptions are carried out spontaneously and without any diligent strategizing or careful planning on his part. He acts blindly by inclination and impulse in accordance with "the energy of desire" present within the sensuous (E/O I: 100), and is, as A says, "a force of nature" about whom “one cannot learn except by listening to the noise of the waves” (E/O I: 92). In the way that A describes it, the relationship between desire and its object is like a game of hide-and-seek that goes on within the relation between psyche and body, which uses Don Giovanni as a vehicle of its play. In being rushed along by the current of temporality, he is a mere instrument of natural processes operating within him, which are a force of their own. While bustlingly active as a human being possessed by natural forces, as a self, Don Giovanni is a passive bystander to the desires, feelings, and passions that direct him and bring him to life in the world.141 With the spirit in him dreaming in an unreflective state of self-consciousness, he is, in a paradoxical way, selfish without being much of a self at all in Kierkegaard's sense.

In looking at Kierkegaard's authorship, a distinction can be made between the will, which is a characteristic of persons or spiritual beings (including God), and desire, which is an ingredient of the sensuous that is not necessarily possessed by spirit. It would be improper to speak of Don Giovanni as imposing his will on women, since as a radically "spiritless" individual, he has neither will nor reflection. In Frankfurt's terms, Don Giovanni is a wanton who is unable to separate himself from his first-order desires so that he can form second-order volitions concerning the desires he has, or the desires he wants to move him to act.142 Because of this, we cannot say of him that he wants to desire women, or that he might want to desire other things instead, or that he has considered being anything other than a seducer. Without reflection,

141 I am borrowing the phrase "passive bystander" from Harry Frankfurt, who uses it to describe the wanton who is unconcerned about the first-order desires or attitudes he has. See The Importance of What We Care About, p. 54.
142 Ibid., p. 16.
he is not able to detach himself from the situation he is in to think about whether he should act in the ways he does, or even form intentions about how to act. Neither does he have any control over his desires as he oscillates between women within the ethereal medium of the sensuous. If, like Frankfurt, one believes that a person must be capable of having second-order volitions, then one must conclude that Don Giovanni is not a person. Since he is without reflection or will, and has no real agency, Anti-Climacus would claim that he is spirit in potentiality, but not in actuality. As such, his actions originate in natural necessity and not in freedom. He is therefore heteronomous to the impersonal forces of nature rooted in him as a psyche-body unity, and is a host to unconscious and anonymous life, which drives his actions automatically.

Kierkegaard argues that human life begins in this state of immediacy. “Immediate feeling is certainly the first, is the vital force; in it is life, just as it is indeed said that from the heart flows life. But then this feeling must “be kept,” understood in the same way as when it is said, “Keep your heart, for from it flows life.”” (UDVS: 71). Don Giovanni, however, has no way of "keeping" these feelings that spring up within him, since he is not able to attain any reflective distance from them through the infinite component in the self. This component, which Anti-Climacus associates with the eternal and possibility, would allow him to think broadly about his given situation as a self that conceives of itself as persisting over time. It would also allow him to imagine different possibilities, and think about what would constitute his identity. In considering the kind of person he could be, or what he could do, he could endorse or reject the feelings and desires he has by employing his will. Normally individuals can do this, but Don Giovanni, has not yet reached a stage of spiritual development under which he can admit any of them as his own in this sense. In his Journals, Kierkegaard explicitly links desire and temporality, claiming, “desire is the temporal” and that “the temporal cannot hold out with the eternal” insofar as man fulfills his potential to become spirit (JP II: 2114). As it stands, Don Giovanni has not advanced to the point where he can impose his will on the spontaneity of nature through spiritual acts that would bridle, extinguish, or appropriate his desires. In acting on desire alone, he is mired in the temporal pole of the synthesis, and as a result, the eternal and temporal aspects of the self are drastically imbalanced.

Without the continuity that the eternal provides in enabling reflection to apprehend and connect the infinite succession of temporal moments, Don Giovanni’s life consists of a series of discrete episodes marked by the different periods of seduction. Because he has no knowledge
about himself in relation to the world and no will, there is nothing to bind these episodes together in a way that would make them more than discrete episodes. He is therefore disintegrated as a self. A writes:

Don Giovanni can become epic only by continually finishing and continually being able to begin all over again, for his life is the sum of repellerende moments that have no coherence, and his life as the moment is the sum of moments and as the sum of moments is the moment. Don Giovanni lies within this universality, in this hovering between being an individual and a force of nature… (E/O I: 96)

Don Giovanni lives in the moment, but these moments are otherwise loose and disparate events. Without reflection to collect them, there is no experience of a continuing self that withstands temporal flux. While each of these moments might be said to possess a unity in consciousness insofar as he experiences them as a self, this unity quickly dissipates with nothing to account for it. It is true that there is a natural form of consistency in his life with respect to the cycle of desire and his recurrent seductions. Yet without a stable form of consciousness accompanied by recollection and anticipation, which would require reflective acts of the imagination, he does not gain insight into these repetitions, and so each affair is like the first for him. He is beyond himself in being cast outward toward a multiplicity of erotic affairs that have significance for him only in the moment they occur, and only for the pleasures they bring him. When considering him as an individual, A compares him to a “picture that is continually coming into view but does not attain form and consistency” (E/O 1: 92). There is a glimmer of selfhood trying to sprout through the shifting surface of the sensuous, but it cannot attain a definite shape, and fades into nothingness as quickly as it arises. He does have the potential to become a formed and unified self that is aware of having a history and future instead of a dissipated force of nature sunk in the immediate and momentary. But for the self to be set over nature in such a way that it could hold these different moments together in reflective consciousness and attain coherence over time, an awakening of the eternal element within him would have to occur.

2.2.1 The Inauguration of Spirit Through Language and Reflection

A believes that in order for Don Giovanni to become conscious of himself as spirit and advance to a higher stage of human development, he would first need to become capable of detaching himself from the sensuous so that he could gain a perspective from which to make
judgments about it and speak about it. He makes the extravagant (and rather implausible) claim that Christianity made this possible in transfiguring humanity by introducing spirit into the world. In doing so, it both brought sensuality into the world and drove it out of the world by negating it (E/O I: 61). Elaborating on this idea in a manner that recalls Hegelian dialectics, he argues:

…it will become evident upon reflection that in the positing of something, the other that is excluded is indirectly posited. Since sensuality generally is that which is to be negated, it really comes to light, is really posited, first by the act that excludes it through a positing of the opposite positive… (E/O I: 61)

The claim is that in order to have a definite conception of something, one must be able to conceive of what it is not. In conceiving of goodness, for instance, I also understand that it is not badness, and if I do not, then I do not have a genuine understanding of goodness. Similarly, once spirit emerges in the world and becomes known as something actual, it points to what it is not—namely sensuality. For this reason, A claims, “Sensuality was first posited as a principle, as a power, as an independent system, by Christianity” (E/O I: 61). This is not to say that sensuality did not precede the emergence of spirit, but only that sensuality cannot be recognized as sensuality until spirit conceptualizes it through negating it. Before it did this, there was no conception for sensuality or any understanding of it, since there was no way for human beings to distinguish it from something essentially different from it. During this time, the sensuous was an all-pervasive element that totally encompassed human life, and so it could not "come to light" in consciousness, which objectifies it through reflective acts. With it being buried in the unconscious, human beings were in the dark about its presence. Consequently, this act of

A admits that the claim that Christianity brought spirit into the world is brazen, and will fail to convince many. It would seem that the spiritual activity he describes would need to be a feature of any ethical community, including those that existed before Christianity. My interest is not in evaluating the plausibility of the claim, but rather to use it to illustrate the way in which a division within consciousness can be seen to arise through which the self opposes itself to the life of sensuality and the flesh. Even if it did not quite bring what he refers to as 'spirit' into the world, at the very least, Christianity played an important role in fostering an environment favorable to its development by making the opposition between the sensuous and non-sensuous aspects of existence more explicit.

A’s point is reminiscent of a parable given by David Foster Wallace during a commencement speech at Kenyon College in 2005. “There are these two young fish swimming along, and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, “Morning, boys. How’s the water?” And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, “What the hell is water?”” Wallace takes this to mean that the basic, obvious realities are often the most difficult to recognize or talk about. A suggests that this is because we are not able to attain the proper distance from them, given that they are right in front of us. To recognize these realities, we have to take up a standpoint outside of them to distinguish them from ourselves. This act of distancing, he thinks, is a principal function of spirit.
negation should not be understood as a logical movement in the way that Hegel understood it, but as an existential movement requiring force, much like the way an individual might oppose an adversary. Spirit negates the sensuous in the sense that its nature is to set itself in opposition to this positive reality in order to grasp its contents in consciousness.

One should note that according to A, spirit is not simply the capacity to negate a given existence or the psychical and bodily, since then it would be defined by the reality that it negates. Neither does spirit posit itself in existence in an act of double negation, negating itself as Hegel claims. He believes it too has a positive existence apart from the sensuous or anything external, and so is not reducible to it. Anti-Climacus also endorses this view when he defines spirit not as negativity, but as a "positive third" that synthesizes the eternal and temporal (SUD: 13). But because spirit is dormant in Don Giovanni while psyche and body are actively engaged with the world, his relation to his external and internal environment is primarily one of “harmony and consonance” rather than “contrast or exclusion” (E/O I: 62). One might object that, like a leaky jar, Don Giovanni's life lacks unity insofar as he cannot get lasting satisfaction from the objects of his desire, and has to repeat the seductions to sustain his enjoyment. Nevertheless, his psychical life is mostly integrated with the external world, since it continues to provide him with objects that satisfy his basic needs while contributing minimal resistance to his actions. Since spirit is not actualized, he also enjoys a lack of opposition between his intellect and his emotions or appetites, or between his lower-order desires and higher-order volitions, which have yet to emerge. While there is a rudimentary kind of unity and agreement between the self and its internal and external environment, which gives him great pleasure, this unity is momentary and at the animal level. Under Anti-Climacus' view, he is primarily disintegrated as a self because its

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145 Under the influence of Kierkegaard, Dąbrowski proposed a theory of personality development that has much in common with his. Dąbrowski describes the state of the personality in its earliest stage of development (such as that of Don Giovanni) as one of "primitive integration" (Positive Disintegration, pp. 1-3). In this stage, the individual acts under immediate instincts and impulses that are stimulated by things in his external environment, without suppressing them or sublimating them so that they conform to moral values. This yields unity and a lack of conflict within one's psychical life, but it also means that one is primarily an automaton pursuing basic biological ends. This primitive structure must be broken down in order for the person to operate at a higher level, where he would achieve autonomy and gain the ability to direct his life under principles he has chosen. Dąbrowski refers to this productive break down in the primitive structure of the psyche, which often causes episodes of anxiety and depression, as "positive disintegration" (Ibid., 14). As will become apparent, Kierkegaard would accept that such psychological disintegration, and the pain associated with it, is necessary for personal growth. However, he would likely reject the concept of primitive integration as Dąbrowski construes it in taking religion as his point of departure, rather than psychology and biology as Dąbrowski does. In Kierkegaard's view, those in the earliest stage of development are disintegrated as selves, since their lives consist of a series of passing moments that are not gathered into a higher unity by means of the eternal component within them. It should be noted that I am greatly indebted to Dąbrowski's work in my reading of Kierkegaard.
eternal aspect has not emerged to lend continuity and stability to his life by setting him apart from temporal flux, and unifying the different moments of his life through the work of recollection and the imagination. As spirit in potentiality, he is dissipated in the sensuous, where he participates in a multiplicity of erotic affairs without collecting himself from out of it. Without spirit negating the sensuous and bringing unity and order to his life as a whole through the work of thought, he is without a stable sense of personal identity over time, and so is fragmented as a self.

A explains how the spiritual activity of negation he describes is necessary for the use of language, and is implicit in our use of it. “In language," he says, "the sensuous as medium is reduced to a mere instrument and is continually negated” (E/O I: 67). In order for thoughts or ideas to be expressed or shared through language, the signifier of a word must become radically detached from what the word signifies and from its sense or meaning. For instance, the sound of the word ‘ball’, when uttered, differs sharply from the ball it refers to in reality, and also from the idea invoked in us by the word. The sound is also negligible for understanding the communication or discerning its meaning; any other sound would do, provided there is a mutual understanding among speakers who have the idea of a ball that it signifies a ball. This shows that with language, “that which is really supposed to be heard," or the ideas and meanings that the sounds convey, "is continually disengaging itself from the sensuous” (E/O I: 68). In order to understand what someone else is saying, for instance, one would never attend solely to the sounds made by the flapping of his tongue or his vocalizing; these purely sensuous elements are continually negated in order for the content of speech to become intelligible, and more than just sounds (E/O I: 67). The process of sensuous negation that can be seen to occur through language and the understanding corresponds to spirit’s negation of the sensuous, although these are not strictly identical processes, since language and the understanding do not comprise the entire functionality of spirit. Language therefore presupposes spiritual activity that, in a paradoxical way, synthesizes ideality and reality while excluding the sensuous aspect of the latter from its sphere of activity. Because it requires the appropriation of the sensuous for the purpose of speech, language is a medium of communication “absolutely qualified by spirit” (E/O I: 67).146

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146 That language exists and can be understood as meaningful provides strong evidence against the naturalist view that what is empirically given, or what we perceive through our senses, exhausts all of reality. As A says, "nature is mute" (E/O I: 68). If immediacy is all there is, we would never be able to articulate it through speech, or make sense of it in a formal and structured way through ideas and concepts by which we could arrive at a coherent conception of
Spirit therefore begins the process of breaking down the primitive type of integration that the human being enjoyed with impersonal nature in order to conceptualize reality, and work toward a higher unity centered upon the personal life of the individual. This is a paradoxical unity in which the sensuous and spirit are held together while remaining separate from each other.

Language and understanding can emerge only through the negation of immediacy, which as an activity of spirit, originally occurs through reflection. A states: “Reflection is implicit in language,” and that “Reflection is fatal to the immediate” (E/O I: 70). In reflection, we are able to transcend our immediate situation in the world through the infinite component in the self. In the first phase of reflection, we are able to discriminate between objects in our internal and external environment, and to differentiate ourselves from them. In the later phase, we are able to become an object to ourselves, and are capable of transforming ourselves and shaping our own identity through the will. Reflection enables us to step back from our given condition to think about the greater context of the world, and to come to knowledge about things both given and not immediately given in perception. We can therefore think about the past and future, about objects, people, and events not sensuously present, and about ourselves in relation to things that do not immediately present themselves as phenomena. In considering our lives as a whole from this position, we can then form higher-order attitudes and volitions in response. Such standing apart from (or even standing under) the world as selves opens up a dimension of ideality through which one can consider those things that do not exist in it as concrete entities, whether they be ideas, possibilities, logical forms, or the like. The understanding engendered through reflection thereby occasions a separation between self and world that allows the individual to draw a firm distinction between his own personal thoughts, memories, and imaginings on one hand and external objects or events on the other. It therefore establishes a duality in consciousness between one's inner life and external reality, or between subject and object. This is a distinction that Don Giovanni has yet to make in enjoying a primitive or non-dual form of consciousness.

Everyone using language must therefore be reflective to some extent, even if not all of them are fully self-conscious. The sensate man existing in the purest state of immediacy, such as Don Giovanni, would hear only formless vocalizing in the place of speech, and so would neither
understand language nor be able to speak it. Since nearly all human beings use language or are in the process of acquiring it, it is rare that reflection does not penetrate immediacy and imbue the content of sensation with meaning and significance. In fact, Climacus contends that pure immediacy of the type enjoyed by Don Giovanni is an abstract concept that has no real existence, and so is never actually present in consciousness. He argues, “the immediate never is but is annulled when it is” (CUP: 112). The thought seems to be that the immediate can only be known to exist in being apprehended through reflection. Once reflection negates it to grasp it conceptually, however, immediacy is disrupted and brought to order in being differentiated into discrete objects. Hence, one can never know the reality of immediacy in its purest, pre-conceptual form, prior to its being taken up and processed in consciousness; we only know it as it is determined through categories of thought or reflection, which spirit issues through its relation to the sphere of ideality.\(^{147}\) A describes the sensuous dimension of immediacy as "the most abstract idea conceivable" not because the sensuous itself has an ideal character, but because it is ineffable. This would seem to challenge spirit's ability to bring it to language or comprehend it at all (E/O I: 56). For instance, one cannot \textit{say} the color red or a pleasurable sensation, but only perceive them. However, we can indeed speak intelligibly to one another about such perceptions or feelings since we have definite ideas that correspond to them. Spirit makes this possible by synthesizing ideality and the reality of the sensuous while holding them apart from one another as they succeed one another in time. It thereby renders the sensuous concrete by endowing it with form and structure, which assists in making it thinkable and articulable (E/O I: 55-56).

In relation to spirit, A describes the sensuous as a principle or power that spirit excludes. This would suggest that the sensuous retains a kind of independence over and against spirit, and indeed, A believes this is the case. He claims that the sensuous enters into “alien territory” when spirit appropriates it for communicational purposes by way of excluding it (E/O I: 70). He also refers to language and the sensuous as two different kingdoms, paralleling the distinction between the eternal and the temporal that pervades Kierkegaard’s authorship. The kingdom of language is characterized by “collectedness of thought” and “laborious achievements of

\(^{147}\) In his study of Kierkegaard's critique of German idealism, Kangas argues that Kierkegaard's work proposes a transcendent origin of existence that consciousness cannot assimilate or recover. He therefore rejects the idealist claim that the self posits itself in its existence and serves as ground of its own being. See Kierkegaard's Instant, pp. 80-88.
reflection”, while the kingdom of the sensuous is characterized by “the elemental voice of passion, the play of desires, the wild noise of intoxication” (E/O I: 90). Don Giovanni is, of course, an occupant of the latter kingdom, and by seducing without words, he has not yet made his way into the kingdom of language through the development of spirit. Without being able to negate his passions or achieve any reflective distance from them, he has no way of regulating his wild behaviors.

The metaphysical dualism brought out in A’s discussion is by no means anomalous with respect to Kierkegaard’s authorship as a whole, including his self-authored works. Although Kierkegaard admonished his reader not to confuse him with the pseudonyms, the consistency between their views would suggest that one can be confident in attributing much of the view endorsed by A to him. 148 By being absorbed in the sensuous (which Kierkegaard later conceives under the concept of the temporal), and without having actualized the spiritual, eternal component within him through language or reflection, Don Giovanni is captive to what Kierkegaard would later call an "alien power" that possesses him, and which moves him to act by acting seductively through him (EUD: 172). 149 It seems that A has this power in mind when he calls the most abstract idea conceivable "sensuous genius," where genius denotes a daimonic energy that inspires his actions (E/O I: 56). 150 This raises an important interpretive question: how is the sensuous alien to spirit if spirit constitutes the relation between psyche and body that the sensuous subsumes? It would seem inappropriate to conceive of psyche and body as alien to the

148 Commentators sometimes ignore this admonition, and fail to give reasons why certain views of the pseudonymous authors should be attributed to Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard writes: "As is well known, my authorship has two parts: one pseudonymous and the other signed. The pseudonymous writers are poetized personalities, poetically maintained so that everything they say is in character with their poetized individualities; sometimes I have carefully explained in a signed preface my own interpretation of what the pseudonym said. Anyone with just a fragment of common sense will perceive that it would be ludicrously confusing to attribute to me everything the poetized characters say" (JP VI: 6786).

149 Although temporality is foreign to spirit, Kierkegaard remains convinced that it ultimately derives its power from the eternal, and has no power of its own. Only through this borrowed power can the sensuous be “life, movement, continual unrest,” as A puts it (E/O I: 71). Max Scheler, another tripartite theorist of man, had conceived of the matter inversely. He argues that spirit is impotent, while the psychical and physical aspects of man are the source of his potency and vitality. Spirit therefore must work indirectly through the activity of these channels in order to sublimate the desires and actions of the human being. In this way, the primitive life of the human being can begin to work toward higher moral values. See The Human Place in the Cosmos, esp. p. 41.

150 I have modified the Hong translation of the Danish Genialitet, which they translate as "elemental originality" instead of "genius." In a footnote to the translation, the Hongs claim this should not be translated as "genius," in the sense of an extraordinarily gifted individual (E/O I: 617). I agree that this is not the sense in which A uses it, but believe that the Hongs miss that "genius" can refer to a spiritual power attending to the individual. For A, this is certainly not a benevolent spirit or the conscience. It should be noted that A's notion of sensuous genius echoes the evil genius hypothesized by Descartes, who could lead him astray in his judgments by corrupting his senses. See Meditations, p. 15.
self, since they are components of it. Hence, if the self can be said to be under an alien power, these cannot be the powers in question.

In answer to this, one can recall from chapter one that for Kierkegaard, the temporal is a powerful reality independent of God and the self, which is destined for an eternal happiness apart from the temporal provided that it fulfills its telos, which is to become itself. The temporal is therefore alien to the self, even though a portion of it resides within the self in having infiltrated the relation between psyche and body. The temporal is a corrosive influence on this relation, but this does not mean that psyche and body are wretched or alien to the self by nature. Psyche and body should be closely guided by spirit to minimize the power the temporal has over it, but they are good insofar as they constitute living creatures, which are concrete individuals that God encompasses in existence in creating ex nihilo. In existing temporally, however, they remain beleaguered by their origin, which is from nothingness or non-being. In a cryptic excerpt from his Papiers, Kierkegaard alludes to "the nothing from which God creates, the nothing the devil chews on in vain." He seems to think that God originally creates living things from a source outside of Him, or from non-being, which as I explained in the previous chapter, in some sense is. But this source threatens to destroy or corrupt them in lingering with them throughout temporal flux. A appears to have a similar idea in mind when he suggests that destructive energies are a pervasive influence on Don Giovanni. He claims that Don Giovanni should be conceived not as an individual, but as "a force of nature, the demonic" (E/O I: 92). As an impersonal power or collection of powers that inflame the passions of individuals and urge them to perform wicked and thoughtless deeds in spite of themselves, the demonic "no more wearies of seducing or is through with seducing than the wind with blowing a gale, the sea with rocking, or a waterfall with plunging down from the heights" (E/O I: 92-93). Combining these views, it would seem that for Kierkegaard, the demonic is an unfortunate remnant of creation ex nihilo,

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151 Haufniensis recognizes that spirit is an ambiguous power in relation to psyche and body. It is "friendly" to them insofar as it holds them in relation, but it is "hostile" insofar as it disrupts their relation through acts of exclusion or negation (CA: 43-44). As a result, alienation might occur when the self feels estranged from its immediate desires or its body. Conversely, it might occur when one would like to lose oneself and one's inhibitions in the moment but cannot due to being overly self-conscious. The paradoxical nature of the self makes the human being prone to inner conflict and identity issues of various types, but strictly speaking, psyche and body are not alien to the self, because they are essential components of it.

152 See Pap. III B 122:5 n.d., 1841-42. As quoted in the supplemental material to Either/Or: I, p. 547.

153 See section 1.3.2.
and occurs when the temporal attempts to compromise God's good creation by parasitically clinging to entities in it, and drawing it toward an errant course.

With this account of creation, Kierkegaard is not suggesting that the whole of nature is demonic in its separation from God. In fact, he praises nature on several occasions in his authorship. For instance, he writes: "With what infinite love nature or God in nature encompasses the great variety which has life and being!" (WOL: 252). Based on the writings of him and A, however, it would seem that due to its abyssal origin, nature harbors some amount of demonic energy that, if not harnessed by spirit, can possess a human being by means of the elemental power of the sensuous. This happens to be the case with Don Giovanni, who is a vehicle for sensuous energies like desire as a psyche-body unity. These can often be violent and unruly, but spirit can react by using the sensuous as its vehicle, prying the human being from the elemental nothingness that bore him and bringing him to his senses through language and reflection. If Don Giovanni were active as spirit, he would be able to appreciate order, structure, and regularity in existence, and would be able to get a hold of himself in it. The world as he perceives it would then be substantial for him. But as a passive vessel of natural forces, he is a slave to immediate instinct and impulse, without having any real understanding of his condition or control over it as a free agent.

One should not assume that all immediate esthetes would live like Don Giovanni, not only because nearly everyone possesses some degree of reflection and linguistic ability, but also because they do not always find enjoyment in the same things. Yet some individuals might have many traits in common with him, even though it is unlikely that the world would meet their needs so effortlessly, and without resistance or conflict. Those who might be said to live in this mode would be similar in that they would pursue immediate pleasure for themselves to the exclusion of all else. At the crudest level, this could be from sex, entertainment, food, drugs, material goods, and so on. Those more socially inclined might constantly seek satisfaction from the attention and admiration of others, or through exercises of power. Since reflection would likely be minimal at this stage, the pleasure they get would be from the gratification of appetites, and they would rarely enjoy the more refined intellectual pleasures of things like art and study. It is worth noting that an immediate esthete could conceivably live to satisfy basic appetites while

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154 Kierkegaard's respect for nature and its organisms is especially evident in a collection of religious discourses titled 'What We Learn From the Lilies in the Field and the Birds of the Air' (UDVS: 155-212).
possessing a significant degree of reflection about doing so. In this case, reflection would be used primarily for things like understanding and communication, or for discerning the appropriate means to the desired end, rather than for any kind of critical examination of the self or one's relationship with the world. The intellect would not be used for free thinking, but would be in service to the powers of the psyche, and so inclination and impulse would dictate most of the individual's actions.

2.2.2 The Nascent Person: The "Public" Mode of Existence

Anti-Climacus contends that the lifestyles of most human beings are properly categorized as immediate, despite their having "a little dash of reflection" to offset the sensuous aspect of their existence (SUD: 58). With the help of things like civilization, education, and culture, which are made possible by the spiritual achievements of thought and language, they have begun to subdue their unruly passions, heedless instincts, and the elemental forces of the natural world. Their higher capacities have brought a spiritual form of order and structure to their life in a manner that outruns any natural form of organization that organisms and inanimate things might have. They have also guided them in forming a regulated community to dwell in, where they attain some degree of stability and security. In achieving a degree of liberation from nature, they are also able to use their cognitive powers to understand things as being meaningful and rational, which Don Giovanni was unable to do. With self-consciousness having awakened to some extent, and in achieving some degree of unity as enduring selves, most people do not partake in sensual indulgence to the extent of someone like Don Giovanni. But Anti-Climacus believes that they are generally so wrapped up in selfishly pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain, and in maintaining an ultimately illusory sense of security within their milieu, that they do not advance far beyond his level of maturity.

Following Schacht, I will call this way of life the "public" mode of existence. In the public mode, the human being is well adjusted to society and the traditional norms, values, and belief systems in place, while the primitive type of integration he had enjoyed with his natural

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155 Schacht, Hegel and After, p. 138. However, I do not agree with Schacht that the type of society Kierkegaard calls "the present age" in Two Ages can be categorized in this way. The present age, in Kierkegaard’s view, is best understood as a time in which individuals have become highly reflective and lethargic, and so are more likely to be spectators of life than passionate participants in it. While they are likely to have many of the characteristics associated with those in "public mode," they are also likely to have much in common with those in the reflective esthetic stage of existence. See Chapters 3-4.
environment and immediate psychical life has started to break down through spiritual acts of negation. Once reflection is elicited through social conditioning, the individual no longer operates purely on the basis of natural impulse, inclination, or instinct. In order for the self to integrate itself with its psyche-body aspect and the surrounding world on a higher level, he must use reflection to cognize himself and the world. In the initial stage of his personal development, he is in no position to cultivate this capacity without the rearing of others, who he depends on for direction and support, and to teach him language and such. To reintegrate with the natural world and fit in with society as a reflective being, he looks to family, peers, race, state or the like to shape his identity, provide him with meaning and purpose, and determine how he should conduct himself. In this way, he can avoid living in pain, isolation, destitution, and confusion.

This upbringing is a healthy part of growing up, but Anti-Climacus laments that those in the public mode tend to remain stuck in this provisional condition, and do not bother trying to deepen their understanding of who they are as individuals through self-reflection. Instead of building on this condition to become independent thinkers who are concerned about spiritual matters, they care more about retaining a sense of belonging to the collective, which they do by conforming to its attitudes, beliefs, and practices. They thereby fail to realize their full potential, and are in a state of immaturity as selves. Preoccupied with "temporal goals" like amassing money, progressing in a career, gaining power and status, and earning a good reputation, these individuals become pacified by the mundane routine of life in the community in integrating with it (SUD: 35). He states:

Surrounded by hordes of men, absorbed in all sorts of secular matters, more and more shrewd about the ways of the world—such a person forgets himself, forgets his name divinely understood, does not dare to believe in himself, finds it too hazardous to be himself and far easier and safer to be like the others, to become a copy, a number, a mass man. (SUD: 33-34)

Criticizing the lack of self-awareness and mediocre spirituality of individuals in the "public" mode, Anti-Climacus writes: "As a rule, men are conscious only momentarily, conscious in the midst of big decisions, but they do not take the daily everyday into account at all; they are spirits of sorts for an hour one day a week—which, of course, is a rather crude way to be spirit" (SUD: 105). As a result, their attitude and conduct is mostly necessitated by social and environmental
factors, rather than being the product of autonomous commitment. It is therefore liable to frequent change based on the fashions of the age or trends in their milieu.

Anti-Climacus believes that in avoiding taking up a critical perspective that would unsettle them by calling their way life or community too radically into question, most individuals lack a great deal of personal integrity and agency. In pursuit of contentment, they do not want to be anything other than what their circumstances and the direction of others have made them. They might step back from their concrete situation to evaluate it and make their own decisions about what to do as free beings on occasion, but to retain harmony with the natural world and society, they are primarily "immersed in triviality and silly aping" of the beliefs, attitudes, feelings, desires, and behaviors of other people (SUD: 101). Because their acts are so frequently motivated by comparisons to others and the pressures of conformity, in addition to natural drives and immediate feeling, it is likely that Anti-Climacus would consider those in the "public" mode to be more like wantons than persons in Frankfurt's sense. Because these individuals have characteristics in common with wantons and persons, while lacking a robust set of second-order volitions, their condition might best be described as nascent personhood. In the case of the nascent person, the finite component of the self outweighs the infinite component that is capable of exercising the will at a higher-order, and one's possibilities are greatly limited by what the crowd or one's immediate feelings dictate. By living this way, they achieve an intimate bond with their psyche-body aspect and the surrounding world, but Kierkegaard believes that to be torn from oneself in this way is to be "possessed" by the world, much like Don Giovanni was demonically possessed by the sensuous energies flowing through his veins (EUD: 165). Of course, spirit has tacitly begun to make its presence known among those taken in by this way of life through the emergence of language and reflection, and so they make some effort to keep the demonic at bay through second-order volitions. However, these individuals still do not have much reflection or will of their own, and so are principally moved by their strongest lower-order desires, even though they might sometimes resist them or call them into question. Therefore, however selfish or egotistical the individual living in the "public" mode might be said to be (and it is very likely that he will be selfish, even if it is not to the extent of someone like Don Giovanni), on Anti-Climacus' view, he is not much of a self at all. Alienated from themselves as autonomous agents, and complacent in the social roles they have assumed, they are for the most part "lost in the life of the world" (EUD: 165).
Schacht correctly points out that Kierkegaard devotes little effort to working out an elaborate theory of the "public" mode of existence, "not because he considers the “public” mode to be of negligible significance, but rather because he finds the others both more interesting and worth taking more seriously as candidates for the most satisfactory form of human spiritual life."156 Much can be inferred, however, from what he does say about those ignorant of being spirit. With their worldly cares, these individuals would still pursue pleasure and amusement above all else. However, since a community needs a stable set of norms, rules, and expectations to sustain itself and function properly, along with its inhabitants acting in agreement with them, this way of life would require a customary form of morality. This would likely include ethical or religious demands, such as obligations to family or society and obedience to its laws, or adherence to the religious tradition one was raised into. But without a strong sense of his freedom, he is unlikely to question or test the normative or political constraints put in place in society (which are not always fruitful or morally justifiable), whether they are explicit or implicit. He is therefore likely to be conservative in his worldview, although this might mean he advocates liberal values if he is brought up in a liberal community.157 Consequently, unlike an immediate esthete like Don Giovanni, the individual living in the public mode would not give his selfish inclinations and desires free rein as an instrument of natural forces. Instead, he would take some effort to constrain them for the sake of preserving the given social order, along with his reputation within it.

For those in the "public" mode, however, an ethical or religious practice is not an intense passion that they take to define them as individuals set apart from the mass. If it becomes an earnest commitment made in deepened inwardness, the individual would have transitioned from an esthetic way of life to an ethical or religious way of life. Even if the nascent person has goals or ideals about the kind of person he wants to be that are drawn from his culture, none of this

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156 Schacht, Hegel and After, p. 138. Kierkegaard alludes to this mode of life in his dissertation on irony, when he favorably discusses the distinction Hegel made between the ethical (Sittlichkeit) and morality (Moralität) (Cl: 225-237). There are complexities here, but the public mode I have described would best fit under the ethical in Hegel's thought, as opposed to that of morality, in which the individual has freed himself of all immediate bonds to the established order. With morality, the private life of conscience assumes primary significance. According to Hegel, morality is represented historically in the figure of Socrates, but this stage is surpassed on the way to achieving a higher unity with society in the form of ethics. After defending his dissertation, Kierkegaard had abandoned his Hegelian roots and placed morality on a much higher level than the ethical as Hegel conceives it. For Kierkegaard, Sittlichkeit becomes a prefiguration of morality.

157 There is a worry that the attitudes and patterns of behavior of those in public mode could lead to fascism or totalitarianism, since these individuals are likely to submit to the will of authority figures without thinking or choosing for themselves. See Fromm, Escape From Freedom, esp. Chapter VII.
would invigorate the will or critical thought, and would likely even make him forget about his unique standing as an individual. Because the stages of life Kierkegaard lays out pertain to individuals in the robust sense, Kierkegaard might not characterize the "public" mode I have described as an esthetic, ethical, or religious way of life. Since individuals in the public mode dabble in these three spheres without passionately committing themselves to any of them, it is not a viable option for those who intend on living a good life in deepened inwardness as selves. But since there is some degree of spiritual development, Kierkegaard would not believe that this way of life is a lower grade of existence than that of the immediate esthetic. Additionally, because those in the public mode have a budding sense for the ethical or even intimations of conscience, Kierkegaard would recommend it over an esthetic way of life that disregards this. In this respect, those in the “public” mode live more admirably than the immediate esthete, and have made real progress in personal development, despite their shortcomings.

Under the pseudonym of Judge William, Kierkegaard provides more evidence of an outlying "fourth mode" that succeeds the immediate esthetic but precedes the reflective esthetic stage in the development of selfhood. Although the ethical has begun to make its appearance in this stage of life, the Judge criticizes those in this mode for not taking the ethical seriously enough, and as a result, not realizing their nature as spirit. Even if they live in an ethically laudable way, they do not truly understand why they live ethically or resolve to live in an ethical way. He writes:

…so many live out their lives in quiet lostness…they live, as it were, away from themselves and vanish like shadows. Their immortal souls are blown away, and they are not disquieted by the question of its immortality, because they are already disintegrated before they die. They do not live esthetically, but neither has the ethical become manifest to them in its wholeness. (E/O II: 168-169)

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158 Schacht disagrees with this assessment, claiming, “he considers those who never rise above this level to be the most pathetic representatives of mankind, compared with whom even an unscrupulous sensualist like Don Juan comes as a welcome relief.” See Hegel and After, p. 138.

159 Kierkegaard regards conscience as a defining characteristic of individuality, and as the focal point of one's relationship with God. In the public mode, however, the individual mostly ignores the demands of his conscience. “Here in temporality the conscience already wants to make each one separately into the single individual… however…it all too easily happens that the voice of conscience becomes merely one voice among many others, and then the solitary voice of the conscience, as is usual with the solitary voice, is so easily outvoted—by the majority. But in eternity the conscience is the only voice heard” (UDVS: 128).
As we will see in the next section and in chapter six, the Judge believes that these immature individuals have not yet become consciousness of their eternal nature, from which follows universally valid principles that assume the form of laws and precepts. Since this knowledge of themselves does not motivate their actions or decisions, he believes they cannot be said to be living ethically in the true sense. He argues that until they collect themselves out of their dissipation in immediacy or unreflective worldliness and realize that they are intended for the ethical way of life by nature, they are in despair.

2.3 Unconscious Despair: Kierkegaard's Criticism of the Life of Immediacy

Although those in the "public" mode or in the immediate esthetic stage of existence do not believe they are in despair, Anti-Climacus claims that they are because, in their ignorance, they are "unaware of being defined as spirit" (SUD: 25). Like the Judge, he believes that learning the truth about one's eternal nature and exercising one's agency as a person of integrity is the ultimate goal in achieving spiritual health within this life. Following Socrates, he believes that relating oneself to the truth is "the highest good" for the human being. Consequently, by preferring to seek worldly or sensual goods instead of self-knowledge, one is unprepared to attain this highest good (SUD: 42). Supposing that he is even right about this, it would seem highly questionable that falling anywhere short of the highest good, whatever that happens to be, would mean one must be in despair. This is especially the case if this individual believes she is happy, and does not experience feelings of hopelessness or misery. It also seems puzzling that most people would not want to know themselves as spirit and be conscious of their freedom if it were indeed the highest good. Hence, if his view were that these individuals are in despair because they do not have the proper conception of themselves as agents or do not want to have this understanding, as Kosch argues, it would be a rather weak and unconvincing one.160

Fortunately, the Judge and Anti-Climacus provide additional reasons to think that the life of immediacy is despair that involve more than mere ignorance of being a self, or of failing to will in the way one should. In this section, I argue that, more fundamentally, the self in esthetic immediacy or the public mode despairs because it is disintegrated in its existence as a synthesis

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160 See Kosch, Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling, and Kierkegaard, p. 154. Kosch does explain that one's misconception of oneself results in a failure to achieve a stable synthesis in the self. She does not, however, base her analysis on the lack of integrity that selves have before despair is eliminated, or explain why this is such a dire predicament to be in. This structural problem caused by the will, I argue, is central to despair in Kierkegaard's thought, while misunderstandings of selfhood are often associated with it.
of the eternal and temporal, infinite and finite, psyche and body, and possibility and necessity. In other words, the human being in this complex state is broken and his identity is compromised, even if he is not conscious of this or only has a rough idea of it. I explain that the disintegration of the self occurs due to its entanglement in the nothingness of temporality, which is a source of tension and anxiety. By being drawn away from his stronghold in the Eternal, and into sensuous pleasures or the life of the crowd as a psyche-body unity, the self is in disequilibrium due to an overemphasis on the temporal conditions of its existence. This imbalance prevents the self from realizing its spiritual freedom and independence from the world, and hence from knowing itself in relation to God. Without the harmony and balance that an intimate relationship with God yields, it lacks the deeper fulfillment and meaning that it longs for insofar as it is spirit, and has an aspect of the eternal and infinite within it. On this teleological account of the self, the self is truly itself and free of despair when it achieves integrity and wholeness through harmonizing its opposing constituents in the act of synthesis. In undertaking this effort by seeking fellowship with God, it evades the nothingness of a worldly existence, which threatens it with destruction or even perdition.  

2.3.1 Despair as Existing Amid Nothingness

Those who read *Sickness Unto Death* without mining its depths will likely get the impression that Anti-Climacus is reticent to offer an explanation of why the life of immediacy is despair. Early in the text, he alludes to despair as a "gnawing secret" that besets every human being (SUD: 27). Elaborating on this idea, he writes:

...anyone who really knows mankind might say that there is not one single living human being who does not despair a little, who does not secretly harbor an unrest, an inner strife, a disharmony, an anxiety about

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161 Taylor also argues that in Kierkegaard's view, the self is in despair due to its failure to achieve its telos, which is to attain self-integration by unifying the different components of the self (*Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship*, p. 10). Taylor suggests that in the esthetic stage of life, this state of disequilibrium is caused by the absence of a decision that would bring stability to the self (*Ibid.*, p. 128). This lack of stability is a problem because so long as one remains in this stage, one remains, in some sense, a child (*Ibid.*, p. 75). I do not disagree with Taylor that Kierkegaard argues this, but I explain why Kierkegaard believes this lack of stability is a major problem for the person living in the esthetic or public modes, and hence why there is a need for religious or ethical decision to correct this. As Kosch notes, Taylor understands the relation between the different stages of life largely in developmental-psychological terms, such that deficiencies in one stage only become apparent at a higher, more advanced stage (*Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling, and Kierkegaard*, p. 150 footnote). But it is not clear why living like a child must mean that one is in despair, or why such a grave expression is suitable in describing anyone who has fallen short of spiritual maturity. My analysis in this section will be done with the intention of getting clear on what Kierkegaard thinks the nature of despair is, and why he believes it poses such a threat to the self's existence.
In this secretive passage, he associates despair with "anxiety," and an "inner strife" or "disharmony" lurking in the heart of each and every human being, even among those who appear to be the happiest. "Even that which, humanly speaking, is utterly beautiful and lovable—a womanly youthfulness that is perfect peace and harmony and joy—is nevertheless despair" (SUD: 25). Hinting as to why even someone with this quality must be said to be in despair, he writes: "Despite its illusory security and tranquility, all immediacy is anxiety and thus, quite consistently, is most anxious about nothing" (SUD: 25). The immediate esthete might seem content in having most of his desires satisfied, just as the individual who has settled into the life of his community might. These individuals are also likely to find adequate meaning and purpose in their lives, which satisfies them as reflective beings. Anti-Climacus, however, believes that the serenity they enjoy within the world is shallow and precarious. There is an indeterminate danger lurking beneath the veneer of harmony and bliss that they are dimly aware of, but are unable to identify as they can other things, and at a deeper level, this "nothing" is a nebulous presence that menaces them in their existing. In other words, the anxiety that affects those living in immediacy is not aimed at any determinate thing in existence, but is a generalized anxiety that arises simply from becoming conscious in immediacy.162 The true nature of immediacy is, as Climacus states, indeterminateness, although determinate objects become manifest to the human being under reflection (PF: 167). As the original source of anxiety, immediacy is not a definite thing in the way that particular objects or entities in the empirical world are, but is rather the medium through which they become present as phenomena in consciousness. Haufniensis states, "the most correct expression for immediacy is that which Hegel uses about pure being: it is nothing".

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162 Heidegger makes essentially the same point in his fundamental ontology when he distinguishes between fear, which is directed toward a definite item within the world, and anxiety, which is not. "That in the face of which one is anxious is completely indefinite...Nothing which is at ready-to-hand or present-at-hand within the world functions as that in the face of which anxiety is anxious" (Being and Time, p. 230). Heidegger concludes from this that "the world as such is that in the face of which one has anxiety" (Ibid., 181). Hence, the world as he interprets it phenomenologically is not a definite thing, but rather the horizon under which things (beings) are disclosed. Much like Kierkegaard, then, he understands the world in terms of nothingness. Repudiating the dualism that Kierkegaard invokes in his ontology, he rejects the existence of an eternal being, or God, that is infinitely qualitatively distinct from the world, and who offers part of Himself in creating the human being out of nothingness.
Anxiety about nothingness therefore characterizes the despair of those in immediacy, although it is typically suppressed or rendered unconscious through occupation with the finite affairs of worldly life, where definite beings are the focus of attention.

Anti-Climacus offers little further explanation of what it means to be anxious about nothing, or why this nothingness provokes anxiety, but Kierkegaard sheds light on this topic elsewhere in his corpus. We have seen that in his religious discourses, Kierkegaard contends that the world and everything within it is built upon nothingness in having been created by God ex nihilo, and that non-being nevertheless is in some weak sense in its association with possibility. Deterrminate beings, which exist temporally but not eternally, come into being from an indeterminate field of possibility and pass away according to God's will. Consequently, they are insubstantial and transitory in nature, but they exist in actuality so long as God maintains them in existence. However, they are nothing apart from their relation to God, who is in the fullest sense. Since anything that exists temporally is self-contradictory and perishable as a union of being and non-being, any human being wrapped up in temporal conditions has strayed from his divine origin. As a result, he is menaced by non-being and the prospect of death.

According to Anti-Climacus and Haunfiensis, this palpable presence of nothingness that pervades immediacy generates anxiety, or even despair. The Christian who has learned of his eternal nature while being situated in the temporal gains constancy, and in doing so, hopes to be saved from the void by holding fast to the Eternal in existence. Because he is a synthesis,

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163 Hegel intends to begin his dialectic of mediation with immediate existence in an effort to free his thought of presuppositions. By this logic, being and nothing are in fact the same. "This pure being is after all a pure abstraction, and therefore absolutely negative; regarded immediately it is nothing" (Hegel's Logic, p. 127). As quoted in the Hong footnotes to The Concept of Anxiety, p. 234. Climacus, however, criticizes idea that philosophy could begin without presuppositions. "How does the system begin with the immediate, that is, does it begin with it immediately? The answer to this must certainly be an unconditional no ... The beginning of the system that begins with the immediate is then itself achieved through reflection... a logical system must not boast of an absolute beginning, because such a beginning is ... a pure chimera" (CUP: 111-112). Hence, immediate existence is already presupposed in any philosophical reflection, which begins by annulling it through an intellectual act of apprehension through which objects are discerned, rather than directly coinciding with it. He thereby rejects the idealist notion that existence originates in an act of thought that posits it, or that thinking and being are identical. Although immediate existence as reflected in human consciousness is nothing, Kierkegaard rejects that this designator of emptiness and abstraction applies to eternal being, which is concrete and full. In affirming that existence is characterized by irreconcilable duality, Kierkegaard departs from Hegel in assuming that being and non-being are absolutely distinct.

164 See section 1.3.2.

165 Following St. Paul's lamentation in Romans 8:19-23, Kierkegaard argues that human beings are not the only living things to sorrow due to their temporal plight. "Yet the lily and the bird do have sorrow also, just as all nature has sorrow. Does not all creation groan under the perishability under whose dominion it was placed against its will? It is all under the dominion of perishability! ... perishability, that is the groan—because to be under the dominion of perishability is to be what a groan signifies: confinement, restraint, imprisonment; and the content of the groan is: perishability, perishability!" (WA: 40).
however, he must wait in temporality in patience, as he can only be removed from it and attain immortality after death.

A similar but secular account of creation can be found in A’s essay on Don Giovanni, who expressed the life of immediacy in its purest form in his total immersion in the sensuous. In a passage depicting the origin of Don Giovanni, he writes:

Don Giovanni's life is...the full force of the sensuous, which is born in anxiety; and Don Giovanni himself is this anxiety, but this anxiety is precisely the demonic zest for life. After Mozart has had Don Giovanni come into existence this way, his life now develops for us in the dancing strains of the violin, in which he lightly, fleetingly speeds on over the abyss. When one throws a pebble in such a way that it skims the surface of the water, it can for a time skip over the water in light hops, but it sinks down to the bottom as soon as it stops skipping; in the same way he dances over the abyss, jubilating during his brief span. (E/O I: 129-130)

According to A, the anxiety that animates the life of Don Giovanni stems from his originating from the nothingness of possibility. Anxious about slipping back into the abyssal depths from which he came, he possesses an exuberant energy that keeps him busily flitting between affairs with different women. However, these joyous events transpiring within the sensuous are ephemeral, quickly fading into nothing just as they emerge from nothing. Don Giovanni's life unfolds in a similar way as he hurtles toward inevitable doom, lusting after women without ever gaining a real sense of himself over temporal duration. Interestingly, A does not describe this nothingness that generates anxiety as empty like Kierkegaard does elsewhere, but as misty and dense. He compares this fullness to what one might view in nature when seeing the horizon "dark and clouded; too heavy to support itself, it rests upon the earth and hides everything in its obscure night; a few hollow sounds are heard, not yet in motion but like a deep mumbling to itself" (E/O I: 129). Then, A envisions this formless, featureless landscape roused and lit up by a flash from the distant heavens, which signals the arrival of Don Giovanni. As this flash, which is "born in anxiety," gains momentum in its perpetual reoccurrence, one has "a presentiment of a

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166 A’s notion of an elemental fullness that precedes the event of creation recalls Haufniensis’ claim that the Eternal is full, while retaining none of its positive connotations. Their disagreement is a consequence of their competing worldviews. As an esthete, A has a vastly different conception of the Eternal than does Haufniensis, who occupies a Christian standpoint. For A, the "womb" of creation, or the "eternal mother of everything," is a monstrous "vortex" that blindly creates just as it destroys (E/O I: 168). The indifference, caprice, and violence of A’s eternal is a far cry from the peace and glory of the Eternal as Kierkegaard understands it in his religious writings.
great fire” that represents the eruption of passion in his life (E/O I: 129). For A, then, it would seem that the immediate consciousness of human beings, and the passions that drive their actions, emerge from this elemental nothingness in the same foreboding manner, and this produces anxiety. One can flee from this demonic origin or render it unconscious through lively activity directed toward determinate beings in existence, but for the esthete A, salvation is out of the question; in the end, one must return to one's place of origin. It is this primal form of anxiety experienced within the sensuous that Anti-Climacus seems to associate with despair in the individual living in immediacy with only a small degree of reflection.

In the passage invoked at the beginning of this section, Anti-Climacus describes this anxiety that haunts the individual as being "about some possibility in existence" or "about himself" in his existence, and not simply an anxiety about being in the world as such (SUD: 22). It might seem that with this statement, he backpedals on the claim that anxiety is about nothing and has no determinate object, but there is a way to resolve this problem. In coming into being from nothing through temporality, the self is not yet what it is essentially, and as a result, it does not yet have an eternal existence. In its infinitude, it hovers in the sphere of possibility as spirit in potentiality, but possibilities are not a thing until they are actualized in existence. Insofar as the self exists as a synthesis of possibility and necessity, it is in a sense nothing, even though it is destined for an eternal existence in reality. Anti-Climacus indicates this when he states that "reflection is never so much itself as when it is—nothing" (SUD: 25-26). In the act of reflection, the infinite component of the self disrupts the individual dwelling in his natural condition by negating it, and this also produces anxiety. One might, however, evade this anxiety about one's infinitude by occupying oneself with social affairs in the public mode or sensual pleasures. In clinging to finite things for support, the individual conceals his anxiety from himself by keeping his knowledge of himself to a bare minimum. On the other hand, insofar as the self consists of necessity and exists concretely, it is "a very definite something" (SUD: 36). The self therefore has reality in thinking and willing as a human being, but since it is in the process of becoming itself in temporality, one cannot say that it is realized in the fullest sense. The person ought to strive for this by wanting to realize its essential possibilities in heightened self-reflection. As long as it is not completely itself by having realized the possibility of being eternal, it exists.
between God and the world, or being and nothingness, and this induces, at a level that is likely unconscious, anxiety and despair.\footnote{Descartes articulates a similar position in explaining how he is susceptible to errors in judgment as an imperfect being. "I realize that I am, as it were, something intermediate between God and nothingness, or between supreme being and non-being: my nature is such that in so far as I was created by the supreme being, there is nothing in me to enable me to go wrong or lead me astray; but in so far as I participate in nothingness or non-being, that is, in so far as I am not myself the supreme being and am lacking in countless respects, it is no wonder that I make mistakes" \textit{(Meditations}, p. 38). Descartes, however, does not conceive of nothingness in terms of impermanence in the way that Kierkegaard does throughout his authorship.}

To get a better sense of what Anti-Climacus might mean by suggesting that anxiety pertains to possibilities and to oneself, one can consult the work of Haufniensis, who deals with the concept of anxiety while investigating the conditions under which the misuse of the will (or sin) occurs. While agreeing with \textit{A} and Anti-Climacus that immediacy "begets anxiety" and that this anxiety is about "nothing," Haufniensis expands on this idea by relating anxiety to the freedom and imagination the human being possesses as spirit (CA: 41). To make these connections explicit, Haufniensis invokes the myth of the fall from Genesis, in which God prohibited the first man, Adam, from eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.\footnote{See Genesis 2:16-17.}

Describing the immediacy enjoyed by Adam before his first sin, he writes: "Dreamily the spirit projects its own actuality, but this actuality is nothing" (CA: 41). In other words, as a spiritual being constituted by infinitude, one is capable of detaching from one's natural condition to imagine innumerable possibilities on the horizon, including possible ways one might be or possible actions one might take. Because these are only possibilities that emerge through reflective acts of negation, they have not yet become concrete or actual, although some of them might in the future. The indeterminacy of possibility produces anxiety in the human being by unsettling his determinate existence and imbuing it with uncertainty. Haufniensis explains that the imagination, in its projecting, can conjure up all sorts of dreadful possibilities that threaten to become actualized, and this is a key contributor of anxiety (CA: 156).

The nothingness of possibility bears not only on what will become of us, but also on human freedom. In his freedom, the human being can choose to act on some of the manifold possibilities projected through the imagination, including those he knows he ought not to act on. In a dialectical fashion, Haufniensis argues that Adam does not learn of his freedom until he receives the prohibition from God, who introduces an obstacle for freedom by announcing its potential misuse. The prohibition awakens "freedom's possibility" in Adam, which is "the
anxious possibility of being able" (CA: 44). The possibility of using one's freedom to do something forbidden, or in the case of Adam, sinful, thereby becomes a live option that spirit imagines. Even if it does not choose to act on this forbidden possibility, the mere idea of it provokes anxiety. When the possibility appears in consciousness, one reacts emotionally to it, even though one remains innocent. Freedom of choice therefore makes one anxious just as the imagination does, and the anxiety that attends choice (especially of the forbidden) provides compelling evidence of our freedom as individuals. Haufniensis does not associate the anxiety of freedom and possibility with despair, but Anti-Climacus appears to be willing to make this move in his account of despair.\footnote{Haufniensis argues that Adam's first sin was freely chosen in a state of anxiety, but he does not believe that the state of anxiety is sin. On his view, Adam would have remained in anxiety under the prohibition even if he had remained innocent as a consequence of being created from nothing. He thereby treats anxiety as an immediate precursor of sin, or as a presupposition of it. Now, according to Anti-Climacus, despair results from the misuse of the will, and identifies this with sin (SUD: 77). If we attribute this view to Haufniensis, one could say that on his account, Adam was originally anxious, but was not in despair until he violated the prohibition and sinned. However, it would seem that on Anti-Climacus' account, which identifies anxiety with despair, Adam must have been in despair even before violating the prohibition. If we attribute Haufniensis' view on the origin of creation to Anti-Climacus, this would contradict the latter's claim that the individual in despair is bringing it upon himself, since Adam had not misused his will yet. This would provide additional evidence that despair is not the fault of the individual as he claims, but is his original state.}

In his endorsement of an ethical way of life, Judge William also suggests that the life of immediacy is despair due to its entanglement in nothingness. He emphasizes that this creates instability in the human being, which as an ethicist, he finds particularly objectionable. Since instability creates uncertainty and disorder, it is not unrelated to anxiety, but Judge William does not treat anxiety at great length. Instead, he focuses on despair in those who are ignorant of being selves. He claims that regardless of whether the person who lives in immediacy know it, in his reliance on temporal conditions, his life is despair "due to its having been built upon that which can both be and not be" (E/O II: 225). On the other hand, in its avowal of the eternal in the human being, the ethical life-view avoids despair by separating itself from the temporal and building itself upon that which "to be" essentially belongs" (E/O II: 225). The individual living in esthetic immediacy or the public mode is engrossed in the fleeting affairs of worldly life, but in contrast to the eternal, which essentially is, that which exists temporally is embroiled in a fusion of being and non-being.\footnote{See section 1.3.1.} The human being thereby lives among things that can either be or not be, and that are constantly transitioning between these states. For instance, a person's health might fail him, material conditions constantly change, relationships end, wealth can be won or
lost, and pleasures come and go. In short, it is in the nature of everything finite to come into being and pass away, and when an individual defines himself by transitory concerns, which alone have meaning for him, he too exists in this volatile state under the pall of non-being. The Judge puts this by saying, "it is always despair to have one's life in something whose nature is that it can pass away," and the esthete does just this by forming attachments to contingent things like money, material goods, reputation, status, or in the case of Don Giovanni, women (E/O II: 236). In desiring things that are not secure from the vicissitudes of life, and that he might eventually lose, he is in despair, even if he otherwise believes he is happy.¹⁷¹ Because the individual living esthetically has an aspect of the eternal within him but paradoxically invests himself in transient conditions that determine his identity, the Judge says of the esthete that his "whole being contradicts itself" (E/O II: 162). This contradiction generates spiritual tensions that are associated with despair, as the self, in the act of synthesis, strives for a stable and continuous existence amidst the instability of life in the world.

In a certain sense, then, the Judge thinks that the individual living esthetically exists in defiance of the principle of contradiction, which is the Aristotelian dictum that it is impossible for the same thing to be and not be at the same time.¹⁷² This is a principle that Hegel rejected in order to get his dialectic of mediation started, but the Judge does not follow him in making this move.¹⁷³ He upholds it as a logical principle of thought, agreeing with Aristotle that it is impossible to think of the same thing as both existing and not existing at the same time. However, since the spheres of thought and existence (or what I have earlier referred to as ideality and reality) are distinct, he does not believe it is applicable to what exists beyond the scope of human thought or experience (E/O II: 170). Insofar as a human being is immersed in the fleeting conditions of the temporal, in which everything is a muddled compound of being and non-being,

¹⁷¹ In her analysis of despair in Either/Or, Kosch argues that for the Judge, despair in the esthetic stage is the result of a misunderstanding of the nature of one's agency, and not a result of desiring transient goods that might not always be attainable (Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling, and Kierkegaard, p. 143). For the Judge, it certainly is the case that those who desire only transient goods have failed to understand their nature as spirit, and are poor moral agents. Kosch, however, overlooks the fact that the Judge clearly offers this as a reason for the esthete's despair, and so misses an important dimension of despair in his thought. On my reading of the Judge's criticism, those who desire only transient goods are disintegrated as selves in failing to consolidate their lives through the eternal component within the self. It follows from this that they misunderstand the nature of their agency, but this is not the primary reason why they are in despair; they are in despair because they are broken human beings who have succumbed to vanity and triviality in their pursuit for worldly things, without having sought the highest good in existence through the realization of selfhood under God.

¹⁷² See Aristotle, Metaphysics, Book IV Chapter 3 (1005b24–30)

¹⁷³ See p. 113, fn. 163.
his position is unsustainable, and so he is not. Insofar as he is spirit and consists of necessity, however, he is, and so ought to seek eternal existence from within his temporal situation. In the Judge's view, the eternal cannot be found in the precarious reality outside of him, since everything in it is constantly changing. If it is to be anywhere, it must be within him, and indeed, the Judge believes that one can discover it there. Therefore, in order to extricate himself from this unsustainable contradiction that he exists in and come to be in truth, the individual must free himself from the clutches of the temporal by willing to be himself "in his eternal validity" (E/O II: 214). As we will see in chapter four, the Judge believes that one can only do this by becoming aware of oneself as spirit, and then deciding to take up the ethical way of life in earnest. In defining oneself under ethical principles, which give one's life ultimate purpose and value, one eliminates despair by integrating the contradictory aspects of oneself under the direction of the eternal within.

Before we move on from this preliminary discussion of the ethical stage of life, the Judge makes another claim about despair in the esthetic stage of life that helps in interpreting his criticism. The Judge claims that the central feature of the esthetic way of life is the pursuit of enjoyment, but this poses difficulties when taken as a life-view (E/O II: 179). He writes, "the person who says that he wants to enjoy life always posits a condition that either lies outside the individual or is within the individual in such a way that it is not there by virtue of the individual himself" (E/O II: 180). In disagreement with Anti-Climacus, who thinks a relationship with an external power (or God) is necessary for defeating despair, the Judge goes on to add, "every life-view that has a condition outside itself is despair" (E/O II: 235). On the Judge's view, the esthete lacks composure in his attachment to external conditions, and so is not collected as a self. By allowing his happiness to depend on things that he does not control, he must focus his efforts

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174 Kosch explains that there is some disagreement about the reason why the Judge believes that those whose enjoyment depends on external conditions (or internal conditions not under their control) are in despair (Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling, and Kierkegaard, pp. 142-145). Lübecke, for instance, has taken his claim to be that in order to avoid despair, we must be sure that our central aim in life will be fulfilled ("An Analytical Interpretation of Kierkegaard as Moral Philosopher," p. 97). Because we cannot be sure we will consistently meet with success in pursuing things like health, reputation, or wealth, the claim goes, our happiness cannot be guaranteed, and so we are invariably in despair over the prospect of failure. This interpretation would make some sense of the idea that one could appear happy and still be in despair, since the possibility of loss or failure might beleaguer one unconsciously. But if this were the Judge's basic argument, it would be unconvincing, since there is little reason to think that we cannot be happy with our present-day affairs while knowing perfectly well that what makes us happy now might not do so in the future, or that we might lose whatever has ensured our happiness. Assuming we even are pained by the realization that there will come a time in which our aim will not be met, we could mentally prepare ourselves to take up a new goal rather than succumb to despair. For these reasons, I agree with Kosch that one should look for an explanation of why the esthetic life is despair that does not rest on the possible failure of finding joy in it.
outward toward the multifarious circumstances in the world in order to maintain it, rather than ever finding it within. Due to the oppositions and fluctuations he will encounter in this approach, as the objects of desire threaten to flee from his grasp, the Judge describes him as "restless" and unstable (E/O II: 87). In seeking a life-view unaffected by despair according to the Judge's criteria, one obvious place to look would be for one that is not based on enjoyment of something transient and outside of one's control. It must also be one in which the individual takes satisfaction in a lasting condition that lies within him in such a way that it is within his control as a self. The Judge believes that the ethical life-view he endorses meets these criteria by allowing for the cultivation of the eternal in the human being under moral ideals. Living ethically engenders an awareness of universally human values and principles that are entailed by one's eternal nature, and fosters the will insofar as one wills to act in accordance with them. By integrating the eternal and temporal aspects of the self, it offers a solution to despair for the one willing to adopt it.

As we will see, the remedies to despair that Judge William and Anti-Climacus offer differ in important ways, since one suggests a religious way of life through Christian faith, while the other suggests a way of life focused on ethical duties and obligations towards humanity. Both emphasize self-knowledge and the exertion of the will on the journey toward self-actualization, but their disagreement results from having different conceptions of what the eternal is, how it relates to the human being, and what it requires of us. With his predilection for the eternal aspect of the human being, however, Anti-Climacus would likely accept most of the Judge's criticism of the life of immediacy. From the Christian standpoint, Kierkegaard criticizes the "pagan" or "natural man" who is caught up in his natural spontaneity in a way that resonates with their criticisms (WOL: 40). Like the individual in esthetic immediacy or the public mode, the pagan, he writes:

...wants to belong to temporality on the most wretched conditions; he does not want to escape it. He clings tightly to being nothing, more and more tightly, because in a worldly way, and futilely, he tries to become something...See, that king whom the gods punished suffered the dreadful punishment that every time he was hungry luscious fruits appeared, but when he reached for them they vanished; the despairing lowly one, the pagan, suffers even more agonizingly in self-contradiction...It is not the fruits that withdraw themselves from him; it is he himself who withdraws himself even from being what he is. (CD: 46)
Ignorant of being a self, the pagan is "trapped in everydayness and habit" in concerning himself with the transitory affairs of the world, and selfishly seeking eminence within it (EUD: 347). Kierkegaard explains that a way to escape this predicament would be to make an ethical or religious resolution, as resolution "joins a person with the eternal, brings the eternal into time for him, jars him out of the drowsiness of uniformity, breaks the spell of habit" (EUD: 347). Without any steadfast commitment to break the spell of the temporal, which those in ignorance are under while gripped by the daimonic energy of the sensuous, the pagan "becomes alienated from the eternal and the original" in himself, and is at risk of perishing in triviality (EUD: 347).

Although the pagan might think his life is rooted in something secure and stable in his care for earthly wealth and abundance, Kierkegaard believes that he has no lasting foothold in existence. In his hankering after what is perishable, the pagan has lost sight of what, in its divine immutability, is truly secure and stable—the Eternal. "The greatest distance," Kierkegaard writes, "is the distance from God’s grace to God’s wrath, from the Christian to the pagan, from being blessedly saved in grace to “eternal perdition away from the face of God,” from seeing God to seeing from the abyss that one has lost God" (CD: 69). In choosing the lesser goods of the world over the supreme and abiding goodness of God, the pagan has lost his spiritual integrity and is in danger of being abandoned forever by God. For Kierkegaard, this is the source of his despair.

2.3.2 Despair as the Disintegration of Selfhood

Recall that Anti-Climacus associates the despair of those living in immediacy with anxiety, or with an "inner strife" and "disharmony" that usually is concealed from awareness through preoccupation with earthly or social matters (SUD: 22). In the last section, it was suggested that this discord is a result of the tension of being situated in the nothingness of the temporal as an individual destined for an immutable existence free of all strife and disharmony. Don Giovanni, for instance, "lives for the moment" by delighting in transitory affairs with no regard for his past or future, but this is a fragmented way of living; the different moments of his life are discrete episodes that have no real coherence or unifying link in his consciousness. Since

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175 Although paganism is traditionally thought to be a religious way of life, Kierkegaard seems to think that it is more properly understood as a form of estheticism rather than a form of religion. One might plausibly argue, however, that for Kierkegaard, paganism is a lower religious stage that would precede the ethical stage and the higher religious stage, which is strictly monothestic. This would challenge the commonly held notion that there is a single religious stage in Kierkegaard's authorship that follows the ethical stage.
the human being is a synthesis of the temporal and eternal, any way of living that exaggerates the
temporal constituent of the human being is intrinsically unstable and out of keeping with one's
nature as spirit, as Kierkegaard points out:

We speak, to be sure, of a lust for life based on despair, which simply because it does not have the next day
lives, as it is said, totally in the today. But this is an illusion, because one cannot exactly live that way in the
today, least of all totally. A human being has the eternal within him, and therefore he cannot totally be in
the purely momentary. (CUD: 77)

Kierkegaard believes that the eternal component in the self demands unity and coherence
throughout the whole duration of one's life, and not in just a moment or in parts of it. Since the
life of the unreflective or minimally reflective individual degenerates into a formless multiplicity
by him being absorbed in worldly affairs and phenomena, he lacks integrity and balance as a self.
He lives in an "episodic and momentary" manner, without resolving to use its imagination to
bind these moments or episodes together so that they form a unified whole (WOL: 178). In order
for the self to keep itself intact and collected during its passage through temporality, a passionate
mode of self-reflection is needed. The crystallization of selfhood cannot be achieved, however,
so long as one is mostly unaware of being a self that has continuity due to having an aspect of the
eternal within it. With his lack of inwardness, the individual living in the immediate esthetic or
public modes has, as he puts it, "lost the eternal" and drifted away from himself (WOL: 178). But
because the eternal is an ineradicable aspect of the human being, to lose the eternal in this sense
is not strictly to lose it, but rather "to be lost" in illusion and untruth (CUD: 137). The Judge
elaborates on this when he suggests that the lives and identities of such individuals are a riddle
that they cannot explain to themselves. The life of the individual in immediacy "disintegrates"
insofar as he cannot rise above its particular moments to understand it synoptically over time as
the Judge can from an ethical point of view (E/O II: 179). Without the eternal to assist him in
integrating the manifold aspects of his life as a human being in the temporal, his life can be
characterized as one of despair.

Anti-Climacus believes that most people are not self-conscious enough to achieve the
degree of integrity needed for a genuinely spiritual existence, but that this is nevertheless the
"task" for all human beings due to their eternal endowment (SUD: 35). He claims that an
awakening of self-consciousness requires "an essential interior consistency and a consistency in
something higher, at least in an idea" that would serve as an ultimate good to aim to realize in existence, and to shape one's life in accordance with (SUD: 107). This unifying principle or criterion would comprehend the multifarious aspects of an individual's temporal existence, and would orient him in a complex world by providing him with meaning, direction, and a goal to strive for in passionate concentration. By committing to it freely and granting it authority over him, he would achieve a stable sense of identity in his concrete existence, and bring order and regularity to his life as a whole. Anti-Climacus believes that the idea of God should serve as this criterion for any individual (SUD: 79), although it is generally the case that people select lesser criteria to view themselves under, such as family, the state, the workplace, or the community. By doing this, one goes on living immersed in the world's multiplicity, alienated from the eternal element in oneself.

Anti-Climacus explains that individuals who earnestly maintain this inner consistency are anxious about losing it. They worry this would happen if they fail to comply with the demands of the criterion under which they have imagined and built their life in the temporal:

In that very moment, the spell is perhaps broken, the mysterious power that bound all his capacities in harmony is diminished, the coiled spring is slackened; everything perhaps becomes a chaos in which the capacities in mutiny battle one another and plunge the self into suffering, a chaos in which there is no agreement within itself, no momentum, no impetus. The enormous machine that in consistency was so tractable in its steely strength, so supple in all its power, is out of order; and the better, the more imposing the machine was, the more dreadful the tangled confusion. (SUD: 107)

In this passage, Anti-Climacus suggests that when one cultivates inwardness through a resolution to live under a higher good or ideal, one casts one's own spell under the auspices of the eternal, and this counteracts the luring spell of worldliness in the temporal. The self-reflective individual who does this constantly recollects his mission and renews this resolution to avoid being sidetracked by the pull of the temporal, coiling himself in inwardness to gain stability and cohesion. Anti-Climacus believes, however, that most people exist without much inwardness in

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176 Neither Anti-Climacus nor Kierkegaard rule out that individuals might live spiritually with an idea of "the good" that does not involve the acceptance of any form of religion. In *Two Ages*, for instance, Kierkegaard praises those revolutionaries who centered their lives upon an idea during times of political turmoil, and so these individuals might qualify (TA: 65). One might also make ethical commitment the focus of one's life instead of any specific religion, as the Judge does. Although spirituality might be present in some shape in such lifestyles, Anti-Climacus believes that any way of life outside of Christianity is despair. They are therefore inadequate forms of spirituality. See Chapters 5 and 6.
being ignorant of being selves. In changing their general attitudes, beliefs, and practices based on
their immediate feelings, or on what the crowd is doing, "they never experience putting
everything together on one thing" (SUD: 107), and this threatens to lead to volatility in one's
behavior and character.

It would seem that by assimilating to conditions in their external environment, which is
formed and regulated through the basic spiritual achievements of culture and society, most
people are able to maintain unity and order in their lives as reflective beings, despite the myriad
occasions in which they might find themselves. Anti-Climacus, however, believes this primitive
form of integration between the self and the world does not give the self the integrity it needs in
containing the eternal within it, and that despite appearances to the contrary, sociocultural
institutions are not ultimately stable due to their being stationed in the temporal. Those who are
primarily shaped by their milieu or possessed by sensual desires are characterized by conflicting
or contradictory desires, beliefs, and attitudes that crop up at different times and on different
occasions, depending on the situation, which means they are fundamentally disintegrated as
selves. Without relying on the eternal to ground one's existence and hold one's life together, one
is dissipated in the chaos of the temporal, even if this chaos has been quelled for the time being
through the implements of society. This latent threat is a source of both anxiety and despair, even
if one remains unconscious of it.

One might object that having a stable personal identity and discerning continuity in one's
life over time is the rule rather than the exception, even for those who live in esthetic immediacy
or in the public mode. The character or temperament of most people does not seem to shift
drastically over the course of their lives, especially once they have reached a state of relative
maturity as adults. One's interests, hobbies, or core beliefs might change on occasion, but often
these are fairly consistent. Surely it is common to maintain lasting relationships with family,
friends, and the community, or to have a steady career or occupation through which one
understands oneself in existence. We also tend to have secular goals or projects that help define
us and provide us with a lasting sense of meaning and purpose, whether it is becoming wealthy
or successful at the workplace, or raising a family, starting a business or organization, or the like.
Hence, ordinary people can organize the multiplicity and complexity in their lives without
succumbing to the chaos Anti-Climacus describes, and most human beings are not nearly as
fickle as he suggests.
Nevertheless, in advocating the religious way of life, Anti-Climacus, rejects anything short of the Eternal as an adequate criterion under which to view one's life. This higher calling is lost if one's identity is completely wrapped up in impermanent conditions that are destined for an impending oblivion, even if one might retain a degree of consistency through them for the time being. These individuals might be said to subscribe to an ideal derived from their culture, but Kierkegaard concludes that an "ideal attainable in this world" is "no ideal," since these consign the individual to finitude rather than facilitating a deep appreciation of the infinite within him (JP I: 852). In his view, the infinite component of the self will outlast anything the world has to offer, and so suggests a hereafter. The individual should acknowledge and prepare himself for this in his daily life in the world by fixing on the proper sorts of ideals from within his earthly situation, rather than remaining ignorant of it or evading it by anchoring himself in fleeting conditions in the world. The apparent substantiality of the world only deceives the individual who believes it offers safe haven and is not essentially groundless.

Since individuals in the immediate esthetic or public modes are mostly "spiritless," they will generally exist in harmony with their immediate psychical life, their natural environment, and society without becoming deeply aware of themselves as different from these conditions. Their relatively smooth passage through temporality certainly provides them with a sense of security and enjoyment while it lasts. However, since the imagination subtly projects possibilities of hardship, misfortune, and destruction that threaten to become actualized at any moment, the secret of this way of life is nevertheless anxiety and despair, which is not mitigated through faith in God. These possibilities quickly become glaring as earthly conditions deteriorate and the chaos lurking beneath it all begins to manifest. Anti-Climacus writes, "When the enchantment of illusion is over, when existence begins to totter, then despair, too, immediately appears as that which lay underneath" (SUD: 44). He believes that when the tumult of temporality is eventually experienced and ruination looms heavily upon the individual, only the eternal can offer him genuine support and consolation, provided he has faith. While an individual like Don Giovanni feels "at home" in the natural world in soaking up the pleasures of seduction, the unity that he has with it is, upon closer examination, shallow and precarious; at any moment, he might succumb to the nothingness that bore him, and which induces the anxiety that fuels his actions.

Anti-Climacus explains that the disintegration of selfhood that occurs in despair can also be seen by looking at the imbalance of the self with respect to its other constituents, namely
those of infinitude, finitude, possibility and necessity (SUD: 29). In his account of despair as it
relates to these constituents of the self as a synthesis, the self that despairs due to a lack of
infinitude and possibility seems to most closely resemble the despair of ignorance. On his view,
a self that lacks infinitude would be constricted by its finitude, and would not have freed itself
from worldly ties so as to think and choose for itself, and become its own person. In letting
others determine how it defines itself, it would fail to use its imagination to recognize its unique
possibilities of being. With a narrow, secular approach to his existence, and patterning his beliefs
and behaviors around the throng of others, this person risks “becoming a number instead of a
self, just one more man, just one more repetition of this everlasting Einerlei [one and the same]”
(SUD: 33). Because finitude greatly outweighs infinitude in these individuals, these constituents
of the self are not integrated properly, and this imbalance is a source of despair.

Additionally, a self that lacks possibility would despair because principles of necessity
govern its entire life, without it being willing to admit the miraculous in existence. Anti-
Climacus says that those with a "philistine-bourgeois mentality" have succumbed to this mode of
despair (SUD: 41). He describes those with this mentality as being practical individuals who,
with their inordinate degree of common sense, have established their lives on the basis of
probabilities and calculations that they have gathered from empirical evidence. In doing so, they
do not allow room for possibilities in existence that exceed what can be accommodated within
the narrow constraints they have imposed on their imagination. For Anti-Climacus, an example
of this type of person would be the determinist or fatalist who does not believe in a supreme
being for whom anything is possible. When he is in a situation in which his ruination appears
inevitable, he is unable to pray to an omnipotent God who, in His concern for them, might step in
to assist him with his difficulty (SUD: 40). To many, it might seem spectacular to suppose there
exists a supreme being who might shatter the bonds of necessity and defy the expectations of
human understanding at will. But if we are not able to believe in the power of prayer or the
possibility of salvation, then we have nowhere to turn for help when, humanly speaking, a
situation is unsalvageable. Since devastation and tragedy is bound to arise for all human beings,
such as in the case of loss, sickness, or death, Anti-Climacus believes that to not believe in God
as a source of possibility beyond the scope of human reason is to despair.
2.3.3 Despair as a Faint Presence in The Life of Immediacy

Anti-Climacus recognizes that many persons who are mostly unconscious of being a self in despair might have a “dim idea” of its presence in their lives, whether it is through an underlying anxiety or a sense that something is amiss (SUD: 48). The typical response is to suppress or ignore this vague understanding, rather than earnestly confront their despair to discern its nature and significance. One way to do this would be to attribute one's underlying malaise to the impact of external factors, such as poor economic or political conditions, a dysfunctional family or social life, or the inability to satisfy an earthly desire. Once these conditions or obstacles are removed, the individual would believe that despair would no longer burden them, and they could go on living without disquietude. Another way would be to busily distract oneself from one's hidden sorrows by burying oneself in worldliness, and pursuing a bevy of engagements, projects, and relationships. Often those who establish this system of self-deception are not even aware they are doing so, but some might have an idea that they are indulging in a form of escapism by retreating from the intensification of self-consciousness.

Pascal arrived at a similar conclusion about the human condition in his Pensées. He writes, “The only good thing for men therefore is to be diverted from thinking of what they are, either by some occupation which takes their mind off it, or by some novel and agreeable passion which keeps them busy, like gambling, hunting, some absorbing show.”177 For Anti-Climacus and Pascal, the diversions employed in everyday life maintain an illusion of security, and by making people complacent in their ignorance, are able to prevent despair from protruding too heavily into the course of daily life and advancing to an intensified stage. Although this makes us comfortable for the time being, for these Christian thinkers, it has the negative effect of keeping us from acknowledging the truth about our miserable condition, as well as the offer of redemption through Christ.

Many of those who are ignorant of being selves are so unintentionally, but there are those who vaguely recognize the presence of despair in their life but want to remain ignorant about it. In reflecting on their lives, they have some idea of their freedom and infinitude as individuals, but they evade an earnest admittance of it by distracting themselves with worldly affairs. Content with their circumstances, they do not want to deal with the separation anxiety that comes with maintaining oneself apart from the group, and finding oneself alone in existence, with nothing to

177 Pascal, Pensées, p. 38.
fall back on. They realize that mental unrest ensues from calling the system of beliefs and practices they have inherited too heavily into question, and know it is much easier to fall in line with what others are doing, even if there are lingering doubts that it is the right thing to do. They are also afraid of taking responsibility for their own decisions and reconsidering, in light of the possibilities opened up before them, whether their values and priorities are the right ones to hold, knowing that guilt and internal conflict will likely follow. Since they want to remain ignorant of being selves to avoid dealing with the anxiety and despair that comes with self-knowledge, they would need to have some understanding of the self they take measures to remain ignorant of, but this would not be enough to translate into a spiritual awakening. This person might believe he is happy in choosing to forget about his "naked abstract self" (SUD: 55), but "despair is right there behind him," waiting to crop up at the moment in which self-consciousness is aroused from its earthly slumber (SUD: 52).

2.4 Criticisms of Kierkegaard's View of the Life of Immediacy

In treating the human condition as despair, Kierkegaard offers a profound phenomenological analysis of the everyday lives of most human beings, which uncovers many of the deepest insecurities and conflicts that we face. Yet many of his assumptions are problematic. In this section, I argue that one should be skeptical of the idea that the life of immediacy he describes is despair, since individuals in this stage of existence are likely to have no knowledge of this, and to disagree with the claim that they are. I also argue that Kierkegaard has no reason to think that "spiritless" individuals are bringing despair upon themselves, since they lack a significant degree of self-reflection and will to begin with. If we are disintegrated individuals as he claims, then this is a tragedy inflicted on us by God, or whatever created us. Lastly, I take issue with Kierkegaard's misanthropy, which he betrays by ridiculing the way of life of most people. If Christianity requires that one have compassion for one's suffering neighbor, and to love them as one loves oneself, then Kierkegaard and his Christian pseudonym are very poor Christians.

2.4.1 Against the View that Those Who Believe They are Happy are in Despair

Those who accept the customary view of despair rather than the technical view given by Anti-Climacus have strong reasons to object to the claim that the life of immediacy described in
Kierkegaard's works is in fact despair. These individuals, in their "ignorance" of spiritual matters, do not appear to be in despair, nor do they believe themselves to be. Without the misery that accompanies what we ordinarily understand as despair, there is no prima facie reason to suppose they are, or that they would want to escape their condition to defeat it. Evidence based on testimony or experience might seem to better indicate the presence of despair than the tortuous speculations of Anti-Climacus, at any rate. Yet he remains convinced that only someone with a superficial understanding of the issue could think that these appearances coincide with the reality of things, which only a person with a deeper knowledge about himself can discover. Recall that on his view, "that which, humanly speaking, is utterly beautiful and lovable—a womanly youthfulness that is perfect peace and harmony and joy—is nevertheless despair" (SUD: 25). This remark demonstrates how far from the customary understanding of despair Anti-Climacus takes us by appropriating the concept for his own purposes, and how much confusion this can invite. On his view, the most cheerful and hopeful person alive would still be in despair so long as they lack the spiritual awareness he describes. In saying something so outlandish, some might claim that he no longer appears to be speaking of despair in any meaningful sense, and that he is simply abusing the language. Even if there are problems under the surface that one is ignorant of, so long as these do not make their presence felt in everyday life, it would seem that one would remain free of despair, so long as we understand despair in the usual sense.

Interestingly, the view that it would be wrong to say that the life of immediacy is one of anxiety and despair is supported by one of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms. A claims that although he is anxious, “Don Giovanni’s life is not despair” (E/O I: 129). He does not elaborate on this claim, but there appear to be a couple different reasons for this. First, life goes very smoothly for Don Giovanni. He has little trouble satisfying his desires or achieving his aims, and so he does not have to deal with major opposition, adversity, or crises. Although a single woman provides him with no lasting satisfaction, going through 1,003 of them unimpeded keeps him content, even if it only distracts him from the anxiety that broods beneath the ebullient surface of his life. Secondly, and perhaps because of his ease of living, Don Giovanni does not reflect on his existence or his actions, whether it is about trivial matters pertaining to his natural condition, or more serious questions regarding his life’s significance, his mortality, or his greater purpose beyond exploiting women. The pleasures he obtains through his immersion in the sensuous supply him with all he needs to happily continue his adventures, without the need for a critical
examination of his way of life, or even being concerned about finding meaning. While no human being could live exactly like this, it is plausible that some people enjoy a life relatively unburdened by obstacles, difficulties, or excessive reflection that would drastically disrupt their natural spontaneity and bring them to a heightened form of self-awareness. Perhaps it is inaccurate to claim that such individuals—like the lovable, youthful women—are in despair, even if an underlying anxiety or a repressed suffering besets them.

Anti-Climacus evidently thinks he is justified in regarding such a condition as despair because he supposes that despair more in line with our customary understanding is concealed beneath the veneer of the life of immediacy, only needing the right circumstances to emerge in awareness. Rejecting this view, Theunissen argues, “there is no unconscious despair. We can have an inadequate idea of despair; however, we cannot be in despair without somehow knowing it.” Yet Freud and his followers have made a strong case for accepting that various emotions, beliefs, desires, and so on can lurk within the psyche while being suppressed from conscious awareness. It is plausible, for instance, to think that someone might harbor a secret happiness about the misfortune of others, or a prejudice against a select group of people, even though they believe they do not. One can also see that on Anti-Climacus’ account, despair in ignorance does not have to remain entirely hidden from conscious life: it gains expression through the bustling activity that keeps many people distracted from bigger problems that would consume them if they stopped to consider them closely. The claim that despair cannot be unconscious does not pose an insurmountable objection to his account, as Theunissen believes.

While one might despair unconsciously, it seems questionable for Anti-Climacus to make the sweeping assumption that every person who happily lives an immediate way of life must be in despair at an unconscious level, which he does make (SUD: 22). As I argued in the previous section, Anti-Climacus and the Judge believe this based on their presuppositions about the nature of the self as a synthesis of eternity and temporality, finitude and infinitude, and possibility and necessity. The key idea is that a human being is disintegrated or imbalanced as a self so long as he privileges the temporal aspect of his being without appreciating its eternal aspect, and that this is a source of both anxiety and despair. On the teleological account of selfhood they provide, whoever does not integrate these components effectively by taking up the ways of life they

\[178\] Theunissen, *Kierkegaard's Concept of Despair*, p. 15.

\[179\] In chapter five, I explain how these structures are evident in the Judge's account of selfhood, although he does not delineate them as precisely as Anti-Climacus.
endorse cannot hope to eliminate it. Their view of despair and their proposed solutions to it are therefore inseparable from their understanding of the self; if you reject their assumptions about the constitution of the self as a synthesis of contradictory components that exists in relation to the Eternal, or are not convinced that achieving integrity and balance with respect to these components is the self's telos (or that it even has a telos), then there is little reason to prefer their view of despair to the customary view that most individuals are not in despair.

This limitation might seem to be a weakness of their account of despair, but my aim throughout this work is to show that Kierkegaard provides a convincing phenomenological account of the self that would suggest that the self is constituted in a paradoxical manner, and that this position has considerable merit. Because of its constitution, the self has difficulty harmonizing contradictory aspects of itself. However, given that individuals in ignorance can go on happily despite such internal discord, as in the case of the youthful woman who exhibits few signs of unconscious turmoil, I argue that it does not necessarily follow from this that they are in despair, unless we understand despair in the technical sense given by Anti-Climacus. But if we do that, the argument becomes question-begging, and the meaning of the term comes radically apart from its meaning in common usage.

I also believe the paradoxical conception of the human being offered in Kierkegaard's work succeeds in posing a major challenge to naturalistic or monistic accounts of humankind, which lose sight of the individual in their effort to comprehend the universe as a whole, often in a scientific manner. These accounts attempt to explain the nature or telos of the individual by appealing to her place within the universe as a totality or system, but this is problematic, given the freedom the self has through its infinite component. As a synthesis of paradoxical components, the individual has difficulty fitting into a natural or logical system, and does not entirely coincide with such systems. The teleological claim that Anti-Climacus and the Judge take to follow from their conception of the human being is more suspect, however, even if the developmental model that Kierkegaard provides by appealing to the different "stages of life" lends credence to it. There has been much disagreement among philosophers about what the self essentially is, or whether it even has an essence, with no consensus in sight. Supposing we rule out naturalistic or monistic accounts of the human being and look toward those views that are

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180 I give basic arguments that Kierkegaard would have against the monistic and naturalistic accounts of the human being in section 1.2.
dualistic, we are still left with competing alternatives on this issue. Kantians, for instance, argue that humans are essentially rational beings who are normatively governed by universal laws and principles that we give to ourselves *a priori* in the act of thinking. Traditional theists, who are often quick to draw a firm distinction between soul (or spirit) and body, oppose this view in their belief that we are essentially God's creatures to whom directives are given by divine fiat. Existentialists like Sartre reject that the human being has a determinate essence like other things in the natural world, and think it is up to us to decide who we are and how we ought to live through our conscious ability to transcend our given situation.\(^{181}\) This is also an issue within Kierkegaard's own authorship, when he would have us decide between esthetic, ethical, or religious ways of living. Although he intends to show that there are conflicts intrinsic to the esthetic and ethical modes that should push us into religion, the multiple possibilities we have at our disposal seem to undermine the notion that the self has a definite *telos* or essence that we can accurately discern at all. In the final moment of his thought, one is supposed to believe that one is a self before God with the task of attaining eternal salvation on the basis of faith and not knowledge. This stance would appeal to those willing to accept Christianity as a remedy for the problems of human existence where others have failed, but it also leaves room for skepticism or doubt about what it means to be a human being.

Someone who endorses a paradoxical conception of the self nevertheless has good reason to think that one can be "disintegrated" or "dissipated" in ignorance in the way that the different authors describe without this being despair. This would be the case in figures like Don Giovanni or the youthful woman, who are not acutely self-conscious or reflective, but for whom joy arises spontaneously and effortlessly. Perhaps this state of naivety is in fact the best position to be in for anyone who can maintain it, even if it means that does not have much of a perspective on one's life as a unified whole, or that one has no greater purpose than enjoying life and its beauty. Perhaps the inner consistency and stability that comes with an earnest commitment to endow one's life with an ethical or religious character, which occurs in the more intense stages of despair, is exactly what should be avoided in order to ward off the misery typically associated with despair.

\(^{181}\) See Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, pp. 20-22.
2.4.2 Against the View that Despair In Ignorance Happens By Choice

In explaining what it means to despair in ignorance as a "spiritless" individual, Anti-Climacus points to a close relationship between spirit and the intellect. These individuals do not care about knowing the truth about themselves or becoming self-conscious in the deeper sense because "the sensate in them usually far outweighs their intellectuality" (SUD: 43). In the last chapter, I explained that reflective, imaginative, and volitional capacities are essential to selfhood, and that these capacities correspond with the infinite component of the self. These capacities would certainly seem to include the intellect. But this leads to the question of whether every individual has intellectual capacities strong enough to allow them to understand the truth about themselves as spirit, and so to be en route to defeating despair. It is quite obvious that some people are naturally endowed with stronger intellectual abilities than others, and that this is one of the many limitations that we have as human beings living in circumstances beyond our control. It would seem those individuals with a greater intellectual capacity would, in general, tend to be more reflective, and hence more likely to appreciate deeper insights about their nature as selves. Those who are less reflective would have more difficulty in thinking critically and generally about their given situation, and so would have more difficulty separating themselves from their original immediacy so as to become intensely self-conscious as spirit. Yet Anti-Climacus and Kierkegaard give no reason to think that we choose the strength of our intellectual capacities, in the same way that we did not originally choose to have an intellect. Presumably, those who have a weaker intellect would want to have a stronger one if it was possible, but unfortunately it is not. It seems, then, that those who are less intellectually gifted might be unable

182 An explanation of the relationship between spirit and the rational part of the intellect is conspicuously absent in Kierkegaard's work. Many in the philosophical (and Christian) tradition that influenced Kierkegaard, including Plato and Kant, believed the rational faculty to be integral to the existence of the self. Broadly speaking, reason occupies the central place in their thought in the way that spirit does in Kierkegaard's thought. Kierkegaard often refers to knowledge and understanding in the context of spiritual activity, but his tendency to avoid mentioning reason would appear to be a major oversight in his thought. This leads one to wonder whether he intends to suppress it from view to distinguish himself from his predecessors. On the other hand, perhaps he just did not believe that the ability to reason was crucial for the development and preservation of selfhood, despite the importance he attributes to knowing oneself in existence. When he does invoke reason, it is often to point out how it must defer to the passions in order to set the stage for faith. "Indeed, no gaze is as sharp-sighted as that of faith, and yet faith, humanly speaking, is blind; reason, understanding, is, humanly speaking, sighted, but faith is against the understanding" (WA: 132). Elsewhere, he suggests that reason and understanding are rooted fundamentally in passion, and that they break down in the moment of faith (PF: 47). In his tripartite theory of the human being, Klages departs from Kierkegaard by explicitly linking spirit with reason, while psyche and body are constituents of a vital impetus that spirit is antagonistic toward, just as in the thought of Kierkegaard. See Spirit as Adversary of the Soul.
to know themselves as spirit or will to be that through no real fault of their own. In this case, it would be wrong to accuse them of bringing despair upon themselves and to hold them responsible for their spiritless ignorance, assuming they are in despair as Anti-Climacus claims (SUD: 17).

In addition to dispositional factors, there are environmental factors that might inhibit someone from achieving the degree of self-reflection necessary for being aware of oneself as spirit and defeating despair. Many are forced into oppressive conditions, or lack access to quality education, or must attend to pressing issues of material sustenance that would seem to impede the kind of rigorous self-examination or intellectual growth needed to "be spirit" in Anti-Climacus' sense. For example, a manual laborer struggling to obtain the basic necessities for survival for himself or his family probably does not have the leisure to ponder deeper questions concerning who he is and whether he is living a good life. Perhaps his options are extremely limited given his onerous circumstances, unless he decides it would be better to carelessly leave everything behind. In Anti-Climacus' view, only those who are in a fortunate enough position to arrive at deeper knowledge of spiritual matters can ever hope to overcome despair, but this would seem to require idle time or opportunities for religious and philosophical contemplation that many people simply do not have. One might argue that it is not difficult to become a Christian or learn of its message in Western society, but for Anti-Climacus, this is a mistake. If an individual has not diligently thought through the terms of Christianity and her life in relation to it because she has become Christian through inheritance, she is better described as a pagan in Christendom than a genuine Christian (SUD: 45). A significant portion of the population therefore would seem to be at a disadvantage in coming to self-awareness from the very beginning, without this being their choice. Perhaps if they were differently situated, they would want to reach the lofty spiritual peaks suggested by Anti-Climacus by awakening spiritually from the life of immediacy.

Kierkegaard, of course, would not accept either of these excuses for spiritlessness. He claims, "spirit must not be considered identical with talent and genius, by no means, but identical with resolution in passion. A simple person can feel the need for the decisively religious" (TA: 22). He therefore holds that the self-knowledge he insists on is not difficult to come by, and that even meager intellectual abilities or earthly conditions would suffice to elevate a person to the proper spiritual heights, so long as they are willing to acquire this knowledge. To be sure, there
would likely be many who are "spiritless" not because they are unable to become spirit or know themselves as that for the foregoing reasons, but because they do not want to be. However, this does not appear to be the demographic Anti-Climacus has in mind when describing despair in ignorance. Those persons would be those who despair because they do not want to be who they are, which, as we will see in the next chapter, is a different category of despair. In contrast, many of those who are spiritless would seem to be in the curious position of being unable to will as selves due to a lack of reflection. Anti-Climacus writes:

Generally speaking, consciousness—that is, self-consciousness—is decisive with regard to the self. The more consciousness, the more self; the more consciousness, the more will; the more will, the more self. A person who has no will at all is not a self; but the more will he has, the more self-consciousness he has also. (SUD: 29)

Given that spirit is the self, the individual who is spiritless lacks self-awareness and will. He is mostly stuck in the pre-reflective consciousness of immediacy, with just a "dash of reflection" to take him out of it (SUD: 58). "Immediacy actually has no self," as Anti-Climacus writes, because "it does not know itself" (SUD: 53). But without being adequately conscious of himself, the individual living in immediacy can have no real will of his own. Most of his actions are motivated by desires issuing from his natural spontaneity and not from his higher-order volitions, which would require deliberate reflection on himself and his natural condition (SUD: 52). Of course, he might entertain light thoughts of being a self or about making his own choices, but because he is not deeply conscious of being spirit by having separated himself from his immediate condition, freedom has yet to awaken, and he is not in a position to will as a self. He is, as Frankfurt would put it, a wanton rather than a person.

Anti-Climacus does well to conceive of this form of despair as ignorance rather than a genuine misuse of the will for this reason. But so long as they do not will as a self, they cannot be bringing their despair upon themselves as he claims must happen in all cases of despair. If they are in despair, it must be occurring through the unfolding of their natural spontaneity, rather than through their own spiritual acts. We have seen that Anti-Climacus associates anxiety with despair. Because the human being is naturally anxious in virtue of existing amid the nothingness of immediacy, and is also anxious about the freedom and infinitude that he possesses as a self, it seems that he is in despair by default, regardless of whether he wills it or not. Human beings
should also not be held responsible for being in despair as he claims (SUD: 16). To be responsible for a given state of affairs, you would have to be involved in willing such a state into existence. But these individuals would not be intending to be spiritless or ignorant; they just happen to be that way by nature. Therefore, they should not be held responsible for it.

In an effort to explain how spiritless individuals can be held responsible for being in despair, Davenport argues that they must have made a primordial choice to be this way. He states, "the aesthete has a hand in his wantonness because his innermost self or volitional identity consists in the third-order will not to have second-order volitions" with respect to the first-order desires that move him to act. 183 This cannot be right prima facie, because it would seem to require a degree of reflection that the individual living in immediacy is incapable of at this stage in his development. For instance, it would be inappropriate to accuse the young child of choosing not to control himself or direct his life, when the child lacks the self-awareness necessary for this. Davenport avoids this worry by claiming that this third-order act of will is not undertaken in reflective consciousness, but he does not explain how this is possible. He cites Kant's *Religion Within the Bounds of Bare Reason* in his essay, and so perhaps has Kant in mind in framing his view. In this work, Kant attempts to explain how it is possible that we hold people responsible for their behavior and judge that they are capable of making choices about how they will act, when we do not do this for other animals. He concludes that for this to occur, our moral character as human beings must have been determined by a primordial choice that we made freely outside of time. 184 He does not believe that God originally established this character, or that it is imposed upon us by conditions in the natural world, since then the kind of person we are and the choices we make would be the consequence of necessity and not freedom. It would then be unfair to attribute moral responsibility to us, in the same way that it is inappropriate to do so with other animals, which act in accordance with casual principles in the natural world rather than in freedom. On Kant's view, an individual like Don Giovanni would have initially chosen an immoral lifestyle, rather than being born into it by fate. Far from being without a will, he would have had a will all along, and so we can hold him responsible for his bad behavior. Since the self's freedom originates in the eternal component within it, one might conceive of the "third-

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183 Davenport, "The Meaning of Kierkegaard's Choice Between the Aesthetic and the Ethical," p. 95.
184 See Kant's *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, especially pp. 21-22.
order act" that Davenport describes as a timeless choice in the Kantian sense, however inscrutable such a deed might be.

I believe that for it to make sense to understand despair as the responsibility of the "spiritless" individual, or to conceive of him as bringing it upon himself in the way Davenport does, modifications would need to be made to Kierkegaard's account so that the will plays a more prominent role in human life in its earliest stages. This account would likely resemble the one Kant offers. While it is needed to make his view consistent, I can find little textual evidence to support the claim that Anti-Climacus (or Kierkegaard) held a view of this sort. Kant's account prefigures the idealist thesis that the self originally posits itself in its existence, and so it is unlikely that Anti-Climacus would endorse a position like it. As a theist, he believes the self is established in its existence by a supremely great power, and the Kantian view simply grants the self too much power over its original condition to be compatible with his view. Moreover, Anti-Climacus claims that the self is established in existence as a synthesis of the eternal and temporal, rather than originating in a timeless state in which it establishes the character it will assume in time. On the other hand, there are those who despair unconsciously who will to be ignorant of being selves, and in this case, it would be reasonable to hold them responsible for being spiritless. But it is not reasonable to hold them responsible for bringing upon themselves the state of immediacy that automatically elicits their despair in the first place. It is this incipient condition that the individual who wills to be ignorant intends to remain in, fearing a worsening of his condition if he breaks from the life of immediacy, whether it is esthetic immediacy or the public mode.

If despair is generally not a state that spiritless persons will into being, and they are nonetheless all in despair, then it would seem that their despair must be affected by either an external motivation or by whatever established them as a self. Anti-Climacus undermines his own position and corroborates the idea that despair can be affected by arguing that an ignorant individual might become conscious of being in despair due to some earthly misfortune that strikes or "impinges" upon him (SUD: 51). The type of despair that might occur in immediacy, he explains, "is only a suffering, a succumbing to the pressure of external factors; in no way does it come from within as an act" (SUD: 51). An example of this form of despair suggested by Anti-Climacus is a case of a young girl who despairs over the loss of her beloved, whom her happiness depended on and whom had meant everything to her (SUD: 20). Assuming the young
girl has little reflection or self-consciousness to speak of, Anti-Climacus suggests that she would not be bringing despair upon herself through her own act in response to the loss, but that her despair would be foisted upon her by forces beyond her control. As Anti-Climacus explains, since her despair resulted from external conditions or by fate, she would quickly recover if these conditions changed and her beloved returned to her (SUD: 52). If she despaired over herself through her own act, then external conditions would not be the reason for her despair, and an improvement in them would be no guarantee that her despair would resolve.

Anti-Climacus appears to recognize that this possibility of affected despair would result in a blatant reversal of his original position, and introduces confusion to mitigate the inconsistency in his account. He maintains that it is really “an innocent abuse of language” to call this despair, since despair in the strict sense occurs through the self's own activity (SUD: 51). On his view, in order for a person to truly know what it means to despair, he must understand that he is really in despair because he has lost or alienated himself from the eternal through his preoccupation with temporal matters. The individual in ignorance of being a self, however, has no awareness of this loss, or knowledge that it was his own doing, and so he claims this state is "not despair in the strict sense" (SUD: 13). However, he then goes on to say that the individual with affected despair “stands and points to what he calls despair," but this "is not despair, and in the meantime, sure enough, despair is right there behind him without his realizing it" (SUD: 52). One should not pardon Anti-Climacus for his equivocation on this issue, however, since in passages like this, he obviously intends to suggest that those whose despair is trigged by an earthly suffering or a life of immediacy are, at the basic level, in despair in the strict sense. After all, these modes of existence are most common. If those in the immediate stage of life are not actually in despair, then it is not universal to the human condition, and the central thesis that made his work so intriguing to begin with collapses.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ Beabout claims that Anti-Climacus does not believe that all of us have to deal with despair, but only those who have misused their freedom. For example, the young child who has not yet made free choices would be an example of someone not in despair. He argues that Anti-Climacus "cannot claim that all human beings are in despair and that despair is essential to being human, or else despair would not be the fault of the individual" (Freedom and its Misuses, p. 101). However, Anti-Climacus goes so far as to claim "no human being ever lived and no one lives outside of Christendom who has not despaired," demonstrating how radical his view actually is (SUD: 22). Beabout defends his interpretation by arguing that Anti-Climacus uses overstatement for rhetorical effect, but this cannot be right, since his radical position is a logical consequence of his view that any human being who is ignorant of being a self is nevertheless in despair.
But how could they be in despair, if despair were not already affected in them by something beyond their control? With little to no will of one's own, it does not seem possible to will to despair in the strict sense, or to lose the eternal through one's own choosing. Even if despair spontaneously arose through the self's own activity, occurring behind its back, as it were, it would have to be something happening to the self, since it is not under the self’s volitional control. As a result, either we should say that these individuals are not actually in despair, or that they are, but are affected by it. Although Anti-Climacus admits both of these states as possibilities to help lend credibility to his account, he obfuscates the issue by insisting they are always, at bottom, in despair in the strict sense, and at fault for it. Nevertheless, he cannot successfully resolve the inconsistency plaguing it without flatly accepting one of these two options, along with its undesirable consequences.

In holding individuals responsible for their despair, Anti-Climacus rejects the notion that despair can be affected by what originally established the self in its existence as a synthesis of the eternal and temporal, which he takes to be the God of monotheism. He argues that despair, as a misrelation in the self, could not exist if the self in its original state was not "in the proper relationship," for then "despair would be something that lies in human nature as such" (SUD: 15-16). The thought seems to be that despair is to be understood dialectically by consideration of those dispositions that are not despair, and that if it belonged to everyone essentially, then it could not be said to belong to anyone. Since we would have no state of mind to contrast it with, we would not be able to conceive of it at all. God must therefore have created the self as a perfectly integrated and balanced synthesis of contradictory components before these components become misrelated through its own free choice. The emergence of despair is thereby contingent on an awareness of an unimpaired state of being. I have done my best to reconstruct Anti-Climacus' argument, but if this is indeed his argument, it is a bad one. Certainly there are many things that would seem to lie in human nature as such, such as consciousness or embodiment, but their pervasiveness does not keep us from understanding them or distinguishing them from other things. If Anti-Climacus is correct in claiming that despair is universal to the human condition, despair might be an essential part of our nature in the same sort of manner.

More importantly, the assertion that the self does not begin its existence in despair is incompatible with the account of human development given by Anti-Climacus and supported in Kierkegaard's other works, including those from his other pseudonyms. As we have seen, the self
begins in a state of immediacy, without possessing a significant degree of self-consciousness or freedom. In its immersion in sensuousness or in worldly affairs, it does not originally know of its eternal nature, or that it has a higher destiny as spirit. It can only discover this through reflection, which the immediate esthete or the individual living in the "public" mode lacks a significant degree of. Moved to act by his natural spontaneity, and passive to the unfolding of immediate desire, this individual has no real will of his own, and is what Anti-Climacus describes as "spiritless." Since spirit emerges in existence on his account, it is not that the individual begins his life reflectively conscious of himself as spirit or volitionally active, and then degenerates into spiritlessness, losing or ignoring his capacities as a self or his relationship with God through his own bad decisions. If that were his view, it would look much like the Kantian idea of a "timeless deed" that the self performs in establishing its character, which I argued he would not accept. It is rather that one begins one's life as spiritless, and gradually becomes conscious of oneself as spirit and capable of making one's own decisions through actualizing one's potential as a self. It therefore seems that the self is a misrelation in its original state of ignorance after all, since it is engrossed in the temporal aspect of its existence, which includes finitude and necessity.

Additionally, if the components of the self were in a proper relationship when God "releases it from his hand" at the moment of its creation, then its eternal and temporal aspects would be properly aligned, and it would not begin its existence as disintegrated (SUD: 16). We have seen, however, that for both A and Anti-Climacus human life begins in immediacy, and that to live in immediacy is to be disintegrated as a self due to existing amid nothingness. Therefore, the eternal and temporal aspects of the self cannot be in the proper relationship at the moment of its creation as Anti-Climacus claims. As I discussed in the first section, the figure of Don Giovanni appears to represent the most primitive form of selfhood conceivable, and so would seem to be the perfect example of a self immediately released from God's hand. If Anti-Climacus is right, then the components of his self should be well-integrated in relation to God, but one can recognize that his life has disintegrated from the very beginning. He is not uncorrupted, but demonic. Without the eternal to stabilize and ground his existence, Don Giovanni's life consists of a series of disparate moments in temporality that lack coherence or continuity. Unable to appreciate his life as a whole from a unified perspective, his actions are motivated by anxiety and blind desire rather than by real conscious intent or an understanding of his predicament. But in beginning his life more like a force of nature than a self, there is nothing Don Giovanni could
have done to contribute to his disintegration as a self, or the misrelation of the eternal and
temporal in him. Lacking in wholeness from the very beginning, he is innocent of any abuse of
freedom that would have caused this. This argument would largely extend to immediate esthetes
and those in the public mode, since they share many of the same characteristics as Don Giovanni,
despite being more self-conscious and possessing a will to some minimal extent.

Of course, Anti-Climacus would not accept the notion of affected despair. He writes, “No
one is born devoid of spirit, and no matter how many go to their death with this spiritlessness as
the one and only outcome of their lives, it is not the fault of life” (SUD: 102). I have shown that
this view has insurmountable difficulties on his own phenomenological account of human
development, and that spiritless ignorance would seem to be the fate of many without their
choosing it. Allowing for despair to be affected by an external condition would resolve the
inconsistencies in his account, but it would also disturbingly point to God as its ultimate origin.
In his view, God is the omnipotent ruler of the natural world and everything in it, which He
creates out of nothing. For Anti-Climacus, this nothingness threatens the human being in its
existence from the very beginning, and produces both anxiety and despair, even if one remains
ignorant of it. If that is the case, God must have allotted us these precarious earthly conditions
that elicit despair in the first place.

To make matters worse, in the next chapter, I argue that on this account, it would seem
that God admitted a fault into our spiritual nature irrespective of what natural conditions hold, or
more precisely, that the self was established as a misrelation to begin with in being paradoxically
constituted. Most Christians would have little trouble admitting either of these possibilities under
the Augustinian notion of hereditary sin. They could explain our despair by appealing to the
perversion of our nature, which Scripture declares to have resulted when the first man and
woman disobeyed God’s orders by eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Anti-
Climacus rejects this, evidently not wanting to undermine the idea of a just God or to mitigate
the responsibility of individuals for their own condition. By his own lights, however, it would
appear inescapable to conclude that the form of despair which embroils us in the first part of life
is a suffering brought upon us out of necessity by God, without this being our fault. Befallen by
distressing circumstances we do not control but must work through to the best of our ability, and
disintegrated as selves, his phenomenological investigation ends up suggesting that the human
condition is tragic.
2.4.3 Against Kierkegaard's Contempt for Human Life

Anti-Climacus believes that most people are ignorant of being spirit, and have a lifestyle that can be categorized as immediate. He does not just describe the lives of these fellow human beings as spiritually inadequate or empty, but deems them downright contemptible. He calls those lives that are not properly spiritual “wasted” (SUD: 26). From a superior and more spiritual vantage point, he declares that he could “weep an eternity over the existence of such wretchedness” (SUD: 27). Such remarks are ubiquitous in Kierkegaard's authorship, and not only in the pseudonymous writings. They expose an undercurrent of elitism and resentment pervading much of his discourse on human existence, and arguably a hatred of humanity. Kierkegaard was well aware of his hostile attitude toward the great majority of human beings, who in his view, are nowhere near fulfilling their potential as spirit:

To contend with people—well, yes, this appeals to me in a certain sense. By nature I am so polemical that I really feel in my element only when surrounded by human mediocrity and scurviness. But on one condition: that I be permitted silently to disdain, to satisfy the passion that is in my soul, disdain—for which my life as an author has richly provided an occasion. (MLW: 92)

On Kierkegaard's view, even those individuals who achieve greatness in secular enterprises do so in vain if they do not know themselves deeply as spirit, and hence do not view themselves in strict opposition to everyone and everything around them. Many of those "spiritless" individuals who earn his disdain are decent, hard-working people with a love for family and friends, and a concern for the welfare of society. Perhaps they are not incredibly passionate, but they are nevertheless happy with their lives and generally intend to do no harm. But as Anti-Climacus states, in this life, "happiness is not a qualification of spirit" due to our underlying despair (SUD: 25). This statement betrays the inhuman consequences of "being spirit" as he construes it. Apparently, you are not living spiritually unless you hold petty grievances against people like the lovable, youthful woman, work ceaselessly to undermine your own happiness through excessive self-reflection, and are disgusted by any happiness or contentment that others might find. While human behavior does often leave us with much to be indignant about, whether it is our propensity to selfishness, greed, aggression, or our susceptibility to adopt a narrow group-mentality without much questioning, to refuse to admit the good that ordinary people can do for one another or the joy in even some of the more trivial occasions in life would itself seem to be
cause for despair. Such a spiteful attitude toward otherwise blameless manners of existing seems unbecoming for a person who "rests transparently" in faith (SUD: 14).

Furthermore, while it is a none too surprising fact that many of us take our mind off negative emotions by staying busy with other things, it would be unfair to reduce the majority of human life to diversionary tactics that we use (whether consciously or not) to distract ourselves from learning the terrible truth about our condition. Human beings are active by nature, and this activity manifests in many forms, whether it is in our struggle for survival, the work we do, our capacity for creativity and imagination, socializing, or our need for entertainment. Some of this activity might indeed ward off negative thoughts or feelings, but not all of it can be considered as forms of self-deception. These are just things that we need to do so as long as we want to continue to survive and be human beings, and not risk halting all practical activity by retreating into an otherworldly life of idle solitude (or if we are talented enough, a prolific authorship). It is unclear what it would even mean for an individual to spend all of his days "undistracted," thinking incessantly about who he is or what God demands of him, or the fundamental truths of existence. Certainly we all have material needs that must be met to live, and social needs that must be met to keep us from going insane, and this would naturally require participation in what for Kierkegaard and Pascal is wretched worldliness. To understand human life in such terms as they do bespeaks profound moral illness, and a lack of sympathy for human beings who are persevering in an existence they did not ask for, and under conditions that they do not control. If most are indeed vulnerable to self-deception in ignoring painful truths, perhaps some amount of self-deception is desirable, and we would do well to learn from them. If so, we should not be anxiously on guard against it, or ridiculing people who fall short of our own proud standard of authenticity.

Kierkegaard also seems to seriously underestimate the amount of self-awareness and will people generally have. As I argued earlier in this chapter, it is unlikely that he would agree with Frankfurt in calling those in the "public" mode full-fledged persons.186 Taylor notes, with some perplexity, that for Anti-Climacus, it seems the well-known bourgeoisie citizen is not self-conscious in any important sense.187 "In Christendom," Anti-Climacus writes, the average person is "also a Christian, goes to church every Sunday, listens to and understands the pastor...he dies,

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186 Frankfurt claims that nonhuman animals and very young children would be examples of wantons, but not average adults (The Importance of What We Care About, p. 16).
187 Taylor, Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship, p. 146
the pastor ushers him into eternity for ten rix-dollars—but a self he was not, and a self he did not become" (SUD: 52). Now, the average human being believes they are conscious of being a self that is capable of making its own decisions and thinking about its own life, however much they might be influenced by the direction of others. Unless we are skeptics about other minds, we should take them at their word for that. The degree or intensity of self-consciousness and willpower, however, is more difficult to measure, although admittedly, it might be possible to make educated guesses from another's expressions, attitudes, or behaviors like Kierkegaard does. This difficulty poses a problem not only for Kierkegaard's theorizing, but my own objection. Yet if Kierkegaard were able to engage with people in a less critical and more empathetic way, perhaps he would recognize that they generally have more self-knowledge than he gives them credit for, and that they have a vivid inner life of their own as selves. With some humility, he might even realize that they suffer through the hardships of human existence too, rather than coasting through life like animals in immediacy.

Kierkegaard's wry observations of human life indicate that he was unable to encounter other people face-to-face in reality and actually listen to what they had to say. His perception of them was skewed by his formidable imagination, which sized them up from afar while bringing all of his prejudices and animosity to bear on them. To his credit, Kierkegaard seems to have recognized this theoretical approach toward other human beings was one of his shortcomings. He writes, "even if I may have a psychologist's eye—I nevertheless see people in such universality that I truly can be said to see no one."188 This is an unfortunate (and potentially dangerous) consequence of spiritual acts of negation, which Kierkegaard wielded with rare intensity with his extraordinary intelligence and his repulsion for all things worldly. His refusal to temper the negativity of detached reflection is out of keeping with the value he placed on positive, concrete living. It signifies not only an imbalance as a self in the direction of infinitude, but also a pitfall of his thought.189 While his psychological insights into human nature are more often than not ingenious, in some cases, he presents a caricature of how people actually live, and displays a callous inability to relate to the plight of other people. Those readers who intend to apply his

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188 See Pap. X 5 B 18 223-224 n.d., 1849. As quoted in the supplemental material to Sickness Unto Death, p. 158.
189 Kierkegaard was well aware of this fault in his character. Anti-Climacus writes of the despair of a "poet-existence" verging on the religious, which he describes as "the sin of poetizing instead of being, of relating to the good and the true through the imagination instead of being that—that is, existentially striving to be that" (SUD: 78). In his Journals, Kierkegaard confirms that this part of the book is about him (JP VI: 6437). In this section, I question whether he is in fact relating to the good and the true in his religious poetizing like he thinks.
thought to their lives in the world, and who take love for one's neighbor seriously, should be wary of accepting all of his conclusions, so long as they aim to maintain "purity of heart" and to regard others humanely.

2.5 Conclusion

Anti-Climacus’ claim that those who live without a great deal of self-reflection are in despair should remain unconvincing. One can be perfectly happy as an immediate esthete seeking basic forms of enjoyment, or as a social conformist in the public mode, even if there are conflicts occurring at an unconscious level due to the paradoxical nature of the self. If we accept that the self is disintegrated in its absorption in the life of the world, which it did not in the first instance choose, then we should admit that this condition must be affected by whatever established the self in existence. Tragically, it cannot be a state that one is responsible for bringing on oneself. It might seem that this position leads to fatalism, but it does not. In the following chapters, I endorse Kierkegaard's suggestion that the human being is capable of attaining freedom of thought and will upon emerging from his natural immediacy in a heightened state of reflection. Since many of those who live mostly within immediacy with minimal reflection consider themselves happy, however, I reject the suggestion that despair is universal to the human condition, though it is likely more common than traditionally believed. Although many might despair unconsciously, it would only directly impact a segment of the population for whom self-consciousness has intensified, or in other words, for whom individual freedom has come to be at stake. Anti-Climacus classifies these more obvious manifestations of despair as weakness and defiance, which I will refer to as being a self in flight or recoil from existence, and in rebellion against existence, respectively.
3.1 Introduction

We have seen that, for Anti-Climacus, the form of despair that occurs in most people consists in a state of disintegration in which the eternal and temporal aspects of the self are out of kilter due to an overemphasis on its temporal aspect. In being ignorant of being a self, the individual is absorbed in a multiplicity of finite affairs in the world, without adequately realizing his capacity for transcendence as a spiritual being endowed with the infinite. The self in this stage is mostly dormant. Defining himself by external conditions that he is passively caught up in, such as worldly affairs or material possessions, the individual has not reflected upon himself enough to appreciate the unique possibilities of existence available to him, or to will any of these into being through his own acts of self-determination. He also lacks consciousness of the eternal within him, which would pry him from his immersion in the nothingness of the sensuous and provide him with stability and consistency against the interminable flux of temporality. Without the eternal as one's stronghold in existence, one is adrift in a momentary existence that has no greater unity or coherence, and to be dissipated in this dreamlike state is to be in despair.

Anti-Climacus believes that despair becomes progressively more intense the more that one has reflected upon oneself as an individual. While most people do not advance far beyond the immediate form of self-consciousness that human beings originally possess, he acknowledges that there are many individuals who become more self-conscious, and hence more spiritual, by gaining an awareness of the eternal within them, including infinitude and possibility as components of their being. When the self begins to reflect more deeply on its existence, it detaches itself from its situation in the world, and questions or raises doubts about the existing state of affairs. When this transition from ignorance occurs, despair assumes an intensified form and become what he calls despair in weakness, or despair "in the strict sense" (SUD: 13). On his account, when an individual despairs in weakness, he does not want to be himself because of some problem that arises for him in the temporal, which might include an earthly loss, trauma, suffering, or hardship. The problem he experiences in temporality elicits heightened reflection on himself and his difficulties, and so engenders knowledge of the eternal in the self by awakening it to a greater degree of self-relational activity. This would include higher-order thinking about
oneself and one's unique possibilities, in addition to the more deliberate form of decision-making that might accompany this. It can be classified as a form of weakness because the self is not strong enough to accept its sufferings and admit them as part of itself.

In support of my claim that despair in Kierkegaard's works is best understood as a state of disintegration in the self, I argue that despair in weakness occurs due to the loss of integration between the self and the surrounding world, or between the self and itself as a finite human being. This painful separation, which originally occurs in the esthetic stage of life, produces a state of consciousness that can be described as a form of alienation. While the individual in ignorance is alienated from the eternal and infinite within him without knowing it, in weakness, a reversal occurs in which the self, in fleeing from its beleaguered finite self as an infinite self, becomes alienated from the world, from others, from society, and from itself as a result of heightened reflection upon them. I argue that an earthly loss or hardship motivates a spiritual form of vitality that conflicts with the naturalistic form that predominates in the earlier, more immediate stages of human life. The inverted vitality of spirit produces an incurvature within consciousness, wherein the self surges up from its existence in the natural world to turn in upon itself in thought. I argue that this incurvature within consciousness, and the awakening of spirituality that produces it, is the distinctive feature of despair in the strict sense. In liberating itself from its worldly existence as spirit, it enters into confrontation with it, rather than being naively immersed in it.

In section 3.2, I explain that the transition to weakness initially arises through a loss of integration with the world, which Anti-Climacux describes as "despair over the earthly or over something earthly" (SUD: 50). By despairing over a particular earthly thing, Anti-Climacux believes that one necessarily despairs over oneself in one's finitude. In approaching despair from a highly theoretical perspective, he does little to explain what any of this would mean in practice. To do this, in the remaining sections, I argue that certain figures illustrated in Either/Or serve as vivid examples of individuals who despair in weakness, and that they demonstrate an inverted form of vitality centered upon the spiritual life of the person, rather than the naturalistic form vitality rooted in the sensuous or elemental forces of nature. In the next chapter, I explain that despair in weakness intensifies when it becomes despair over the "earthly in toto," or over the world as a whole (SUD: 60). I claim that this second phase of weakness is also portrayed in Either/Or through meditations on the reflective esthetic stage of life. With despair being
described in such similar ways in these pseudonymous works, it will be shown that a generally consistent account of it emerges in Kierkegaard's work, although there is some disagreement between the authors that will be addressed.

3.2 Despair Over Something in the World and Over Oneself: The First Phase of Weakness

On Anti-Climacus’ view, despair in weakness begins with a suffering that disrupts the blithe worldview of the immediate esthetic or public mode of living. In heightened self-reflection, the self does not want to be itself in its finitude or concretion due to some temporal difficulty it comes up against, and that it must deal with in some way. In this state of "crisis," the everyday routine the individual has become accustomed to breaks down (SUD: 25). The system of diversions and distractions that renders despair unconscious in the smooth functioning of everyday life has, in some sense, failed, and it becomes a noticeable problem in one's personal life. In the last chapter, it was explained how a self in ignorance might become conscious of being in despair as a result of external factors impinging upon it by a "stroke of fate," such as a trauma or misfortune (SUD: 51). The example Anti-Climacus uses to illustrate this form of despair is the loss of some beloved person or object through which the self felt intimately connected with the surrounding world, or as he exaggeratingly puts it, through the loss of what "to the man of immediacy is his whole life" (SUD: 51). Because the self in ignorance is mostly passive to its immediate desires, and is driven to act by them, he does not describe despair in ignorance as involving acts of reflection or the will. Although the ignorant individual thinks about himself and states of affairs in the world insofar as he uses language and has become educated within his community, reflection is primarily in service to immediate impulses, feelings, drives and desires, many of which are patterned on the behaviors of others. These are primarily directed toward earthly matters, rather than more spiritual concerns about one's life. As a result, he remains well adapted to his psychical life, his embodiment in the natural world, and his milieu, even while temporarily grieving under some earthly burden that causes feelings of separation or loss.

We saw that language, education, and socialization spurred reflection in individuals, but that in most people, this only involves a minimal degree of self-consciousness. Anti-Climacus argues that this state of ignorance is despair, but he explains that the more serious cases of despair are "brought on by one's capacities for reflection, so that despair, when it is present, is
not merely a suffering, a succumbing to the external circumstance, but is to a certain degree self-activity, an act" (SUD: 54). A significant increase in self-awareness, in his view, is motivated by earthly suffering in certain individuals who are unable to readily recover from it, whether it is through some loss, illness, or adversity. When despair becomes the self's own act through some difficulty that it cannot get over and insists on clinging to through continued reflection, the self despairs in weakness by not wanting to be itself. Since this form of despair is a product of reflection, the suffering the individual experiences redoubles. She suffers from despairing over something earthly, but she also suffers from being a self that is conscious of being in despair. For instance, someone who despairs over the death of her beloved would suffer under this loss, but she would also suffer from being a self who has to live without her beloved. Despair over something earthly is therefore, at the same time, despair over oneself, and for Anti-Climacus, the latter is the basis of all despair (SUD: 19). Despair is indeed brought to awareness by earthly hardship or crisis that one has latched onto, but in all its variations, it is essentially a sickness of self-consciousness. It can be classified as a form of weakness when the self is not strong enough to accept its sufferings and admit them as part of itself.

The character traits of those who despair in weakness are suited to the customary view of despair, which is usually not the case for those who despair in ignorance. These individuals are likely to show signs of depression, to grieve over their circumstances, or to announce they are in despair to others. He claims that the intensified forms of despair generally occur in people with deeper natures, or in those who have become more spiritual as a result of having endured “bitter experiences and dreadful decisions” in life (SUD: 26). In his view, many people never reach this stage of self-development because they remain enchanted by the sensuous element of their existence, including the objects, people, or things that present themselves by means of it (SUD: 43). When a painful crisis emerges that jolts them out of their complacency, however, despair becomes palpable as a sickness of the self.

Despair in weakness should not be understood as arising simply from having one's aims thwarted, or from one's desires not being satisfied. Someone might suffer because he was rejected for the position he wanted, or because a close friend betrayed him, but this does not necessarily mean that he does not want to be himself. While such external conflicts are likely to cause pain, grief, or frustration, the individual does not truly despair in weakness unless internal conflict is present due to increased reflection. In these cases, the self, in its infinitude, recoils
from the finite condition it had previously settled into to engage in sustained reflection on itself and the difficulty that has befallen it. In his separation from immediacy, he finds himself at odds with something in existence as a thinking being, and not merely in a disagreeable emotional state. Rather than simply bemoaning a loss or difficulty, he might persist in asking himself why things had to happen as they did, whether he did something wrong, and what he should do with himself. He might also be anxious, doubting that good things are in store for the future, and not trusting that things will go well for him or those he cares about. If reflection becomes too advanced, he might have problems discerning meaning and purpose in life. He might begin to question why he bothers going on, or what the point of it all is. Such reflective distancing unsettles him in his concrete existence, and opens up a realm of possibilities that had been obscured when he was content with his worldly situation. He is therefore likely to think critically about his previous life, his values and ideals, his role in society, the world at large, the future, and what these all mean for him. Certainly he had questioned external conditions in his earlier life and sought reasons to explain his circumstances, but only at this point of earthly hardship does his own existence get put into question. When this occurs, the inner life begins to awaken, and his being truly becomes an issue for him.  

Anti-Climacus does not explain why an earthly suffering is necessary to increase the degree of self-awareness and reflection in an individual to the point that despair becomes a noticeable or even chronic problem. It would seem that this could happen simply through being well educated, imaginative, or intelligent, or that one might begin to raise worries and have misgivings about states of affairs in the world and oneself in it just by learning of terrible events that occur, without personally experiencing a major suffering or loss. It could be that the kind of detachment that he has in mind with his notion of despair in weakness requires a great deal of pain to trigger it, which one is unlikely to experience absent a significant crisis. One way that human beings respond to pain is by dissociating themselves from their feelings so that they are not fully absorbed by them. By recoiling from his pain, the individual alleviates it to some extent, however minimal. In reflecting on his painful condition, he also would be able to consider how best to handle his situation. In these ways, heightened reflection functions as a defense.

190 I am borrowing this phrase from Heidegger, who uses it to describe the mode of being of the human being (or more precisely, Dasein). See Being and Time, p. 32. Heidegger does not reserve the term for those who are facing adversity, however.

191 In the next chapter, I show that A in Either/Or is arguably one such individual who seems to have become acutely self-aware through intelligence alone, which results in him despairing over the earthly in general.
mechanism when life becomes burdensome. In support of this idea, one might recognize that we are most likely to be keenly self-conscious when we are ill with the flu or the like. In an incapacitated state of detachment, we are torn away from our everyday projects and concerns, and forced to confront ourselves. Without experiencing much suffering, it is unlikely that we will disengage from our habits and activities in ordinary life and stop to consider our lives closely for an extended period, even if we are otherwise reflective. In a state of relative contentment or enjoyment, we would be less likely to come to any greater knowledge of ourselves.

Although this mode of self-reflection obviously has its drawbacks, he believes that it has the positive effect of allowing the individual to obtain a more accurate conception of his identity as a person. He claims that the self in ignorance, in its outward-directed enjoyment, mistakenly identifies itself solely with "externalities," such as the things it desires, the people it cares about, or its place in society (SUD: 53). But when the self in weakness turns inward to reflect on itself and the earthly suffering it experiences, it consciously sustains itself in this reflection, rather than forgetting itself in worldly occupations and engagements. As the self gains hold of itself from the flux of the temporal by recollecting its issues, and repeatedly calling them to mind, it begins to understand, however vaguely, that there is something unchangeable within it, and that it is "essentially different from the environment and external events and from their influence upon it" (SUD: 54). While the self in ignorance might be described as an externalist about personal identity in understanding itself relative to finite conditions or events in the world, the self in weakness might be called an internalist about its identity in beginning to become conscious of itself as absolutely distinct from anything external, finite, or worldly. It thereby gains a kind of freedom and independence that it did not have in the state of ignorance, and so comes closer to realizing the eternal within it.

Because this is only the initial phase in the transition from ignorance, the self who despairs in weakness over a particular earthly loss or hardship will only obtain a limited amount of self-knowledge. Although he would gain continuity in his consciousness of himself by maintaining himself in his self-relational activity over an extended period of time, and by collecting himself from his immersion in the temporal, this would not be enough for a spiritual breakthrough of the type desired by Anti-Climacus. The self that despairs in weakness, he writes:

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192 With his theory of positive disintegration, Dąbrowski also conceived of painful existential crises to generally have positive effects in facilitating the development of the person. See Positive Disintegration, pp. 4-15.
...has no consciousness of a self that is won by infinite abstraction from every externality, this naked abstract self, which, compared with immediacy's fully dressed self, is the first form of the infinite self and the advancing impetus in the whole process by which a self infinitely becomes responsible for its actual self with all its difficulties and advantages. (SUD: 55).

It is difficult to make sense of this passage, since Anti-Climacus seems to refer to four different types of self that the individual possesses as a result of being disintegrated. But the difficulty eases when one realizes that Anti-Climacus is referring to a single "actual self” that, as a synthesis of infinite and finite components that are sundered, can be described in multiple ways depending on which component is under consideration. Absorbed in its concrete situation in the world, and dependent on it for his establishing its identity, the "fully dressed self" of immediacy does not know of its infinitude, even though it has it. When problems are confronted at the level of the finite and the self despairs, the self begins to reflect on itself and its concrete situation as a "naked abstract self," which it does by detaching itself from this situation and conceiving of itself, events, or possibilities in an abstract way. Not feeling "at home" in the world due to something it suffers under in it, it flees its painful condition by retreating into the imaginative realm of infinitude and possibility. No longer seeing itself as embedded entirely within its earthly existence, it gets a sense of itself as being outside of it in thought.

It is important to note that, for Anti-Climacus, the "naked abstract self" is only the "first form" of the "infinite self," rather than the final form that the self is responsible for realizing in existence in becoming eternal. Kierkegaard suggests elsewhere that this term denotes the self in essence but not in existence. As we will see in Chapters 5 and 6, rather than lingering outside of existence in infinitude and abstraction, in its mature state, the self draws toward itself in its concretion, much like the self had done in its original state of immediacy. The difference is that the ethical or religious individual, who has achieved the spiritual breakthrough described above,

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193 Kierkegaard is not the only philosopher who often spoke of the self in different senses. Kant, for instance, distinguishes between a phenomenal self, which is constrained by spatiotemporal conditions, and a noumenal self, which is not. The phenomenal self, he claims, "can be determined by his reason, as a cause, to actions in the sensible world," while the noumenal self is “the same man though in terms of his personality” (The Metaphysics of Morals, 6:418). The phenomenal self for Kant would roughly correspond to the "finite self" of Anti-Climacus, while the noumenal self would correspond to the "infinite self." The decision to split the self in two in this way might seem puzzling, but it can be explained if one assumes that the self is disintegrated in its existence, and so can be regarded in different ways.

194 See p. 52. For a discussion of the role the infinite and finite aspects of the self have in self-realization, see section 1.4.
wills to reconcile the conflict between the infinite and finite aspects of his nature by living out his thought within existence in deepened inwardness. In doing this, he achieves integrity, unlike the individual who is ignorant of being a self.

3.3 Despair over Something Earthly in A’s Analysis of Tragedy

Under the pseudonym of A, in Either/Or, Kierkegaard lays out the essential features of despair in weakness and the state of consciousness that it consists in by appealing to characters culled from art, music, and literature. In the first of his morbid speeches delivered before a secret society known as "The Fellowship of Buried Lives," A examines the ways in which modern tragedy has departed from ancient tragedy by edging toward despair. He first considers how the character of human life has changed since the Greek period. The essential difference between human beings in the ancient and modern period, he believes, lies in the fact that the ancients, in enjoying a life of immediacy, were not adequately self-reflective, and so did not conceive of themselves as free agents whose lives were of their own making. "Even if the individual moved freely," A writes, "he nevertheless rested in substantial determinants, in the state, the family, in fate" (E/O I: 143). Even though he acts by making choices, the hero's tragic downfall is primarily a suffering under natural or supernatural powers that dictate the course of his life in consequence of being bound by necessity and finitude. Imperiled in temporal existence, he sees himself engulfed by a totality of forces that have no regard for him as an individual. Although these immense and inscrutable powers provoke fear and anxiety, in part by making individuals realize they are basically powerless spectators of a hostile world, the tragic is not an occasion for despair for A like it would be for Anti-Climacus; as an esthete, he believes the ensuing destruction of human life contains a soothing and alluring beauty that has healing potential for those able to find solace in it (E/O I: 145). For these individuals, reverence for the tragic

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195 The Fellowship of Buried Lives' is a translation of 'Symparanekromenoi,' which as Hannay explains, is a Greek expression coined by Kierkegaard (Either/Or, p. 616). The Hong's translate this as "The Fellowship of the Dead," but this is less pregnant with meaning, and does not convey that those within this association are nevertheless still alive.

196 Elsewhere in Either/Or, A claims that the ancient Greeks were "qualified Psychically" but not yet spiritually, meaning that they were yet to attain reflective self-conscious (E/O I: 62). He therefore conceives of them much like children, which as Williams notes, is a view shared by classical scholars as eminent as Nietzsche (Shame and Necessity, pp. 9-10). Williams, however, challenges the idea that the consciousness of the Greeks was substantially different from our own. He argues that they had similar notions of moral agency, responsibility, obligation and the like, and that an obvious distinction cannot be drawn here.
reconciles them with existence, without needing any ethical or religious curative measure as the Judge and Anti-Climacus claim.  

In the modern age, however, individuals have become more reflective and liberal than those in the past due to the influence of Christianity on Western culture. By turning their attention inward toward themselves, they have gained an autonomy and independence from natural conditions that the pagans of the ancient period lacked. Therefore, in modern tragedy, "the hero's downfall is not really suffering but is a deed," or his own wrongful act that he is to be held responsible for (E/O I: 143). Although the modern tragic hero suffers under some earthly difficulty like the ancient one, this is not a suffering that contemporary audiences deem him totally helpless against. They believe the individual brought it upon himself, in the same way that Anti-Climacus believes that one brings despair upon oneself. Because they have lost sympathy for the hero, and believe he is guilty or somehow at fault for his predicament, A laments that the modern age risks losing a sense of the tragic entirely, even though it proclaims an essential truth about existence in its fatalistic depiction of human suffering and defeat (E/O I: 149).

A claims that, unlike the ancient tragic hero, who is integrated with circumstances in the natural world and tightly constrained by familial, political, and religious bonds, or what might be called "the social substance," the modern tragic hero has become dissociated from these nurturing and placating elements. He is, as A puts it, "subjectively reflected in himself, and this reflection has not only reflected him out of every immediate relation to state, kindred, and fate but often has even reflected him out of his own past life" (E/O I: 143). Hence, the modern individual begins to break from the established order that he was reared in by relating himself to himself in the way that Anti-Climacus describes, gaining a sense of his freedom as a "naked abstract self." As A explains, spirit achieves this feat by negating the sensuous, including the psychical and bodily elements that constitute the self in the sphere of temporality, while

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197 In his commentary on Aristotle's account of the tragic, Kierkegaard claims that the conflicts experienced by the tragic hero arouse fear and sympathy in viewers, and that through these emotions, they become involved in the hero's plight. In this way, tragedy tears individuals out of their narrow outlook and makes them witness a greater truth about human existence. Kierkegaard believes the kind of reconciliation with existence that tragedy fosters is inadequate, however, since it brings about a loss of self in contemplation of the esthetic, rather than helping the spectator discover meaning in his or her existence as a self. See Malantschuck, Kierkegaard's Thought, p. 45.

198 I am borrowing this term from Schacht, who uses it in interpreting Hegel's conception of alienation. See Alienation, p. 37. This term risks being a misnomer, since Kierkegaard believes that in the final moment, nothing situated within the temporal is enduring or substantial. One might, however consider society and its institutions as substantial for a temporary period, and as providing support, order, and structure for human beings during the limited amount of time that God allows them to be established in existence.
nevertheless retaining a loosened relation to it. Through the awakening of his own activity of self-reflection, he understands himself in opposition to the worldly context that he had formerly been bound up with, when he was mostly passive as a "fully dressed self" in immediacy. $A$ suggests that this opposition might become so drastic that he even finds himself alienated from the individual he previously took himself to be, or unable to identify himself with who he was in the past. He believes that with the uprooting from the social substance and the earthly that reflection has engendered in modern times, the individual, in his isolation, "becomes his own creator," and with this autonomy, assumes responsibility for the total character of his life in a way that was unthinkable for the ancient Greeks (E/O I: 149). As an esthete partial to the tragic and the totalizing, deterministic system it assumes, $A$ believes that this conception of a radically independent self stripped of its finite characteristics rests on an illusion, and that nature and society alone form and constitute the individual. Nevertheless, it is a pervasive illusion that has come to define the present age with the assistance of Christianity and its otherworldly understanding of the human being.

$A$ believes that when the individual's downfall is thought to happen chiefly through his own free acts instead of through the external conditions that had formerly supported him in his existence, the tragic is lost, and "when the age loses the tragic, it gains despair" (E/O I: 145). He therefore associates the self-sufficient mindset of the present age, in which the human being becomes radically guilty for his flaws or mistakes, with despair instead of tragedy. In our age of despair, he claims, the doubt and critical thought engendered by excessive reflection has undermined the political and religious bonds that held the state together "invisibly and spiritually," along with the meaning they bestowed. Meanwhile, the disintegration of society has led to a state of confusion and disorder that has made people more self-reflective in turn (E/O I: 149). Caught in this vicious circle, the isolated individual is left to pick up the pieces of the broken social substance on his own, using his imagination to find his own path and meaning amidst the chaos. $A$, however, believes that to construct a worldview on one's own account in this way is to despair.

In order to illustrate how the basic theme of ancient tragedy might be expressed in modern tragedy, which departs from it in attesting to despair, $A$ recasts the Greek heroine Antigone into a modern figure tormented by self-reflection. While in the ancient Greek play, it is common knowledge that Antigone's father, Oedipus, murdered his father and married his mother,
the modern Antigone he envisions is the only person that knows of this tragedy. Unwilling to tarnish her father's legacy by revealing this terrible fact to anyone else, it remains a painful secret that she holds within her and resolves to protect with all her might. The hereditary guilt and sorrow that characterizes ancient tragedy is preserved in the modern retelling, since A's Antigone inherits these sentiments as a result of her father's mistake. Suffering privately under this familial burden, she remains embedded within the social substance and the earthly like the Greek Antigone. On the other hand, she has loosened herself from it as an individual through sustained and solitary reflection on the family secret. Although A does not explicitly state that she is in despair, by taking her father's guilt upon herself and suffering under the weight of her thoughts about him, which she repeatedly calls to mind of her own will, one can see that she has the characteristics of despair that he describes. Because her sorrow is caused in part by her own acts of reflection on a state of affairs that she will not forget about or get over, and in part by something earthly that burdens her, she also qualifies for despair in weakness as described by Anti-Climacus.

Concealing the knowledge of her father's error within her heart, and vowing to remain silent about it, A explains that the modern Antigone's life "does not unfold like the Greek Antigone's; it is turned inward, not outward. The stage is inside, not outside; it is a spiritual stage" (E/O I: 157). While the Greek Antigone lacked this interiority, and had no essential secrets that threatened to be disclosed to others, the modern Antigone, in her solitude, holds back her knowledge from the world, and is duplicitous in her dealings with it. By all appearances, she is enthusiastic and joyful when the Greek nation commemorates her father as king, but hidden within her is sorrow and guilt over her knowledge and his fate that nobody else is aware of. Unlike the Greek Antigone, the feelings of her inner life do not coincide with those expressed in her outward life, or as Anti-Climacus might put it, her "infinite self" does not align with her "finite self." There are two different principles of activity running concurrently within her that are not in essential agreement. Her spiritual activity is invisible and unexpressed to others, while she continues to act normally in the world. Those in the Greek period were interested in the visible expressions of the tragic hero, but in the modern period, the invisible activity of her private life draws fascination in those especially attuned to it, like A.
3.3.1 "Inverted Vitality" as a Designation of Despair

By transforming Antigone into a "buried life" that a disintegrated age like our own can admire, A intimates a paradoxical and dualistic philosophy that might be called 'inverted vitalism.' Traditionally, vitalists have challenged mechanistic accounts of living things by claiming that life originates in an immaterial force that animates material bodies. In Bergson, this is conceived as a creative impetus common to all living things, which he calls élan vital. Vitalism is a monistic theory insofar as it intends to explain the extraordinary complexity and diversity of life, including the individuation of organisms and the advent of persons, by tracing it to this common source that is essentially impersonal in its basic operations. In A's thought, the human being might be said to instantiate this universal vital impetus as a synthesis of psyche and body, which are activated by the elemental powers of nature and the sensuous. This is most perfectly exemplified by Don Giovanni, who as a "force of nature," is moved to act by lower-order drives and desires without experiencing conscious opposition to them, and without

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199 I am indebted to my friend Zach Williams for this turn of phrase. He suggested it to me after being inspired by a poem from Emily Dickinson. "A Death blow is a Life blow to Some / Who till they died, did not alive become - / Who had they lived - had died but when / They died, Vitality begun -" (Dickinson 966, p. 407). This is a theme that carries on throughout Kierkegaard's authorship, where the individual who lives spiritually lives as one "dead to the world."

200 See Bechtel & Richardson, "Vitalism" in The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

201 See Bergson, Creative Evolution, esp. pp. 87-97.

202 In explaining how vitalists would understand the life of a human being, Bergson writes, "in nature, there is neither purely internal finality nor absolutely distinct individuality. The organized elements composing the individual have themselves a certain individuality, and each will claim to have its own vital principle if the individual pretends to have his own . . . the individual is not sufficiently independent, not sufficiently cut off from other things, for us to allow it a "vital principle" of its own . . . In this sense each individual may be said to remain united with the totality of living beings by invisible bonds. So it is of no use to try to restrict finality to the individuality of the living being. If there is finality in the world of life, it includes the whole of life in a single indivisible embrace" (Creative Evolution, pp. 42-43). Kierkegaard would likely argue that this theory, which takes as its point of departure the multiplicity of elements constituting the life of organisms, fails to account for the basic and persistent unity in the consciousness of the person conducting the biological investigations, or what Kant calls the transcendental unity of apperception. Similarly, it does not explain how the individual can retain the sense of his own identity over the vast number of biological changes that occur in time. On the other hand, A would likely agree with Bergson's claim, since he believes individuality is a product of natural forces and social influences. Yet I claim that it is just this theory that A calls into question by proposing that one might live while being dead to the world, much like the modern Antigone. Inverted vitalism is a position that is reconceived in a more promising light, but not essentially altered in the ethical and religious stages of life.

203 Elsewhere, Kierkegaard calls "immediate feeling" the "vital force" that generates life, and explains that this feeling must be kept to steer it on the proper course (UDVS: 71). I argue that because the human being is spirit, what "keeps" or watches over this vital force to set it on the right path cannot originate in immediacy, since then spirit would be naturalized as a temporal phenomenon, and so commensurable with other living things. To maintain the transcendence of spirit and do justice to its eternal aspect, there must be an essential difference between the lives of natural entities and human beings. Natural beings are driven solely by this vital force, whereas the human being is driven in part by this vital force through the psyche-body relation, and in part by the spiritual activity of the individual, which interrupts its uninhibited procession and subjects it to its rule.
thinking about them or choosing which to make his will. Because the human being is spirit, however, the character of his life is susceptible to an inversion in which the natural processes of life in their primitive immediacy are disrupted by the individual's self-relational activity. I believe that in Kierkegaard's writings, reflection, imagination, and willing consist of a higher-order form of vital activity originating in the self rather than in nature or the external world. This internal principle of activity that God allots to the individual should not be disparaged as dead intellectualizing, but is vital in the sense that it is driven by a non-naturalistic form of desire, which I have referred to as will. Hardship, suffering, or loss can thereby stimulate an individualized \textit{élan} that thwarts one's natural spontaneity, as the self spontaneously relates itself to itself in existence. It does this in thinking about itself, in striving to attain the ends it aims at, and in choosing which of its lower-order desires it wants to be its will. In setting long-term goals for itself and shaping itself as it chooses, it would think and will with a concern for the future, rather than narrowly focusing on its present or immediate existence.

Inverted vitalism is demonstrated in the life of the modern Antigone. While the life of the Greek Antigone does not end until Creon puts her to death for violating his decree by burying her brother, the life of the modern Antigone "is essentially at an end" once she learns of her father's mistake and begins a process of intense self-reflection in securing his secret (E/O I: 156). Although she continues to live in the world among others, and appears normal and even happy in everyday life, this role she takes on is a facade that she does not truly identify with. As A puts it, in her separation from the world and humankind, "her real life is nevertheless hidden" beneath externals that she is dead to, but to be disintegrated or torn from one's finitude in this way is to despair (E/O I: 157). In the terms of Anti-Climacus, in weakness, she flees from the concrete self that she does not want to be.

One should not confuse the despair inherent to inverted vitalism with lifelessness or stagnancy, however. As A explains, inwardly the modern Antigone is richly alive in mulling over her thoughts and holding onto the memory of her father. He states that this energetic "turning back into oneself" that her self-reflection occasions "gives her a preternatural bearing. She is proud of her grief, she is jealous of it, for her grief is her love. But yet her grief is not a dead, static possession; it is continually in motion; it gives birth to pain and is born in pain" (E/O I: 158). This active state of inhibition is a reversal of the condition of Don Giovanni, whose activity was born in uninhibited sensual enjoyment, but it is not a state that is altogether objectionable to
her. A explains that she feels proud and ennobled in sustaining her conscious opposition to the surrounding world, and in being selected "in a singular way" to preserve the legacy of her father through her secrecy (E/O I: 157). There is, then, "a great animating idea" that drives the solitary existence of the modern Antigone and gives her purpose, as she continues to reflect on her father's fate, her love for him, and her guilt in knowing of his mistake (E/O I: 158). One can see that fervent idealizing motivates the life of the inverted vitalist, while sensual desires, appetites, and the pressures of social conformity motivate the life of immediacy. Inverted vitalism is therefore a dualistic position that sets the human being in strict conflict with the greater forces of nature or the social world, whereas vitalism traditionally posits a global harmony between them, despite allowing for conflicts and tensions within this greater unity.

Elaborating on his "inverted vitalism," A writes of the alienation that the modern Antigone experiences in her separation from the totality of the world and humankind. In the Greek version of the tragedy, when Antigone learns that she will be buried alive in the tombs for disobeying Creon's orders, she cries: "alive to the place of corpses, an alien still / never at home with the living nor with the dead." Although she meant this quite literally, A explains that the modern Antigone can say this of herself figuratively for the rest of her life after she learns of her father's fate (E/O I: 159). These remarks express the uncanny predicament of the modern Antigone. In limbo, she is not dead, but neither is she alive in the sense that those in their original immediacy might be said to be. Withdrawn from the everydayness that characterizes the lives of most people in the world, her life plays out away from the world and not in it. In her restless, detached reflections, and with a love that "draws her out of herself into her father's guilt," the modern Antigone "feels alien to humankind" (E/O I: 161). Refusing to be drawn back

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204 See footnotes on p. 630 in Either/Or I (Hong translation)
205 It is questionable whether A conceives of the majority of people that the modern Antigone dwells among as alive in a deeper sense, although they would certainly fit the biological definition of it. In a figurative sense, the inverted vitalist is "alive to the place of corpses" in everyday life within the world, or what we might call the public mode. Perhaps he sees the average person as not unlike the walking dead in his automaton-like conformity to his surroundings, although this is admittedly a harsh and, as I have argued earlier, unfair assessment.
206 A's notion of a "buried life" as depicted by the modern Antigone would seem to challenge Heidegger's conception of the human being as 'being-in-the-world' (Being and Time, section 12), and support Scheler's view that the human being occupies a position outside of the world in virtue of his reflective capacities. Scheler writes, "at exactly the same moment when this 'human being' placed himself outside nature to make it an object to be dominated and an object of novel principles of arts and signs—at exactly the same moment he had to anchor his very own center of being somehow outside and away from the cosmos. He could not anymore conceive himself simply as a "part" or as a simple "member" in the world after having placed himself so bravely above it" (The Human Place in the Cosmos, p. 64). For Anti-Climacus, the human being can be said to be in the world insofar as psyche and body also constitute him. He therefore occupies an intermediate position, wherein he is in the world, but not of the world.
into the self that she is as a human being situated in the world, she does not want to be herself in her concretion, but this failure of identification results in a state of alienation indicative of despair.

A discusses the fatal consequences that would ensue if the modern Antigone's secret were disclosed by generating a tragic collision in his version of the story (E/O I: 162-164). He proposes that she falls in love with another man whom she feels obligated to be open with, while also bearing a love for her father that demands the secret be withheld. The man suspects that she is keeping something from him, and tries to wrest the secret from her. She must therefore decide whether to maintain her fidelity to her father and lose her beloved, or to confide her father's error and her guilt to him. But as A explains, in surrendering the secret that it was her mission to defend, the inverted life of Antigone is in peril: "our Antigone carries her secret in her heart like an arrow that life has continually plunged deeper and deeper, without depriving her of her life, for as long as it is in her heart she can live, but the instant it is taken out, she must die" (E/O I: 164). Once she reveals her inner self to her lover by admitting her terrible knowledge and her sorrow, the suggestion is, the life that she had been witholding and concealing would evaporate into exteriority, and Antigone would lose the self she had been cultivating as an internalist about her identity.

One might argue that this situation seems more pathological than tragic, and that she ought to release her secret to her beloved in order to rid herself of her despair, along with her pitiful self-obsession. Perhaps this return to ordinary worldly life through personal disclosure would strengthen her as an individual and reconcile her with her finite self so that she could overcome the weakness of not wanting to be herself that Anti-Climacus describes. In a similar vein, Dupré argues that Kierkegaard's continued interest in excessively reflective subjects of this sort evinces an immature personality on his part, or a narcissistic self-centeredness.207 Like Sagi, however, I do not believe that the emphasis Kierkegaard puts on these issues, whether it is in the pseudonyms or his self-authored works, is simply a result of his personality quirks or the mental pathology of an uncompromising individualist.208 As a master psychologist, his descriptions of alienation and despair stem from profound insight into the human condition that might apply to anyone sincerely grappling with his or her existence in the face of suffering. It is likely that those

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207 Dupré, Kierkegaard As Theologian: The Dialectic of Christian Existence, p. 18.
208 Sagi, Kierkegaard, Religion, and Existence, p. 17
who have closely examined their life in response to an earthly hardship or suffering will relate to the plight of the modern Antigone in some way or another, whether it is her secret pride, her hidden sorrow, her isolation, or her inhibitions. The characteristics of the intensification of self-consciousness that he provides in this pseudonymous work are therefore not simply accidental features of one person's existence, but will apply to anyone who arrives at greater knowledge of who she is.

It is also not obvious that the despair of the modern Antigone would resolve if she released the secret that had been animating her inner life and stirring feelings of guilt and sorrow, and that this would allow her to recover the type of integration with the world and herself that she had enjoyed before carrying her burden. Neither is it clear that an individual roused to self-reflection through profound suffering could return to his previous life of immediacy unchanged as a person, and without having lurking doubts about existence or harboring a certain mistrust of it. Anti-Climacus, for instance, believes that despair over something earthly of the kind experienced by the modern Antigone would awaken a deeper consciousness of oneself that one might try to ignore or forget through diversionary tactics, but that one would not be entirely successful in this. This individual might thereby seek relief from despair by throwing himself into worldly life and externalities, "but always with the consciousness of the self he does not want to be" (SUD: 66). The infinite aspect of the self that had surfaced in despair in weakness might recede into the background of his existence, but it would not vanish from awareness entirely, and his inner restlessness would manifest itself in worldly ventures and bustling activity instead of personal reflection (SUD: 56). This, however, is still despair, even if this despair has been effectively rendered unconscious.

Anti-Climacus would also disagree with A's claim that the modern Antigone would "die" if her secret is wrested from her. In his view, sustained reflection on her guilt and her grief fosters the self, but it does not create the self or keep it alive as A seems to suggest. Because the self has something eternal in it, it cannot die. It therefore remains continually present throughout the duration of one's existence, whether one becomes conscious of this or not. Like A, however, he believes that self-reflection allows for getting a hold of oneself apart from the world, which the self is originally under the sway of. But A thinks that ultimately, it is ridiculous for an individual to consider himself as "the absolute in all this, his relativity," and to believe that he can escape the tragic by transcending the social substance and natural conditions that determine
his fate (E/O I: 145). As we will see in the following chapters, Kierkegaard believes that sustained self-reflection under the auspices of the eternal is a presupposition of human freedom. It allows for self-shaping and self-transformation that would not happen if nature simply ran its course temporarily without the guidance and input of the individual. Hence, although it is possible for one who despairs in weakness like the modern Antigone to give this up and preoccupy himself with worldly endeavors instead, this is not to lose oneself as A thinks, but "to be lost" and away from oneself as an infinite being (CUD: 135). In relapsed individuals adrift in everydayness, despair would still lie underneath as an unresolved problem that they flee from.

3.4 Despair as it Manifests in Reflective Sorrow

In "Shadowgraphs," the second of his speeches dealing with the aesthetics of despair, A expands upon his inverted vitalism by delineating the contrast between exteriority and interiority in self-reflective individuals. This fundamental distinction, he claims, becomes evident upon considering the differences between immediate and reflective sorrow in those affected by misfortune or the loss of something earthly. Although it is felt interiorly, immediate sorrow expresses itself sensuously in mourning or the like, and so has a corresponding exteriority. Although there is great external conflict in the human being who sorrows in his immediacy, there is little internal conflict, since the interior and exterior aspects of the human being remain in basic agreement. Just as in the case of the tragic, the sufferer would rest in natural conditions or in the social substance in his suffering, and so would not qualify as being in despair in A's sense. Reflective sorrow, however, "is not at one with itself" in this respect, and so would qualify as despair (E/O I: 170). As he describes it, reflective sorrow "wishes to conceal itself" interiorly, and so remain hidden beneath an incongruent exterior (E/O I: 169). As Anti-Climacus might put it, in refusing disclosure, the "infinite" or "abstract" self of the individual who sorrows reflectively is not in accord with her "finite" or "concrete" self. Because one cannot perceive reflective sorrow in the appearance of the human being, it is not fit for artistic portrayal, unlike immediate sorrow.

While recognizing the difficulty of the task, A intends to illustrate reflective sorrow artistically through what he calls 'shadowgraphs'. A shadowgraph, he explains, is an image that is not visible until the material that contains it is held up to the light, whereupon it appears as a shadow projected onto the wall. In his fascination with "the dark side of life," or the invisible
'spiritual stage' that he described the modern Antigone's life as playing out on, he attempts to capture "an interior picture that is too delicate to be externally perceptible, since it is woven from the soul's faintest moods" (E/O I: 173). Catching hints of this shadowy form of sorrow in certain literary figures, he draws on subtle cues from their visible life to imagine what they are experiencing internally in response to the loss of their beloved.

One of the figures that he uses to illustrate a "buried life" of reflective sorrow is Marie Beaumarchais from Goethe's *Clavigo*. After she becomes engaged to Clavigo, who means the world to her, he decides to leave her, inflicting great suffering upon her by "perfidiously severing the connection" that she had with him (E/O I: 180). Too weak to bear her grief on her own, she must depend on the support of those around her, who recognize that the broken engagement signals "the death of her" (E/O I: 181). To console her, they try to convince her that he was a loathsome person and a deceiver that she should forget about. But along with her sorrow, which she keeps hidden beneath a quiet and calm demeanor as she goes about her everyday business in the world, Marie has incessant doubts about whether or not he truly cared for her as he appeared to, which others have no inkling of. Although she is dead to the everyday concerns of ordinary people, inwardly, she has been has brought to life through his departure.\(^{209}\) Explaining how she cannot reach finality in the process of reflecting on whether his love for her was real or an illusion, A writes:

\[\ldots\text{her sorrow is characterized by the restlessness that prevents her from finding the object of her sorrow.}\]
\[\text{Her pain cannot find quiet; she lacks the peace that is necessary for any life if it is to be able to assimilate its nourishment and be refreshed by it; no illusion overshadows her with its quiet coolness as she absorbs}\]

\(^{209}\) One might note the analogy between the relationship of Marie and Clavigo and the God-relationship in Kierkegaard's thought. This link is suggested in a couple places. A writes of what is on Marie's mind as she imagines her reconciliation with Clavigo: "He returns; he does not look down; he looks at me half reproachfully and says: O you of little faith, and this little phrase is poised like an olive leaf on his lips—he is there" (E/O I: 185). This references a statement made by Christ in response to the disbelief of his disciples (Matthew 8:26). It also references the olive leaf the dove gave to Moses after the great flood, signaling that he could return from his ark to the dry land of the earth (Genesis 8:11). Clavigo's departure is thereby compared to Christ's departure and promised return. Similarly, Climacus compares God to a seducer who surreptitiously guides the human being to self-actualization in withdrawing from him. "No anonymous author can more slyly hide himself, and no maieutic can more carefully recede from a direct relation than God can. He is in the creation, everywhere in the creation, but he is not there directly, and only when the single individual turns inward into himself (consequently only in the inwardness of self-activity) does he become aware and capable of seeing God" (CUP: 243-244). This analogy that Kierkegaard runs with in his pseudonyms is, quite frankly, disturbing, in that it suggests a deceitful God who plays cruel games with his creation.
Unable to settle on any definite conclusion about what Clavigo's intentions were with the relationship, and whether or not she was used, the object of Marie Beaumarchais's sorrow is indeterminate, although this mystery fuels her continual inquiry. Without a definite object to sorrow over, she might be said to sorrow over nothing. In despair, she circles around in thought, imagining the possible scenarios that might have occasioned the breakup without knowing what actually did.

It should be noted that the indeterminacy of the object of reflective sorrow that A describes resembles the indeterminacy of the object of anxiety that both Haufniensis and Anti-Climacus describe. The restlessness of sorrow and anxiety would also seem to suggest a close relationship between them. For all these thinkers, anxiety precedes reflective sorrow as an ineluctable feature of human life in its immediacy. As we saw in the last chapter, anxiety is present in pre-reflective individuals like Don Giovanni who are in strict pursuit of sensual enjoyment, and in more reflective individuals living in 'the public mode' who worry about future possibilities in existence. While these two feelings are not identical, it would not be unreasonable to conclude that for A and Haufniensis, reflective sorrow emerges in anxiety and is inflected with it, just as despair is. For Anti-Climacus, on the other hand, despair is not a consequence of the progression of anxiety, but anxiety is despair from its inception, since it is the immediate product of a disintegrated self. In his view, reflective sorrow would simply be one of its later, more advanced manifestations.

In the passage above, we saw A alluding to the illusions and deceitfulness of affairs in the temporal, which unless uncovered, have a pacifying and alluring effect on those drawn into everyday life in the world. These effects are remarkably similar to the effects he attributed to the tragic for those are able to come to terms with it. As I have pointed out, even though the temporal is an ineliminable aspect of the self by way of the psyche-body relation in the human being, Kierkegaard has suspicions about it, and conceives of it as a danger in associating it with nothingness or non-being. His anxieties crop up in comments made by A, who seems to conceive of the deceiver Clavigo as Marie's guide through temporality. Remarking on Marie's doubts and disillusionment in a tragic world, he writes:

the pain. She lost childhood's illusion when she acquired that of erotic love; she lost erotic love's illusion when Clavigo deceived her. (E/O I: 189)
She has lost the happy trust with which she would have accompanied him dauntlessly into the abyss, and she has acquired instead a hundred misgivings.... At the time Clavigo left her, a future lay before her, a future so beautiful, so enchanting, that it almost confused her thoughts; it obscurely exerted its power over her. Her metamorphosis had already begun; then the process was interrupted, her transformation stopped. She had had intimations of a new life, had sensed its powers stir within her; then it was broken off and she was repulsed... (E/O I: 189).

Here A describes Marie in the earlier, more passive phase of her life, when she was captivated by her life in the world. In her erotic attachment to Clavigo, she could maintain a healthy confidence in the world, and rely on the satisfaction brought by his love. Blithely carried along by earthly affairs that she immediately identified with, and rooted firmly in the present moment, she had no deeper understanding of her situation, and no real concern about future misfortune. As A explains, "that which was to come smiled upon her very generously and mirrored itself in the illusion of her erotic love, and yet everything was so natural and direct" (E/O I: 189). The natural processes associated with traditional vitalism therefore steered her physical and psychological development, rather than her doing this of her own will. The negativity generated by the traumatic loss of Clavigo, however, disrupted the inner stillness she enjoyed in her original harmony with the temporal, and made her recoil from her concrete existence. The doubts and sorrow that set in with her separation from him made her gain a heightened consciousness of herself through her own reflective activity, and left her trying to make sense of things in the aftermath of her loss.

In her restless doubting and questioning, which have disrupted the natural process smoothly unfolding in her original immediacy, Marie has begun a personal process of spiritual development that I have described as inverted vitalism. Carefree and untroubled during her engagement with Clavigo, Marie might be described as "living without why" in her natural spontaneity as spirit in potentiality. But in becoming spirit in actuality after Clavigo breaks the engagement, Marie lives with a why in questioning and demanding an explanation of her predicament. Although one's natural development leads one to the stage in which spiritual

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210 I am borrowing this phrase from Meister Eckhart, who suggests that "living without why" is the highest form of spiritual practice, rather than the initial stage of spiritual development. For Eckhart, however, "living without a why" means doing God's will by surrendering one's will and forgoing earthly attachments. For a discussion of Eckhart's position, see John Connolly, Living Without Why.
development is possible, this latter, more "angular" phase of the self's development cannot be carried out in its original immediacy, since there the self does not relate itself to itself through its own acts of reflection or volition. As Anti-Climacuss puts it, spiritual growth does not come naturally like "teeth, a beard, etc." or "as a matter of course over the years; this concept is precisely the uttermost opposite of spirit" (SUD: 58-59). While the acquisition of language, education, and socialization facilitate the initial development of spirit, and motivate the self's initial activity that transcends psychical or physical processes, the self can only be spurred to higher stages of development through the kind of disintegration that occurs following an earthly suffering or loss. Because detachment from the world and earthly desire is needed to rouse the self's own activity to a degree under which it can substantially transform itself in its existence, he states, "the self must be broken in order to become itself" (SUD: 65). It therefore must awaken to despair to know itself and become what it is, which will likely entail episodes of depression, psychological turmoil, or anxiety of the kind experienced by Marie and the modern Antigone.

3.4.1 Despair as Self-enclosure

A state of brokenness is precisely the position that Marie Beaumarchais finds herself in after her broken engagement to Clavigo, as the infinite and finite aspects of the self are no longer aligned with one another. Detached from her concrete existence, and consumed by thoughts about whether he led her astray, she is, as A puts it, "inclosingly reserved, silent, solitary," despite appearing to others to be her normal self (E/O I: 169). 'Indesluttet,' which I will follow the Hongs in translating as 'inclosing reserve,' designates an intensified form of self-consciousness associated with self-relational activity, and is, as we will see, the central concept in Kierkegaard's account of despair. The self that is inclosingly reserved does not expand to greet the world in its overwhelming givenness like it did in its earlier immediacy, but rather contracts or shrinks from it. A describes it as an "innermost retreat" where the self dwells in restless abstraction, endlessly seeking the object of its sorrow. "Like the pendulum in a clock," reflective sorrow "swings back and forth" between different possibilities, passing the time in its hideaway without being able to settle upon any definite item in existence to sorrow over (E/O I: 170). In its uncertainty, it "continually begins from the beginning and deliberates anew, interrogates the witnesses, checks and examines the various statements, something it has already done hundreds of times, but it is never finished" (E/O I: 170). In taking up a "path of thinking" that is "infinite,"
Marie desires resolution to her painful reflections by finding a finite expression that would put her thought to rest, but insofar as she cannot attain this end, she remains isolated from the temporal realm (E/O I: 180). Grieving in inclosing reserve, she "is never really present" in the world among others, "but is continually in the process of becoming" (E/O I: 172).

The spiritual awakening of the human being that happens in despair in weakness involves a personal process of becoming that overlies a natural process of becoming, the latter of which would include changes occurring within the psyche-body relation. Climacus refers to these distinct levels of process in his discussion of the coming into existence of the historical, which for him, pertains only to persons in the medium of temporality. Because they have an eternal component in them, they are able to conceive of themselves as being the same person over time, and to understand the duration of their life as forming a unified whole, unlike other animals. He claims, "coming into existence can contain within itself a redoubling, that is, a possibility of a coming into existence within its own coming into existence. Here, in the stricter sense, is the historical" (PF: 76). The historical is "dialectical with respect to time" as a result of emerging from the dynamic interaction between the eternal and temporal in the human being, and thereby involves both persistence and change (PF: 76).

A describes the self-relational activity that the individual engages in when coming into being as a self in the natural world as circular, and as constantly in motion. "Like a squirrel in its cage," he writes, reflective sorrow "turns around in itself" in recollection, rather than forgetting itself and its issues, or losing itself by focusing on finite affairs outside of its concern (E/O I: 170). In constantly returning to herself in her reflections, the individual with an intensified self-consciousness is not fully present to herself in her finite situation. Detached from it as an infinite self, she fails to completely coincide with herself at any single moment in the realm of the temporal. Because the human being in inclosing reserve is not at one with itself in its procession through temporality, self-reflection is rather more like an advancing, spiraling motion rather than a circular one where the self would end its reflections directly at the point where it began them; although the subject matter of these thoughts tends to repeat itself incessantly, she ends up at a new position in her thinking as time goes on, moving forward in her thinking despite the lack of any resolution to it. Through this enduring pattern of self-relational activity, she establishes a history as a person in the world.
A claims that there are only two ways to stop this endless cycle of reflective sorrow and restore unity in the self, or what Anti-Climacus would call the infinite and finite aspects of the self. The first way to break her inclosure would be to find an external expression for one's sorrow. Marie Beaumarchais, for instance, would have to obtain definitive evidence that Clavigo had or had not deceived her. A believes that in this case, the sorrow would not necessarily cease, but it would become an immediate sorrow that discloses itself externally by resting in substantial determinants (E/O I: 178). In this way, relief would arrive as her emotions would no longer be bottled up, and the different aspects of the self would be in basic agreement with one another. The second way would be to resolve to terminate this reflection through an act of will. Marie, however, is still motivated by earthly concerns rather than spiritual ones, and so "this cannot happen, for the will is continually in the service of reflection, which energizes the momentary passion" (E/O I: 188). Although her spirituality is budding insofar as she engages in acts of self-reflection, she has not yet reached the point where she has control over her will as a self. Because her will conforms to her strongest first-order desires, she is, as Frankfurt would put it, more like a wanton than a person with second-order volitions that determine what she will or will not desire. Earthly passion dictates her actions and the content of all of her thinking, while thought inflames the transient desires that force her to aim toward a conclusion to her inquiry. 

A suggests that in order for her to terminate her sorrowful reflection and direct her thinking to other matters, a higher-order act of freedom is needed. By imposing her will as an infinite self, she would be able to subdue the earthly passions that her reflections are entangled in, and thereby liberate her thought from their rule. Marie, however, has yet to gain a grip on her thinking so that she could resolve to quit thinking about whether she was deceived. She has come to herself in suffering under something earthly, but has yet to begin to live as a self-possessed individual. As we will see, the Judge believes that when one has detached oneself from external conditions to the extent that one can gain hold of oneself and begin to will of one's own accord, one has moved beyond the esthetic stage of life and into the ethical stage. This latter stage does

211 Frankfurt initially claims that the wanton could be capable of reasoning or deliberating on what he intends to do, but that in doing so, it wouldn't matter to him what desires form his will (The Importance of What We Care About, p. 17). He rejects this in a later essay, claiming "reasoning involves making decisions concerning what to think, which appear no less incompatible with thoroughgoing wantonness than deciding what one wants to do" (Ibid., p. 176). A suggests that Marie is reasoning about her situation without making decisions about what to think, and so sides with Frankfurt's original claim. It is first-order desires that determine what is on Marie's mind, while reason assists in guiding her to the conclusion she passionately searches for. She has not yet stepped in to intervene by deciding what she wants to think about, or which of these desires she wants to be her will.
not appeal to \( A \), as he believes ethical duties and obligations are an obstacle to enjoyment, which is the only thing worth living for.

One might think that Marie would feel proud and exceptional in distancing herself from the surrounding world and others, much like the modern Antigone. But \( A \) remarks on how insignificant Marie feels in her spiritual abandonment, stating: "Her sorrow always remains a tiny wailing infant, a fatherless and motherless child" (E/O I: 189). As he describes it, her self-enclosure does not seem to be motivated by pride or a feeling of her own importance with respect to others, but rather by uncertainty and doubt about the beloved whose cruel deception left her existing like a foundling. As a Christian, Anti-Climacus would not agree with this assessment. Following Augustine and Luther, who conceived of sin through the metaphor of man being curved in on himself in his selfish rejection of God, he claims that pride is "the secret" of inclosing reserve (SUD: 65).\(^{212}\) Yet Anti-Climacus does not offer a reason to think that inclosing reserve has to be held out of stubborn pride or reprehensible self-love, even if it is in some cases. The fact that it originates in an earthly loss or hardship due to circumstances beyond one's control counts against this conclusion, and instead suggests that the secret of inclosing reserve is unwanted suffering. It is therefore quite natural to sympathize with someone like Marie, who strikes us not as conceited or sinful, or even as selfish, but as a frail individual who suffers tragically through no real fault of her own. One can imagine that many of those who despair after the loss of a loved one, or in suffering from a serious illness or the like, are in a situation similar to hers. It would seem strange to conceive of their heightened self-reflection and disquietude as sin or pride as Anti-Climacus does, unless one has no trouble accepting it is sinful to not easily come to terms with an affliction brought on in one way or another by the will of God. Far from being wicked, their perplexity and sorrow is quite understandable.

\(^{212}\) In *The Gravity of Sin*, Jensen explains that *homo incurvatus in se* is a metaphor that has roots in Christian anthropology. This term was first put forward by St. Augustine and later rehabilitated by Luther to illustrate how the human being, in sin, selfishly turns away from God and others. St. Augustine claims, "Yet man did not fall away to the extent of losing all being; but when he had turned towards himself, his being was less real than when he adhered to him who exists in a supreme degree. And so, to abandon God and to exist in oneself, that is to please oneself, is not immediately to lose all being; but it is to come nearer to nothingness" (*City of God*, Bettenson translation, Book XIV, Section XIII, pp. 572-573). *Indesluttet* would seem to be a descendent of this term, although Kierkegaard does not credit Luther or Augustine for it.
3.5 Conclusion

On Anti-Climacus' view, one first becomes conscious of being in despair when one despairs over a particular suffering or difficulty that arises in one's earthly existence. Because reflection is a part of the self's nature, in despairing over something earthly, one ultimately despairs over oneself as the subject of suffering. Hence, at this stage of personal development, friction arises not only between the self and the world, but also between the self and itself with respect to its abstract and concrete aspects. Since this difficulty pertains to a particular earthly thing, the individual will likely be fairly integrated with the surrounding world and his immediate psychical life, although his connection to them will be loosened or compromised as a result of intense reflection on his life. He might continue enjoying many of the same things, and his desires, attitudes, and lifestyle might not change a great deal. He might also depend on family and the community for support during this time, and still find meaning and value in what he once did. On the other hand, the suffering he experiences leaves him detached, and raises doubts about many of these things that formerly gave him a sense of belonging in the world and society. Self-reflection disrupts the unity and harmony that he felt between himself and the world when life was going smoothly for him, and when he did not need to pause to consider his life too closely. This conflict within the self is characteristic of despair, and attests to a lack of integration between its eternal and temporal components. Anti-Climacus refuses to conceive of this dysfunction as tragedy as an esthete like A would, but believes that it is the individual's own fault. In the next chapter, I argue that despair in weakness could not be the fault of the individual on his own account, much like despair in ignorance could not be. A therefore has good reason to view human existence as tragedy, although one should fault him for not taking human freedom seriously enough.

Through figures like the modern Antigone and Marie Beaumarchais, we have seen that suffering under something earthly rouses the vitality of spirit by bringing the individual to self-reflection and invigorating her imagination and will. Before she experienced this suffering, her reflective and volitional activity was mostly in service to earthly desires, appetites, and passions generated from her natural spontaneity, which proceeds from the lower nature in the human being. Of course, being a member of society contributes to reflection and requires regulation of these selfish desires and drives, which complicates the life of the human being. Yet much of our social life is compatible with our lower nature, and we are allowed to express it in a controlled
and socially approvable manner. When the individual's own spontaneous activity increases as a result of becoming conscious of being in despair, however, backflow occurs, and her attention begins to turn inward toward herself and thoughts about her life. This is liable to isolate her and leave her in a painful state of self-enclosure, where many of her thoughts and feelings remain bottled up and undisclosed to others. Although it has obvious drawbacks, this added complication benefits her insofar as it enriches her inner life, and liberates her from her naive immersion in worldly flux. Human suffering can therefore foster a personal process through which one gains possession of oneself and realizes one's higher nature as spirit. In the next chapter, I explain that this process gains momentum when the individual despairs over the world at large, rather than over some particular thing in it.
Chapter 4
The Self in Flight

4.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, I explained that Anti-Climacus characterizes despair as a form of weakness when the self does not want to be itself because of earthly hardship, loss, or suffering. This form of despair has two phases. In the first phase, the individual despairs over a particular earthly thing, while in the second phase, she despairs over the "earthly in toto," or the world in totality (SUD: 60). When despair intensifies upon entering this second phase, the individual becomes more self-consciousness in knowing herself as absolutely separate from the world and society, and not merely as opposed to particular things that she despairs over. Although the individual who despairs over something earthly starts to gain an appreciation of herself as a "naked abstract self" in her emerging reserve, in other ways, she is still supported by things or people in the world that she closely relates to, such as friends, family, occupations, projects, or the like. In this way, she slowly transitions from the public mode to a new way of viewing the world and her place in it. In the case of despair over the earthly in toto, however, these "externalities" that had previously anchored her in existence and held her interest as a "finite self" no longer do, and in a state of detachment, she sees herself as an individual in conflict with the whole world as an "infinite self." She does not only despair over the state of the world, but in being self-reflective, she also despairs over herself in her painful confrontation with the world.

In this phase of despair, there might indeed be external conflicts involving friends, family, occupations, and so on, but this is not the primary reason for her despair. Her despair originates in self-consciousness, and is caused by internal conflict that arises between the psyche-body relation, which the world has possession of, and the higher capacities of the intellect or will. With earthly suffering having brought her to heightened self-reflection, she has either lost many of the desires she once had in her natural spontaneity, or no longer identifies with them like she once did. Nevertheless, she continues to go on with life in the world torn in this way, without getting much satisfaction from life. Because of her suffering, and perhaps the suffering she observes in others around her, the world in general has started to lose its luster and meaning for her. In a state of crisis, things do not make sense or align with her expectations like they used to, and what once gave her purpose might no longer do so. Unhappy with the present
state of affairs, she will likely spend time fantasizing about a better order of things, or thinking about the way things ought to be rather than the way they are. With the loss of pleasure and meaning in her life, the rift between herself and her finite condition has widened, and the harmony that she had previously enjoyed with it has been lost.

In explaining how this variant of despair arises, Anti-Climacus states: "When the self in imagination despairs with infinite passion over something of this world, its infinite passion changes this particular thing, this something, into the world in toto" (SUD: 60). Inflamed by passion, the imagination "infinitely magnifies" the loss or difficulty through the tendency it has to make hasty generalizations (SUD: 60). This might, for instance occur in someone who has lost a beloved. In losing this particular person, she might soon imagine herself to have lost the whole world. For Anti-Climacus, this individual discovers a genuine aspect of herself in learning of her infinitude, but her partiality toward it is a mistake made by a self in flight from the world. He states that in truth, "the loss or deprivation of every earthly thing is actually impossible, for the category of totality is a thought category" (SUD: 60). Following Aristotle, he suggests that concrete individuals are what truly exist, as opposed to general ideas like that of totality, which are abstractions generated by the imagination.\(^{213}\) The idea seems to be that despite her difficulties, she still exists in the world as an individual in relation to other individuals, and must come to grips with this aspect of herself in order retain balance with her finite aspect. The complication is that the suffering caused by her particular earthy loss has sent her imagination spiraling into such abstractions in the sphere of ideality, and so has exaggerated the infinite aspect of her self at the expense of the finite.

Anti-Climacus does not treat despair over the earthly in toto at length, but in section 4.2, I argue that the pseudonyms in Either/Or provide a rich account of it by delineating what might be described as the reflective esthetic mode of existence. This way of life was intimated in the figures of the modern Antigone and Marie Beaumarchais, who had moved on from the immediate esthetic and public modes in the event of an earthly suffering. It is epitomized, however, by A, an ironist and romanticist who suffers not through anything in particular impinging upon him in the way that Anti-Climacus describes, but by being an intelligent person

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\(^{213}\) Anti-Climacus appears to disagree with A on this point. For A, the elemental power of the sensuous has a reality that cannot be conceived under the category of individuality, although individuals embody this force of nature that subsumes them to varying degrees. As spirit, the individual recognizes the presence of the sensuous within him and negates it through reflective activity, but the sensuous does not itself exist as a concrete individual.
who has gained a clearer sense of the world as a whole after much experience in life. \(^{214}\) These figures all exemplify the inverted vitality of spirit, and show how it produces a desolate state of self-enclosure by disrupting the primitive type of integration one had with the world in one's original immediacy. In section 4.3, I explore the methods that \(A\) uses to cope with this state, which is characteristic of despair.

There is a question, however, of what kind of spiritual activity Anti-Climacus believes gets roused in despair in weakness, given that the self has both reflective and volitional capacities that are interlinked, but not identical. Some scholars have suggested that despair in weakness, and the esthetic way of life in general, is due to an absence of decision or a failure of agency. While this might be Kierkegaard's intent, in section 4.4, I argue that based on the phenomenological evidence he presents throughout his works, this form of despair stems from a complication ensuing from the use of the intellect, rather than from a misuse of the will. \(^{215}\) It is therefore principally a problem of increased knowledge of oneself and existence, or the shedding of ignorance that results from increased self-reflection. It is true that Anti-Climacus describes this as a state of not willing to be oneself, but I claim that by the estimate of him and the Judge, the will is a subsidiary factor in this form of despair. Like despair in ignorance, then, it seems to be a condition that people originally find themselves in, rather than one that they bring upon themselves as he claims. It would be more justifiable to conceive of the division and conflict occurring between the paradoxical aspects of the self as tragedy, rather than as sin or wrongdoing.

4.2 Despair over the Earthly in toto in Either/Or

Through his nihilistic but incisive ruminations on the human condition and existence in general, \(A\) offers a multifaceted approach to the problem of despair by describing the many ways in which it can manifest in the more reflective stages of human life. This involves a pervasive

\(^{214}\) \(A\) does not seem to arrive at this condition through the loss of a particular thing that he has magnified into the world in total, unless one counts the loss of joy as an occasion to rail against all existence (which I discuss in the next section). Or at least if he has, it is not mentioned in his writings. But he would seem to qualify for this condition insofar as he does not despair over anything in particular, but rather in the face of all existence.

\(^{215}\) Kosch, for instance, agrees with Taylor that "the most fundamental characteristic of the aesthetic stage of existence is the absence of decision" (Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling, and Kierkegaard, footnote on p. 150). I agree that this is an important characteristic of the esthetic stage of life, but I reject the notion that despair should be understood as rooted in it, despite Anti-Climacus' protests to the contrary. It is simply inconsistent with what he states elsewhere in the text, and with what Kierkegaard suggests elsewhere in his authorship.
sense of meaninglessness, anxiety, anhedonia, boredom, alienation, isolation, and absurdity. Although these facets of despair might seem only loosely related, I argue that under Anti-Climacus’ view, they are intrinsically linked through their common origin, which is in the state of disintegration the self undergoes through heightened reflection on itself and existence. As we will see in the next section, A tries to overcome despair through the free play of his imagination and by converting his life into art, but he falls well short of success in doing so. This leaves him open to criticism by the Judge, who suggests that he take up the ethical mode of existence to restore his connection with the world, and unify the infinite and finite aspects of himself. The Judge believes he can only do this by properly orienting himself toward the highest good—that is, the Eternal—through an effort of the will, which he has yet to exercise adequately.

4.2.1 The Loss of Joy and the Escalation of Boredom in the Reflective Aesthete

Interestingly enough, A rarely mentions despair explicitly in his collection of writings, and seems reluctant to characterize his condition as that. With the exception of his effusive essay on Don Giovanni, however, it forms the undercurrent of all of them. Reading his papers, one gets the impression of a shrewd man who has foundered under his comprehensive outlook on the world, and by extension, his knowledge of himself as a member of it. As was the case in figures like Marie Beaumarchais and the modern Antigone, reflection has taken him out of his narrow immersion in the present moment and opened up the sphere of ideality. Unfortunately, this increase in activity as a self has placed him into inclosing reserve, where he heaps scorn on all of existence based on the grander vision he has arrived at through his repeated observations. As the Judge explains, A’s thought about his situation and the human condition has made him “a stranger and an alien in the world” (E/O II: 83). His alienation from the world figures most prominently in “Diapsamalta,” which contains a series of aphorisms on human existence that he fittingly addresses “to himself” (E/O I: 17). There he writes,

I am alone, as I have always been—forsaken not by men, that would not pain me, but by the happy jinn of joy, who trooped around me in great numbers, who met acquaintances everywhere, showed me an opportunity everywhere. (E/O I: 41)

216 Under the pseudonym of Johannes Climacus, Kierkegaard confirms that this was his intention in writing about the esthetic stage of life in Either/Or, remarking: “Part I was despair” (CUP: 253).
Ironically, he believes that his loneliness does not stem from his isolation from other people, but from the joy that had embraced him in his original immediacy abandoning him and making him fend for himself. This pleasurable feeling was not one that he chose, but it instead came upon him naturally in his proximity with the sensuous, when he felt in agreement with affairs in the surrounding world. *A* suggests that this withdrawal of joy causes him to feel alienated from the world *in toto*, but for Anti-Climacus this is a mistake: it is actually our own activity of self-reflection that disrupts the enjoyment that the sensuous presents us with in our finitude by bringing us to an awareness of our separation from it as an "infinite self." Since this type of happiness "is not a qualification of spirit," the self cannot restore the enjoyment that has been lost of its own accord (SUD: 25).

Although contemplative enjoyment is possible at this stage due to the continued influx of the sensuous, this comes rather infrequently, and overall is not as pleasing as being immersed in joy. Of course, the cultivation of one's intellectual capacities is productive in many ways, but it can carry with it detrimental effects. Had *A* not begun to think abstractly about his life in the world to the extent that he has, he would never have lost this primordial joy of living that a sensualist like Don Giovanni experienced in going through 1,003 women without getting sick of it. But since reflection is an essential activity of the self that is catalyzed not only by suffering, but also by the acquisition of language, education, and social conditioning, a heightening of this activity inevitably arises in any normal human being. Few, however, will realize this capacity to the degree that *A* has. It is therefore less likely that most people will experience the continual absence of joy that he feels.

Because the human being is spirit, the natural vitality and passive enjoyment of someone like Don Giovanni cannot generally be sustained over the course of an entire lifetime. For those who have gained a great deal of experience in life and have given much thought to it, desire gradually wanes, and what once provided satisfaction eventually becomes stale. In the case of *A*, life has lost the enchantment that it once had for him, and has become a mundane routine. Exiled from the sensuous as spirit, he complains that he no longer has the same enthusiasm for things as he once did:

My soul is dull and slack; in vain do I jab the spur of desire into its side; it is exhausted, it can no longer raise itself up in its royal jump. I have lost all my illusions. In vain do I seek to abandon myself in joy’s infinitude; it cannot lift me, or, rather, I cannot lift myself. Previously, when it merely beckoned, I
mounted, light, hearty, and cheerful. When I rode slowly through the forest, it seemed as if I were flying. Now, when the horse is covered with lather and is almost ready to drop, it seems to me that I do not move from the spot... (E/O I: 41)

A can recall a point in his life when everything was new and wonderful, and he felt exuberant as desire irresistibly grabbed him and propelled him on the journey through temporality. In this stage of natural spontaneity, the sensuous had captivated his interest with its lush and vibrant activity, without demanding much from him in return. To the extent that reflection accompanied this process, it was used uncritically to help him find the means to satisfying his natural desires and appetites, or to conduct himself in a way that would meet social demands and expectations. By establishing an abbreviated degree of separation between himself and the surrounding world, it was able to lift him above the moment just enough for him to get a wider perspective on it, but he could just as quickly enter back into the swing of things at the next moment.

Unfortunately the time of youthful vigor has long since passed, and it now takes strained effort on his part to do anything. A writes that even trivial everyday activities have become burdensome, and no longer come naturally to him:

I don’t feel like riding—the motion is too powerful; I don’t feel like walking—it is too tiring; I don’t feel like lying down, for either I would have to stay down, and I don’t feel like doing that, or I would have to get up again, and I don’t feel like doing that, either. Summa Summarum: I don’t feel like doing anything. (E/O I: 20)

In a state of listlessness, he appears to conclude that action in the external world is futile, even though he is highly active in the internal realm of abstraction. His vitality is therefore inverted. As he ponders his situation as a disengaged spectator of the universe, he does not see the point of doing anything. Yet he somehow manages to go on without really wanting to.

No longer attracted by life in the world, A is left alone without a compelling reason to act, and life has become boring for him. The world does not stimulate his senses in the way that it used to, although his lack of interest in its affairs does stimulate thought and speculation, and made him more self-conscious as a result. In the esthetic essay “Rotation of Crops,” he argues that boredom is a fundamental principle of existence (E/O I: 290-291). This basic fact of boredom is concealed from the lives of most people, but it is nevertheless there, and able to
disclose itself to disillusioned reflection that has turned in upon itself. Boredom, he explains, motivates action in existence by means of repulsion, as people desire to rid themselves of its influence by losing themselves in worldly engagements, whether they are conscious of this or not. He even speculates that boredom must have been the impetus of motion in the act of creation. “The gods were bored,” he writes, “therefore they created human beings. Adam was bored because he was alone; therefore Eve was created. Since that moment, boredom entered the world and grew in quantity in exact proportion to the growth of population” (E/O I: 286).

Although daily tasks, relationships with others, projects, busywork and the like offer relief from boredom for most people, A has become disengaged from all these affairs through increased reflection on himself and existence. As a result, the boredom lurking beneath it all appears to him in all its might. No longer able to experience joy, which would relieve him of his boredom and bring him into concrete engagement with the world, he is no longer moved to act in it, and no longer strongly identifies with what he once did. As external action declines, his internal activity of reflection is spiraling, leading to a renewed vitality that I have described in the third chapter as inverted vitalism. But as we have seen through Anti-Climacus' writings and the A's essays, this loss of harmony between the infinite and finite aspects of the self is despair, and must be surmounted to arrive at spiritual health.

4.2.2 Fatalism and Existential Paralysis

A does not believe he did anything to prompt joy’s departure, and thinks that there is nothing he can do of his own powers to bring it back. He feels himself to be without a say in his crippling loneliness and abstraction—a hapless victim of fate. He declares, “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! Well, then, even though I cannot spin, I can still cut the thread” (E/O I: 31). In this aphorism, A suggests that at an earlier point of his life, when he was in the midst of things, he had the impression of having control over his life and power over his own destiny when he acted. This is a freedom he strongly desires as a human being. As he begins to stop and reflect on the series of events unfolding around him, whether it is due to the loss of joy or some earthly crisis that befell him as Anti-Climacus suggests, he begins to think this sense of freedom was an illusion. From his alienated standpoint, everything about his existence, including his own desires, seems to be the result of forces beyond his control. Things are inexplicably happening to him, without him being
the cause of anything. In his theorizing, he finds himself a passive bystander in a situation not of his own making, but rather one in which he is "spun" or thrown into. This is, of course, a far cry from Kierkegaard's religious conception of being as gift.

Feeling impotent, he is convinced that the cosmos generates life out of an indifferent and impersonal necessity, with no regard for him as an individual. “I am predestined,” he writes, “fate laughs at me when it suddenly shows me how everything I do to resist becomes a factor in such an existence” (E/O I: 36). Believing that he is ultimately unable to rejuvenate himself through an effort of the will, he claims to have only one real liberating power: the stoical capacity to detach himself from his natural condition, including his feelings, emotions, and other people, so that they have only a minimal effect on him. He can only “cut the thread” from life and refuse identifying with these things by being perched in contemplation of his natural condition, rather than being an earnest participant attached to certain projects, relationships, or outcomes that might occur. A is indeed an esthete without religious commitments, but this is nevertheless a spiritual movement intended to redeem from his entanglement in the temporal. Yet in implementing this desperate strategy to save himself through his acts of reflection, he severs his connection to his finite self, which is irretrievably in the world and bound up with the processes of life. In putting too much stock into his infinitude, he does not want to be himself in his finitude. As a result, his alienation from the finite only worsens, and inclosing reserve reaches a fever pitch.

By his own estimate, this liberating measure is not nearly as effective as he would like in bringing him the serenity he desires. Despite his mystical contemplation, he still admits to having to endure a life filled with suffering:

“I seem destined to have to suffer through all possible moods, to be required to have experiences of all kinds. At every moment I lie out in the middle of the ocean like a child who is supposed to learn to swim. I scream (this I have learned from the Greeks, from whom one can learn the purely human). Admittedly, I

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217 Summarizing Luther's assessment of man's fallen condition, Shestov makes a point that befits A's fatalistic perspective: "the fallen man cannot do anything for his own salvation, his choice is no longer free, everything that he undertakes brings him closer to death, and the more he "does" the weaker he becomes and the deeper his fall" (Athens and Jerusalem, p. 221). Anti-Climacus claims that the human being is free to make the resolution of faith, but that God has to act upon us to save us, and to establish the conditions under which the choice to become a Christian can be made. We cannot do it of our own powers, but must have faith that help will come from the outside. One might take offense at the idea that God incarnated himself as a human being for our salvation, but as he explains: “Faith is a choice, certainly not direct reception—and the recipient is the one who is disclosed, whether he will believe or be offended” (PC: 141).
have a swimming belt around my waist, but I do not see the support that is supposed to hold me up. It is an appalling way to gain experience.” (E/O I: 31-32)

Broadening his thinking to matters concerning the totality of existence, A has no an adequate explanation for his predicament. Without a belief in God, or any firm understanding about the ultimate nature of reality, he finds himself surrounded by mystery. Feeling as helpless as a child as he floats atop an ocean of uncertainty, he concludes that some power must be sustaining him in his existence, but he is not sure what it is. He anxiously struggles to make out the best way to navigate the waters it has cast him out on, but never feels confident about his ability to do so. Neither does he know where they will ultimately lead him. Pascal had expressed a similar worry in his *Pensées*, writing, “The eternal silence of these infinite spaces fills me with dread.”

Perhaps A screams to fill these spaces and draw the attention or pity of the powers that overwhelm him, but in their indifference, they refuse to give any reply. As his existential reflections advance and lead him into the infinitude of the imagination, Anti-Climacus would claim that A neglects the finite aspect of the self, which creates an imbalance within it. In lacking an appreciation for the concrete context of his existence in his excessive abstraction, he is in a disoriented condition that Anti-Climacus calls infinitude's despair (SUD: 30-33).

In this state of flight, where all relations to the finite are severed, A discovers the terrible ambiguity of his fate, imagining the many possibilities that might be realized in existence. He explains that this repulses him, and causes him profound anxiety:

> What is going to happen? What will the future bring? I do not know, I have no presentiment. When a spider flings itself from a fixed point down into its consequences, it continually sees before it an empty space in which it can find no foothold, however much it stretches. So it is with me; before me is continually an empty space, and I am propelled by a consequence that lies behind me. This life is turned around and dreadful, not to be endured. (E/O I: 24)

Although he exists in a state of detachment, he still feels himself reaching out toward something solid and secure to hold onto, some end or goal that will guarantee him final rest and safety, but such stability eludes him. The future gives him no assurance that he will ever find it, and proffers only a multitude of vapid experiences instead. He gets the sense that whatever force propels him

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218 Pascal, *Pensées*, p. 66.
onward through temporality has long since determined what it will do with him, and although he
would like to change his trajectory, he can do nothing to frustrate the necessity of its procession.

Remarking on the distinct mood that his fatalism produces in him, he writes, “I feel as a
chessman must feel when the opponent says of it: That piece cannot be moved” (E/O I: 22). He
longs for freedom, which for Anti-Climacus, is an essential characteristic of the self, but the loss
of freedom he assumes rules out any capacity for choice that would make an honest difference in
existence. This puts a severe limitation on what remains possible for him. He once saw a world
of possibility at his fingertips, but it has since been brought to ruins. He laments:

“My soul has lost possibility. 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!” (E/O I: 41)

Recall that Anti-Climacus holds that necessity and possibility are two components of the self that
are brought into relation. In viewing his entire life under the category of necessity and ceding the
notion of possibility, Anti-Climacus would claim that A has disregarded an essential component
of who he is. He has thereby succumbed to necessity's despair, which is to lack possibility (SUD:
37-42). Anti-Climacus believes that when there is an overweight of one or more of these
components, as in the case of A, the self is in despair as a result of losing its integrity or balance.
A's position is especially unstable in that he might also be described as having succumbed to
possibility's despair by lacking necessity. Steeped in the infinite through his overactive
imagination, he is anxious about what might happen in the future, and shipwrecked on
speculations about the nature and origin of his existence. With existence appearing chaotic to
him, everything has come to seem possible for him, while nothing seems possible at the same
time. Vacillating between these two variants of despair, he occupies a self-contradictory position
rife with tension and incoherence, and this only worsens his despair.

The lack of possibility and freedom leaves A in a wretched state of paralysis. As the
Judge puts it, for a reflective aesthete like A who has thought through his existential condition in
such a thoroughgoing manner, “life comes to a halt” (E/O II: 171). In contrast, the vital activity
of immediate esthetes like Don Giovanni or those in the public mode rarely comes to a halt, for
reflection, in ministering to appetites, immediate desires, and surrounding events, has not
intensified in a way that would disrupt the flow of the sensuous by calling anything too radically into question. Doing what comes naturally to them, whether it be conforming to social norms or following their strongest desires where they lead, these individuals do not pause to step back from their situation to evaluate it to any significant degree, and lack an enduring identity as selves. As a reflective esthete who has transitioned from these stages of life, A writes, “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.” (E/O I: 26) While those in the earlier stages of life are immersed in temporality through their entanglement with the sensuous, and are basically "going with the flow" of it all, A observes himself standing at a point outside of it in inclosing reserve, ruminating upon existence while alienated from the world. However, he is nevertheless situated in it as a human being constituted by psyche and body, and so is alienated from himself.

Reflection has enabled A to apprehend existence and come to a greater understanding of it, but it leaves him at such a remove from the present moment that the fluid character of temporality loses its emphasis. In an evocative description of this state, Thompson writes that A feels as if "the continuity of his life has been ruptured on either side of the present moment. He looks back to a past which is no longer, and forward to a future which is not yet. Removed from both, he occupies a moment which is, as it were, wrenched out of time. This moment—isolated, discontinuous, lonely—is the moment of the “dreadful still life” which lies at the heart of A's existence.”

For this reason, A asserts, “It is not merely in isolated moments that I, as Spinoza says, view everything aeterno modo, but I am continually aeterno modo” (E/O I: 39). As we saw in chapter one, pantheists and objective thinkers also enter this "timeless" state of universality in their impartial speculations, disregarding their existence as individuals in their search for an eternally valid explanation of things. Their situation is therefore similar to that of A. While

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219 Thompson, *The Lonely Labyrinth*, p. 43.
220 See section 1.2.
221 The Judge criticizes those philosophers who conceive of their lives altogether speculatively, without valuing their individuality. Because they believe all of their actions are necessitated by past events, they do not take themselves to be freely choosing their actions with an eye toward an indeterminate future. Consequently, "life comes to a halt" for them (E/O II: 171). In his view, they too are in despair in their reflections, and are alienated from themselves much like A is, even if they do not realize it. Describing their condition, he writes: "Their minds are at ease; objective, logical thinking has been brought to rest in its corresponding objectivity, and yet, even though they divert themselves by objective thinking, they are in despair, for a person can divert himself in many ways, and there is scarcely any means as dulling and deadening as abstract thinking, for it is a matter of conducting oneself as impersonally as possible" (E/O II: 212). In the Judge's view, A and the philosophers are "outside" of themselves in

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these thinkers remain in it only during intense periods of study or contemplation, A purports to remain in it constantly, with a sense of his individuality intact.

This moment is a painful position to be in, but it has great import for the development of selfhood. It indicates that the eternal and eminently spiritual aspect of his self has come to the fore and begun to eclipse the temporal aspect that had kept him enslaved to sensual desire, his natural condition, and his social milieu. While this helps bring the self to maturity, in other respects, A displays a remarkable immaturity as a self. For Anti-Climacus, A despairs of the earthly in toto by hovering in the infinitude of abstract thought, without admitting the significance of his existence as an individual, which is concrete and real. Consequently, he has become a fantastic spectator of existence rather than an active participant in it. In turning too closely to the eternal aspect of the self and neglecting the temporal aspect, he continues to be disintegrated as a self. The Christian would also criticize him for his lack of faith. In failing to orient himself to the past or future in such a way that he could conceive of his life as a unified whole, he does not repent of his misdeeds, nor does he expect salvation in a life to come. For Haufniensis, the dreadful moment A describes is transfigured under the terms Christianity introduces, and becomes the Instant.²²² Rather than regarding it as unbearable, the person of faith interprets it as a sign that salvation is imminent. He do not remain hung up sub specie aeternitatis like A, but reconciles himself with his concrete existence as an individual by living in the world as Christ taught, or in other words, doing God's will in existence.

While A has gained an intimation of himself as spirit and as a synthesis of the eternal and temporal, infinitude and finitude, and possibility and necessity through the deepening of reflection, in Kierkegaard’s view, he remains at an early stage on the path toward realizing his spiritual nature. As Kierkegaard explains in Two Ages, this recognition of one's infinitude and of possibility is a precondition for a higher and more liberating mode of existence, but is in no way sufficient for it (TA: 96). A's estheticism would need to be surmounted in order for him to enter the ethical or religious stages and properly realize his freedom. As we will see, in these stages, he could embrace both the eternal and temporal aspects of himself, and help bring them into alignment as a way of overcoming despair, along with his debilitating tragic sense of life.

²²² For Haufniensis, “the instant” signifies the point at which the eternal makes its first attempt at stopping time. See section 1.3.2.
4.2.3 The Loss of Meaning, and the Attempt to Rediscover Joy

Because of his increasing detachment from the world and from other people, which had previously endowed his life with ample meaning without him having to search for it or give it meaning through his own efforts, A must grapple with a looming sense that existence is meaningless. Sometimes, he seeks for a greater meaning that might be eluding him, asking, “What, if anything, is the meaning of this life?” (E/O I: 31). At other times, however, he comes to the nihilistic conclusion that the search is futile, and that there is no meaning to be found in the tedious march of necessity, which generates the same outcome for all finite beings in the end:

How empty and meaningless life is…we find consolation in the thought that we have a long life ahead of us. But how long is seven times ten years? Why not settle it all at once, why not stay out there and go along down into the grave and draw lots to see to whom will befall the misfortune of being the last of the living who throws the last three spadefuls of earth on the last of the dead? (E/O I: 29)

To A, who discerns the nothingness of temporality, nothing seems to last, and the inevitability of death renders everything we do pointless and insignificant in the long run. Moments of joy flee from our grasp just as soon as they arrive, and everything held dear to us will be utterly forgotten at the end of this short life. By bringing the totality of existence under scrutiny, including an uncertain future, his thoughts have emptied any meaning that his present circumstances might offer without replacing it with anything. With possibility being lost for him, any attempt to recover a possible meaning must, in the final moment, be a hopeless enterprise.

The Judge corroborates the conclusion that this state is despair in his treatment of the esthetic life-view of A. Given that despair is mentioned infrequently in A’s writings, one cannot assume he would necessarily agree with this assessment, despite the mounting evidence for it. The Judge says that he might prefer to call his a life-view of sorrow, which for him, can still be of esthetic interest, or he might not admit to having a life-view at all (E/O II: 232-239). Nevertheless, the Judge calls despair "the final esthetic life-view" because the individual taking it up has come to recognize the meaninglessness and futility of a life centered upon the enjoyment of transient pleasures (E/O II: 194). In his letter to A, the Judge writes,

You still have in your power all the elements for an esthetic life-view. You have financial means, independence; your health is undiminished; your mind is still vigorous; and you have never been unhappy
because a young girl would not love you. And yet you are in despair. It is not a despair involving something actual but a despair in thought. Your thought has rushed ahead; you have seen through the vanity of everything, but you have not gone further. Occasionally you dive into it, and when for a single moment you abandon yourself to enjoyment, you are also aware that it is vanity. Thus you are continually beyond yourself—that is, in despair. (E/O II: 194)

As the Judge explains, it cannot be the actual circumstances of his life that have made A unhappy, since these are quite good, but rather how he has come to understand or interpret these circumstances. He therefore seems to disagree with Anti-Climacus' claim that earthly hardship or suffering is needed to jolt the individual into an intensified state of self-consciousness. Perhaps in intelligent or sensitive individuals like A, learning or rumination would suffice. He initially retreated into ideality to escape the burden of reality, which he judges to be vain and empty, but his knowledge ends up burdening him more than reality ever did. The Judge notes that on a few occasions, A's wandering reflections subside enough for him to enjoy himself by getting caught up in the moment, much like the immediate esthete. Yet even when this happens, there is still a sense in which A is outside of the moment in thought, and for the Judge, this can only mean he is in despair. Not only is this despair of the earthly in toto, but more importantly, it is also despair over himself as a thinking being who must confront the world in all its tedium and triviality.

By living in the concealment of inclosing reserve, A occupies the standpoint of irony. Kierkegaard explains that a feature of all forms of irony, whether it is rhetorical, literary, or existential, is that "the phenomenon is not the essence but the opposite of the essence" (CI: 247). One can note how the inner life of A fails to coincide with his outer character. He appears to others as a healthy, stable bourgeoisie citizen, but on the inside, he broods over how wretched everything is, without anyone else having a clue. Kierkegaard generally treats of irony as a state of consciousness in which the subject sees himself "as negatively free" from all earthly bonds and attachments, or what I have referred to as the social substance (CI: 247). This negative freedom is a consequence of spiritual acts of negation, which generate reflection upon one's natural condition by bringing the self back to itself in a repelling movement away from it.²²³ This spiritual power liberates the individual from the surrounding world and puts them into a position to comprehend it, but it can be taken to extremes if he does not temper it with existential commitment to the finite. In its extreme form, represented by A, irony undermines everything

²²³ See section 2.2.1.1 for an explanation of this activity.
that supports the individual in existence, including its sense and meaning. From this standpoint, the social substance has lost its substance, and shown itself to be illusory. Kierkegaard writes:

Irony sensu eminentiori is not aimed at one part of existence or another, but is aimed at the entire actuality of a given time and under given circumstances. It has, therefore, an apriority in itself; it does not achieve its totalizing view by successively destroying one part of actuality after the next, but it is by virtue of its totalizing view that it destroys individual parts. It is not one phenomenon or another which is observed sub specie ironiae, but it is the totality of existence. As far as this goes, one sees the correctness of Hegel's designation of irony as infinite absolute negativity. (CI: 254)

Kierkegaard explains that the ironic consciousness consists of an irreducible and self-sufficient unity in relation to the world and its multiplicity. One does not arrive at this unity by judging particular things or events to be insignificant or illegitimate, since then irony would be dependent on the parts of reality that it negates. In this case, the ironist would not be able to adopt a universalized standpoint independent of the world's multiplicity, and so would never be able to achieve an overarching view in which he recognizes the finite particulars as being parts of a greater whole. In its infinitude, irony understands itself as absolutely distinct from anything external or finite, which for it, is a mere passing show bearing no essential truth. To the extent that the ironist allows himself an identity rather than nullifying it like he does with everything else, he would be an internalist about his identity, but it is unlikely he will allow this. In refusing to let anything remain unharmed under his destructive gaze, A does not employ his freedom as spirit in a positive, concrete way by bringing himself into engagement with the world, others, or God.

The pall of meaninglessness A discovers in existence makes the achievement of a concrete unity with it exceedingly difficult. Adrift in a world that he has difficulty relating to, he finds himself set with no real purpose or task, or even a real opportunity for pleasure; as a result, he feels that he has no good reason to act. The Judge charges A with being indifferent toward the consequences of his actions, saying, “You turn toward the future, for action is essentially future tense; you say: I can do either this or do that, but whichever I do is equally absurd—ergo, I do nothing at all” (E/O II: 170). Lacking any sense of direction that would guide him toward a desirable end, A is without any "ground projects" that would give him meaning and a reason for
living by anchoring him to his concrete existence. In a groundless state of flight from it all, he is unable to act with any enthusiasm or conviction. What happens to him also does not matter to him. He maintains, “If I were offered all the glories of the world or all the torments of the world, one would move me no more than the other; I would not turn over to the other side either to attain or to avoid (E/O I: 37). His existential paralysis has not only made the quality of his experience burdensome and boring, but has led him to the point that he has no motivation to do anything. Without a will of his own, he has resigned to being passive to the greater forces in the world that have swept him up and determined his circumstances. Now, however, he is an ironic spectator of them, as opposed to Don Giovanni, who was absorbed in them in his enthusiastic participation in existence.

While A has developed spiritually by having surmounted his natural immediacy through his own activity of reflection, Anti-Climacus would claim that his idleness and apathy toward his life show that he still has a long way to go before he realizes his full potential as a self. A has no robust will of his own, and as he explains, the less will one has, the less of a self one is; without a will, one is not a self at all (SUD: 29). The Judge claims that there is one sense in which A does have a will. He says to him, “What you want to be is—fate” (E/O II: 15). This suggests that A has forgone the exercise of his freedom in an attempt to reconcile himself with the natural processes that unfold by necessity, which in his view requires an embrace of the tragic. Perhaps he believes that by successfully leaping into the sensuous, he would become present to himself again in his finitude, and would recover his long-lost joy of living. He would, at the same moment, have quelled his acute self-consciousness, which he longs to be free from. As Heidegger explains in his own thought, this quietistic movement would seem to require a weak application of the will at the outset, or a will to not will, so that the self can give up its resistance and let in sensuous energies without influencing them through its higher-order acts. But
weaning himself from willing by surrendering to fate is not how he should use his will if he intends to maintain his integrity as a self and retain the possibility of defeating despair. Recall that, for Anti-Climacus, the self is a synthesis of freedom and necessity. By aligning himself with necessity and denying his freedom as an individual, \( A \) neglects a crucial facet of selfhood, and so does not want to be himself. If it were possible to succeed in carrying out this movement, he would still be disintegrated as a self.

Don Giovanni was similarly without a will in his sensual intoxication. Disintegrated as a self in a pre-reflective mode of self-consciousness, he was in thrall to the temporal, without the ability to even know this. By resigning himself to fate, \( A \) seems to want to regress to a unitive state much like that of Don Giovanni in an effort to recapture the splendor of immediacy, and recover his natural spontaneity. This strategy, however, is incoherent. In despair over himself and his separation from the earthly \textit{in toto}, \( A \) might try to throw himself into sensual living in order to rid himself of self-consciousness and rekindle the enjoyment of previous times. But as spirit, this infantile way of life is exactly what he had originally flown from in becoming more self-conscious. Even if he were to succeed in returning to an illusory state of security and comfort by assimilating back into the public mode, he would not be happy in it for very long. He would soon remove himself from it again through ironic reflection, where he would turn back in upon himself. He is therefore in dire straits in despairing over himself and over the earthly, and must figure out a different way to combat his despair than inclining too heavily toward one pole rather than the other. Additionally, short of a lobotomy or mental disease, the knowledge of existence he has obtained in his infinitude cannot be forgotten. It would also seem difficult, if not impossible, to turn off reflection at will. Rather than move backward in a nostalgic groping for an idyllic past, he must push forward in his pursuit of unity by willing to be himself. This outlook toward the future would put him into the ethical or religious stage, where he would gain a deepened appreciation of his agency and responsibility as an individual in possession of himself. As we will see in the next chapter, an affirmation of his individuality will first take him further into despair, which is something that the hedonist \( A \) does not want to risk.

\begin{quote}
annihilation of the will would come upon the individual as a gift from beyond, rather than as his own doing. At this point of dispossession, he would be totally possessed by the greater powers that be.
\end{quote}
4.2.4 Absurdity and The Persistence of Desire in the Reflective Esthete

Although A condemns all of existence, and is listless when it comes to engaging in worldly activities or seeking earthly satisfactions, as an inverted vitalist, desire does not entirely go away for him. He admits, “my eyes are surfeited and bored with everything, and yet I hunger” (E/O I: 25). He feels that something essential is absent in his life, but he cannot discern what it is that he needs to complete him. This is not a desire for any object that the world or society can offer him, since his desires for finite goods are either satisfied or easily satisfied. It seems, then, that it could not have originated within the psyche-body unity, or the lower nature of the human being, at all. It is rather a non-naturalistic desire stemming from the individualized élan that was evoked in the face of earthly difficulty, when the infinite component of the self began to drive a wedge between himself and the surrounding world. As an inverted vitalist, he has what C.S. Lewis would describe as an "inconsolable longing" for something transcendent and ineffable, which corresponds with the eternal aspect of his being. The Germans refer to this feeling as Sehnsucht, but I will refer to it as spiritual longing. Those who are ignorant of being selves are likely unaware of this infinite longing in their cravings for sex, money, success, material things, acclaim, and so on, but it emerges in those whose higher, spiritual nature has awakened.

One might attempt to address spiritual longing by throwing oneself into sensuality, with nostalgic yearnings for an earlier, happier period of life, but as we have seen, this would be a mistake. This desire cannot be fulfilled by any finite good in the temporal, and so must be directed toward an infinite good. In Repetition, Kierkegaard treats spiritual longing in the reflective esthete in great detail under the pseudonym of Constantin Constantius. Constantius tells a story of a young man who falls deeply in love with a woman, but whose love only lasts for a few days before his feelings for her dissipate. While he is initially overcome by the glory of the beloved, who captures his imagination and fills him with awe, his bliss cannot be sustained for long. Once it passes, he feels empty, and even annoyed by the woman. He can only begin to approach this feeling again by recollecting the love he had for her, but merely imagining it pales in comparison to the real thing, and so ends up making him generally unhappy. In the wake of this loss, the young man experiences “a melancholy longing in which he not so much drew near to the beloved as withdrew from her" (REP: 137). He flees into the sphere of ideality to reflect on his former love for her, while confusedly trying to maintain the relationship in everyday life.

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226 See C.S. Lewis, Surprised by Joy, p. 72.
despite the fallout from the feelings that are now lost. As Constantius explains, in truth, it was never the woman he loved: "she was merely the visible form, while his thoughts, his soul, sought something else that he attributed to her" (REP: 141). Constantius refers to this "something else" that transfigured the woman as "the idea" which his love had set in motion in him (REP: 140). His point seems to be that the woman had momentarily embodied the idea of infinite love or goodness, and that this brief experience of its realization had brought out the romantic in him. He longs for the return of the wholeness and unity he felt in that moment (what Constantius calls a repetition), when the reality of the woman and the idea of love in its infinitude coincided. Now, however, he is divided against himself. He perceives the woman and all of reality as imperfect, while chasing the perfection of the idea through his poetic imagination, as it beckons to him from on high.227

Both the young man and A are reflective esthetes, but A's case would seem to be different in some ways, since he does not cite a failed love affair as the reason for his misery. Perhaps he thinks he is close to attaining this highest good that the young man longs for when beauty dawns on him in its profundity, whether it is through the observance of art or an encounter with the sublime in a natural setting. This might offer him a taste of heaven for the moment, but his persistent malaise would seem to suggest that it does not provide the lasting fulfillment and harmony he seeks.228 As we will see in the following chapters, individuals at a higher stage of personal development aim to address spiritual longing by pursuing the ethical or religious way of life. For Anti-Climacus (and also for Lewis), only Christianity offers a convincing response to the essential needs of the human spirit by promising to unite the individual with God, and by this means, to eternally heal the division between the infinite and finite components in the self.

227 Continuing a theme that lurks throughout Kierkegaard's works, Constantius considers the notion that God is a seducer. As he understands it, God used the girl to stimulate the young man's spirituality and evoke in him an idea of infinite goodness. "From a religious point of view, one could say it is as if God used this girl to capture him, and yet the girl herself is not an actuality but is like the laced-wing fly with which a hook is baited" (REP: 185). In a religious sense, the young girl is a "ladder rung by which he had climbed" on his inward journey toward God (REP: 138).

228 A rhapsodic expression from his Journals provides evidence that Kierkegaard might have experienced what it is like to have this longing fulfilled for a brief period of time, or at least to the limited extent that earthly life permits of this. “There is an indescribable joy that glows all through us just as inexplicably as the apostle’s exclamation breaks forth for no apparent reason: “Rejoice, and again I say, Rejoice.”—Not a joy over this or that, but the soul’s full outcry “with tongue and mouth and from the bottom of the heart”: “I rejoice with my joy, by, in, with, about, over, for, and with my joy”—a heavenly refrain which, as it were, suddenly interrupts our other singing, a joy which cools and refreshes like a breath of air, a breeze from the trade winds which blow across the plains of Mamre to the everlasting mansions” (JP V: 5324).
A's despair can be seen to stem from the incompatibility between some of his basic needs as a human being with a spiritual aspect, and the barren conditions of existence, which can fulfill hardly any of them. He yearns for freedom and enriched possibility, but can only believe in fate. He desperately seeks understanding, meaning, and purpose, but things have come to seem meaningless. He wants to experience joy, but pleasures now feel dull to him, and he cannot help but be bored by everything. He desires security and certainty, but senses danger and volatility in existence. These are all indications that he is alienated from the world, and by extension, himself as a finite being related to others in it. Reflecting on the experience of these effects of alienation, as he does in "Diapsalmata," only exacerbates his problems, creating a devastating feedback loop of despair. The state of alienation that reflection has sent him spiraling into implies that he is disintegrated and imbalanced as a self. In his spiritual longing, he cannot attain harmony with an imperfect world he is forced to reside in, and which does not align with his lofty ideals.

This conflict at work in A's life reveals something absurd or even paradoxical about his situation. Camus explores this absurdity in great depth in his writings on the human condition. Interpreting Camus' thought, Sagi explains:

On the surface, the absurd resembles alienation, but this is not so. The experience of alienation focuses on the process of detachment and separation. By contrast, the experience of the absurd assumes that unity and alienation coexist, and the sole legitimate meaning of unity is the constant yearning for it.

Anti-Climacus could explain the absurd through his view on the paradoxical nature of the self, or spirit, which demands both separation and union in its existence. We have seen that A's life is marked by the widening gap between the infinite and finite aspects of himself, as spirit liberates thought, imagination, and the will from the confinement of the earthly through its reflective acts of negation. Yet his life consists in a unity insofar as spirit consists of the relation between the infinite and finite. Unfortunately, this relation is not the untroubled unity that he desires, since existence refuses to accommodate him by satisfying his longings as a self that has something

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229 Throughout his works, Kierkegaard suggests that this incongruence between the individual and the world is despair, but Camus refers to it as the absurd. Camus defines it as "that divorce between the mind that desires and the world that disappoints, my nostalgia for unity, this fragmented universe and the contradiction that binds them together" (*The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 49).

230 Sagi, *Albert Camus and the Philosophy of the Absurd*, p. 23
infinite and eternal within it. Try as he might, he cannot hope to acclimate to existence by ridding himself of his finite aspect, as was clear in the failures of stoical detachment to resolve the alienation he experiences. Despite being able to view his life and existence from a universalized perspective, his embodiment and psychical life as a particular individual are conditions that he finds himself ineluctably attached to. He therefore realizes that he must overcome the alienation wrought by spirit not by indulging the negativity of contemplation, but by using his freedom in a positive way in taking an active and participative role in existence. In the next section, I explore the methods that \( A \) uses to forge this connection with existence in practice.

### 4.3 Coping with Despair: The Decadent Life-view of the Reflective Aesthete

I have argued that for Anti-Climacus, the meditations in "Diapsalmata" reveal a man in despair, but this is not to suggest that \( A \) wallows in despair without taking measures to mitigate it or even overcome it. As an esthete, \( A \) seeks redemption from his misery not in ethical or religious action, but by taking up the life of the mind in pursuit of great art. \( A \) does not just indulge in art as a hobby, as he does throughout his collection of essays, but more importantly, he attempts to conceive of his life as art to glorify it and make it interesting again. His approach bears much in common with that of the Romantics, who tended to treat all of reality poetically. Through ironic detachment, he turns his life into poetry by engaging in flights of imagination that take him out of the real world and into an ideal world of his own devising. He explains:

> My sorrow is my baronial castle, which lies like an eagle’s nest high up on the mountain peak among the clouds. No one can take it by storm. From it I swoop down into actuality and snatch my prey, but I do not stay down there. I bring my booty home, and this booty is a picture I weave into the tapestries at my castle. Then I live as one already dead. Everything I have experienced I immerse in a baptism of oblivion unto an eternity of recollection. Everything temporal and fortuitous is forgotten and blotted out. (E/O I: 42)

\(^{231}\) \( A \)'s poetic reconstruction of reality draws heavily from the thought of Schlegel, a leading figure in the Romantic movement and a proponent of irony. Kierkegaard treats this topic in *The Concept of Irony*. In analyzing Schlegel's *Lucinde* within the context of that work, Soderquist explains that Schlegel "uses the term “irony” to describe the consciousness of an individual who has discovered the spiritual key to personal integration. That is, he suggests that a consciousness of “irony” brings about a kind of synthesis between irreconcilable opposites: the ironist lives in the finite world, where no finite human purpose seems ultimately fulfilling, while at the same time keeping alive an awareness of the infinite, a sphere that promises wholeness if one can access it via a sort of mystical union. Irony accompanies the “religious” consciousness that has “seen the inner light,” to so speak. Schlegel seems to imply that this divine inner light assures the individual that his purposes and goals are valuable in and of themselves" (*The Isolated Self*, p. 139).
Trapped in a "buried life" of reflection, A chooses to inhabit a lonely realm of fantasy rather than to stay grounded in the world and suffer the mundane. The latter is what he would have to do in living in accord with the norms and practices of society and its institutions, or the strictures of morality in the public mode. In suspending considerations of these external sources of order and meaning for the sake of pleasure and beauty, he interprets the world entirely from his subjective vantage point and invents his own meaning, without caring about whether he sees things as they in fact are. To facilitate the creative process, he has abandoned objective standards of truth, including the notion that there is a reality independent of him that he should appreciate without distorting things through his own preferences and biases.

In defense of worldly engagement, the Judge criticizes this way of life. He tells A:

You continually hover above yourself, but the higher atmosphere, the more refined sublimate, into which you are vaporized, is the nothing of despair, and you see down below you a multiplicity of subjects, insights, studies, and observations that nevertheless have no reality for you but which you very whimsically utilize and combine to decorate as tastefully as you can the sumptuous intellectual palace in which you occasionally reside. (E/O II: 198)

A understands himself in an altogether abstract way, which allows him to render reality all the more ideally to himself through his imaginative constructions. The Judge, however, believes that this conception rests on a fundamental misunderstanding, and that the self so considered is a mirage. Rather than seeing himself correctly as bound to civilization and its institutions, A sees himself as a spectator torn apart from them. This sends him soaring beyond the social substance and into an intellectual space that can best be described as one of nothingness. As a result of the freedom he has achieved through ironic negation, his life is without substance, and he perceives the world as chaotic and broken. The Judge accuses A of being "youthfully intoxicated" in the "infinity that is your element" by privileging the boundless possibilities of idealizing over the settled conditions of his actual existence, especially as this concerns practical matters such as his relationships with other people (E/O II: 83). A has therefore alienated himself from the world, and also from himself as a human being situated in it, by converting it to theater based on his

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232 The Judge puts this by telling A, “You scorn everything that is established by divine or human laws, and in order to be free of it you snatch at the accidental” (E/O II: 14-15).
desires. Reality has value for him only insofar as it supplies him with the material content, or as he puts it, the "occasion" for the free play of his imagination (E/O I: 233). After touching down in the broken world of finitude to acquire fragments for his stage production, he flees to the rarified atmosphere of the infinite, where he can impose whatever meaning and significance he wishes upon them, like some sort of god, before repeating the process. According to the Judge, in being "finished with the world" and everything finite in this way, he has brought himself to despair with his lopsided oscillating (E/O II: 202). Anti-Climacus, of course, has a very similar view. In despairing over the earthly in toto, he can also be said to be in infinitude's despair due to overemphasizing the infinite component of his self, although he remains in dialogue with the finite, which is positively transfigured under his poetic reconstruction.

This strategy of relieving despair does not cohere with other aspects of A's life-view. He believes that the course of his life is necessitated and that freedom is illusory, but at the same time, he lingers in possibility, choosing how to imaginatively construct the world around him. As a fatalist convinced of his impotence, he lacks possibility, but as an orchestrator of his existence, he has it in excess. His prodigious imagination has effectively liberated him from the constraints of his finite existence, and so has made him a consummate freethinker. This tension in his views points to instability within the self, which Anti-Climacus would take as a sure sign of despair.

We have seen that A finds it difficult to act in the external world, but as an inverted vitalist, there is lively reflective activity occurring through his imagination. Therefore, he acts, but this action is confined to his internal environment, and does not bear external results. This lifestyle would seem to require autonomy and a measure of will, but Anti-Climacus would not agree that A is strong-willed, or that he has actualized himself to any significant extent. In his view, that would require steadfast existential commitment to things that an ironist like A, in his destructive idealizing, would refuse to accept as binding or authoritative. Instead, A intends to ceaselessly reinvent himself in an arbitrary way. For instance, he cautions against friendship or marriage, for then an individual "has lost his freedom and cannot order his riding boots when he wishes, cannot knock about according to whim" (E/O I: 297). As Rudd points out, while A has begun to realize his freedom by detaching himself from all ideals, principles, and states of affairs, he does not utilize this capacity to shape himself through the will much at all. "He is suspended in possibility without really achieving anything definite (or making himself anyone
Rudd explains that one might object that he commits to the principle of non-commitment, or that his ground project is to have no ground project, but this is self-contradictory, and so leads him further out of balance. This volatile state of indeterminacy and insubstantiality is further evidence that \( A \) has succumbed to the nothingness of despair.

By taking up this project, Kierkegaard argues that an ironist like \( A \) desires "the subjective freedom which at every moment has in its power the possibility of a beginning," and which is "not inconvenienced by previous relationships. There is something seductive about beginnings, because the subject is again free, and it is this pleasure the ironist longs for. In such moments, actuality loses its validity for him; he is free, above it" (CI: 253). It is not an ending or future goal that \( A \) seeks in his spiritual longing, or even real and lasting meaning, but a glorious beginning, before he was encumbered by the belief structures, values, and practices that society has put in place. It is therefore a desire to be free of his finite self. In this primordial moment, he would not even be saddled with an identity, which had been shaped under their influence. He thinks that if he could recollect this infinite beginning in a state of freedom, he would be at the helm of a world that was all his to capitalize on. This state of freedom would be much like the one Don Giovanni experienced, but in the opposite direction, since Don Giovanni was free of being an infinite self. As Soderquist puts it in his reading of Schlegel, "this spiritual longing for the infinite sparks artistic creativity: as the ironist cultivates and expresses a mystical union with the infinite, finitude itself appears to be transformed. And by virtue of this divine creative light which changes the individual and his world, the individual “self” emerges as a whole."\(^{235}\)

For Anti-Climacus, who posits an infinite qualitative distinction between God and the human being, this purported "mystical union" with the God within is nothing more than the zenith of self-absorption. Rather than becoming divine, the self has become little more than a mirage. On this point, Kierkegaard states "as actuality has lost its validity for the ironic subject, he himself has to a certain degree become unactual" (CI: 259). The Judge and Anti-Climacus believe that until the self becomes concrete and actual by humbling itself under its limitations in the finite, it is in despair. From the Christian standpoint, however, Anti-Climacus does not think that the Judge's ethical commitment or \( A \)'s esthetic toying with life suffice in coping with the difficulty of integrating the opposing constituents of the self, or bringing it to its fullest

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233 Rudd, Self, Value, & Narrative, p. 71.
234 Ibid., p. 74.
235 Soderquist, The Isolated Self, p. 139.
realization. He believes that if an individual wants any hope of defeating despair, he must expect that his spiritual longing will be fulfilled in the future rather than in the immediate present, from which he is irremediably cut off in reflection.

By living from the constructions of his imagination in an ironic pose, \( A \) intends to fuse (or confuse) reality and ideality, the finite and the infinite, and freedom and necessity, in an attempt to restore joy and meaning in his life through his own powers. The problem is that this attempt at an esthetic reconciliation with existence is a groundless project that is not guided by any firm principles or commitments, other than the pursuit of beautiful or interesting subjects for observation. Because perceiving or imagining things that have these qualities depends largely on passing moods or contingent circumstances, Anti-Climacus would claim this is too fickle and unreliable of a criterion to arrange one's life by. It cannot give him the stability and consistency he ultimately needs as a self with something eternal in it, and so would not yield lasting harmony in his life.

4.3.1 Techniques For Producing Pleasure and Reducing Suffering

\( A \)'s retreat into ideality provides him with ample opportunities for amusement, but it makes him almost totally inaccessible to others. In inclosing reserve, he can no longer enjoy real and lasting relationships with other people in the present, including friendships and romances.\(^{236}\) Like the young man in *Repetition*, he would rather recollect such relationships than face them in reality:

For me nothing is more dangerous than to recollect. As soon as I have recollected a life relationship, that relationship has ceased to exist. It is said that absence makes the heart grow fonder. That is very true, but it becomes fonder in a purely poetic way. To live in recollection is the most perfect life imaginable; recollection is more richly satisfying than all actuality, and it has a security that no actuality possesses. A recollected life relationship has already passed into eternity and has no temporal interest anymore. (E/O I: 32)

\( A \) usually gets more pleasure from his imaginative excursions than he does from interactions with other people, since he is able to view them in an idealized way. A recollected love affair, for instance, can conjure up a rich assortment of moods and emotions in a person, depending on how

\(^{236}\) \( A \) condemns friendship and marriage in an extended passage from “Rotation of Crops.” See *Either/Or* I, pp. 295-298.
he remembers it. Of course, he is also given considerable leeway to recall the relationship as he sees fit, perhaps by neglecting its imperfections and augmenting its desirable or poetic aspects. In shaping and refashioning material through the imagination, the recollecting individual wields a great deal of creative control over his experience. He has room to consider countless possibilities, and is able to exercise a freedom in the sphere of thought that is nearly total. The freedom and creative control that A desires is otherwise harder to come by with respect to the limits imposed by one's finite condition. While the power of the imagination is a great good for human beings, the Judge and Anti-Climacus believe that it is misused when dissociated too much from actual life on such a regular basis, as it is in the case of A.

In addition, A values recollection because of the security it provides him. Because recollection only depends on reality as the occasion for its activity, it is less impacted by temporal uncertainty, which A has become acutely aware of. It can also protect against loss or misfortune, which he recognizes are uncomfortably close at hand for every human being. For example, a lover to whom he has grown deeply attached might leave or betray him. To avoid future misery, he can abandon such a relationship early and recollect it, fantasizing about what was and could have been. Recollection is also a capacity that he has under his own power. Because it is an activity internal to him, only in extreme circumstances could it be taken away from him, and it could not be taken away like an earthly good. Thus, recollection empowers him, and makes him independent of conditions in the surrounding world. Through acts of recollection and the imagination, A can conceive of his life as a work of art without having to feel pinned down by responsibilities toward others. Relationships constrain and disappoint, but in his view, recollection is a reliable and liberating companion on life's journey.

Although A is able to spend much of his life in imagination and recollection, he must also manage life in the world to the best of his advantage. To do this, he implements additional creative strategies to attenuate the boredom that factors in his despair so that he can regain pleasure in the mundane. In “Rotation of Crops,” he recommends a method for defeating the monotony of everyday affairs and adding some variety to life. This method, he writes, “does not consist in changing the soil but, like proper crop rotation, consists in changing the method of cultivation and the kinds of crops” (E/O I: 292). As a fatalist who understands himself to have caught sight of existence as a whole, A believes that human beings do not have much of an ability to alter “the soil” of existence, but to a certain extent, they can change the manner in
which they approach the multiplicity of existing things, or “crops.” To make life feel new again, he suggests constantly changing one's attitudes and behaviors, along with the particular situations or things one takes an interest in. As he puts it, “The eye with which one sees actuality must be changed continually” (E/O I: 300).

A believes that there are a few tricks to carrying out this method successfully. First, one has to master the art of forgetting and recollecting in order to “cultivate” the field of existence effectively (E/O I: 292-295). While people typically want to forget only painful or unpleasant things, in his view, we should become skilled in forgetting even pleasurable and meaningful things, as these tend to quickly lose their luster the more a person gets used to them. For example, a song one likes might start to wear thin after the tenth listen, or a job one originally enjoys might get old after a couple of years. For this reason, pleasures should be limited ahead of time so that similar pleasures can be enjoyed at a later date. They can always be recollected, or experienced anew after being forgotten about. Recollection and forgetting should therefore be used in a way that keeps life as fresh and exciting as possible in order for boredom—and consequently despair—to be avoided.

Second, one must also be able to “continually vary oneself” by being in control of one’s moods (E/O I: 298). He concedes that moods cannot be controlled in the sense that they can be called up on command, but the individual can be sensitive to how they are operating within him, and be able to predict what moods to expect in the future based on past and present circumstances. He should not remain with a single object or task for very long, but make changes to what he is doing based on the moods that arise. For example, if he finds a project or relationship he is involved with getting dull, or if he thinks for any moment that he has maximized the pleasure he could get from it, then this would be a reason to pursue something else. He might also use his skill of forgetting to come back to it later with a rejuvenated mindset. In this way, one can live artistically by orchestrating one's experience through the succession of moods.

Because moods are highly variable, the individual who surrenders to their progression in this way will be capricious and unprincipled, and thereby will be more likely to have a fondness for the random in existence. A explains:

One does not enjoy the immediate object but something else that one arbitrarily introduces. One sees the
middle of a play; one reads the third section of a book…One enjoys something totally accidental; one considers the whole of existence from this standpoint; one lets its reality run aground on this. (E/O I: 299)

*A* use this method as a way of integrating his freedom with the imposition of reality, just as he tries to establish this harmony by wanting to *be* fate. Existence appears to him as a chaotic and contingent phenomenon that is constantly in flux and without reason, and so he follows suit by allowing himself to be changed continuously through mood, along with changing the attitude through which he approaches things in existence. In acclimating to his concrete existence while preserving his poetic license, he ventures the paradoxical feat of mastering life without being master at all. He states, “The accidental outside a person corresponds to the arbitrariness within him. Therefore he always ought to have his eyes open for the accidental, always ought to be expeditus [ready] if something should come up” (E/O I: 300). In seeking enjoyment in trivialities and nonsense, *A* rejects any notion of an enduring self that retains a coherent set of beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and values over the course of time. In his view, if he were to have a stable character, it would be the most boring, predictable thing imaginable, and certainly something to despair over. He therefore creates excitement in his life by playing at being different selves depending on the situation, and allowing his identity to shift over time.

Constantius alludes to a state similar to this in describing the formation of identity as it occurs in young people. He explains that initially, the youth is not conscious of having a determinate identity. In the process of discovering himself, he looks to external conditions like family and the community to assist him in establishing one, while also drawing on the power of his imagination for the task. Constantius uses the theater as a metaphor in explaining how the youth might go about this in ordinary life upon observing the conduct of others. At the theater, he might take pleasure in imagining himself in the many different roles that the characters on stage play:

In such a self-vision of the imagination, the individual is not an actual shape but a shadow, or, more correctly, the actual shape is invisibly present and therefore is not satisfied to cast one shadow, but the individual has a variety of shadows, all of which resemble him and which momentarily have equal status as being himself. As yet the personality is not discerned, and its energy is betokened only in the passion of possibility, for the same thing happens in the spiritual life as with many plants—the main shoot comes last. (REP: 154)
In this passage, Constantius rejects the anti-essentialism of later existentialists like Sartre, who claim that the self has no profound identity.\textsuperscript{237} With the individual having an "actual shape" that persists invisibly over the duration of his experience, Constantius suggests that the self has an essence as a "naked abstract self." In the first chapter, I explained that Kierkegaard believes this essence is analogous to the base line of a drawing that fundamentally shapes it without being visibly present in it.\textsuperscript{238} At this early stage of development, however, the youth does not know who he essentially is as a person. He does not understand what the "base line" of personality requires of him, and so does not know how to realize this essence in existence. To determine this, he must experiment with different identities or characters in order to find the one that best suits him through trial and error. The child might do this when he is at play, or when he models himself on others and follows what they do. Constantius explains that figuring out who one is by experimenting with different "shadows" is a healthy part of growing up and coming to know oneself in truth, but "it is tragic or comic if the individual makes the mistake of living out his life in it" (REP: 155). In his ironic posturing, \textit{A} makes precisely this move, negating any sense of having a stable identity so that he can experience the pleasure of starting fresh at any moment. His arbitrary toying with his identity sows discord between the infinite and finite aspects of the self by exaggerating its infinite aspect, and so contributes to inner restlessness. His failure to settle upon a determinate identity and employ it consistently in existence is therefore a sign of despair and a lack of maturity as a self.

It might be asked whether all reflective esthetes will necessarily use all of the aforementioned techniques in order to combat despair, or whether one must have the same qualities as \textit{A} does to live under this category. There is no reason to think that this is the case. \textit{A} and the young man of \textit{Repetition} each portray one way in which the reflective esthete might live, just as Don Giovanni comically portrayed one way in which the immediate esthete might live. As Eremita explains, a single, coherent view of the esthetic way of life cannot be presented (E/O I: 13). It is difficult to account for all of the factors that constitute both forms of this lifestyle, although I have attempted to delineate their general features. One might recognize many of these same qualities in oneself, or even in the modern age at large, as society has become transformed through digital technology and its capacity to render reality in an idealized way. The essential

\textsuperscript{237} Sartre, \textit{Being and Nothingness}, pp. 443-444
\textsuperscript{238} See section 1.3.2
feature of the reflective aesthete is his attempt to retain interest in life and make it agreeable to him again despite being plagued with dismal thoughts about its nature. To do this, it is conceivable that he might turn to alcohol or drugs to subdue his reflection instead of something like recollection, or he might lose himself in busy work, hobbies, electronic devices, or projects that bear little relation to art, without thereby succumbing to the crowd mentality. Kierkegaard is not interested in these unexceptional cases, since they concern individuals who do little to explore their spirituality to any great depth. Of course, Kierkegaard contends that even the most profound esthetic lifestyle would do poorly in fulfilling one's spiritual longing, since it fails to address the eternal component in the human being effectively.

4.3.2 A Portrait of Spiritual Longing in The Reflective Esthete

A’s papers conclude with “The Seducer’s Diary,” a darkly humorous and perverse work that depicts a reflective esthete who masterfully uses these techniques for procuring pleasure. The diary chronicles the seduction of an innocent and unsuspecting young girl by a shadowy figure named Johannes. In the preface to the diary, A purports to be only its editor, while claiming that Johannes is the author. On the surface, Johannes appears to others as a human being like the rest, but few have any idea of his duplicity. As a voyager of ideas and a poet of his own existence, he is, as A puts it, “infinite reflectedness into himself” (E/O I: 307). In a passage that returns to the dualist theme permeating Kierkegaard’s thought, A writes:

> Behind the world in which we live, far in the background, lies another world, and the two have about the same relation to each other as do the stage proper and the stage one sometimes sees behind it in the theater. Through a hanging of fine gauze, one sees, as it were, a world of gauze, lighter, more ethereal, with a quality different from that of the actual world. Many people who appear physically in the actual world are not at home in it but are at home in that other world. (E/O I: 306)

Although the actual world provides Johannes with finite content, whether it is a young girl, a public event, or the like, he uses this as merely an occasion for his idealizing. To use an expression from "Rotation of Crops," out of the abundance of his imagination, he is able to

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239 Victor Eremita doubts that A did not author the diary, stating: “It really seems as if A himself had become afraid of his fiction, which, like a troubled dream, continued to make him feel uneasy, also in the telling” (E/O I: 9). It can be assumed, then, that A has much in common with Johannes, but fears where his reveries are leading him, as the diary exemplifies.
“fertilize actuality” in order to enhance its original presentation and perceive it in a way that suits his interest at any given moment (E/O I: 305). In weaving his tapestry from these fragments of life, Johannes imposes the forms and meanings on things that he desires, but this capricious playing with possibility robs the world of the form and meaning it already has, and so deprives it of its solidity and substance. Finite conditions, as ordinary people in the public mode understand them and relate to them, no longer have significance for him. This tactic adds excitement to existence by endowing it with lightness and mystique, and by allowing him artistic control over it. As a result of this, however, he is increasingly unable to distinguish between reality and ideality, or fact and fiction. He can no longer perceive things as they actually are, but rather how he has artistically envisioned them to be. The world has become his canvas that he can embellish as he wishes, and life little else but a dream.

Johannes epitomizes the reflective aesthete in his pursuit of pleasure, just as Don Giovanni epitomized the immediate aesthete. While Don Giovanni desired all women by impulse, Johannes, in his deliberations, carefully discriminates between them, and is only interested in seducing one at a time. Eremita explains that, unlike Don Giovanni, the reflective seducer is less gratified by the satisfaction of sensual desire than he is by the process of seduction. Using his imagination to scheme the seduction and create a character for himself relieves him of the boredom of everyday life, and provides the real enjoyment of the affair. Rather than stay with the woman once he has completed the seduction, he quickly abandons her and pursues someone new, in keeping with the rotation method discussed by A. Don Giovanni and Johannes are therefore stuck in the same habit of manipulating more and more women to satisfy their desires, without finding lasting rest or fulfillment.

The victim in the diary is a seventeen-year-old girl named Cordelia. Johannes first catches a glimpse of her on a stroll through Copenhagen, where he spends his days surveying...
young women in action as he lurks in the distance. He does not first speak of her as an embodied human being, but as an image that captivates him as it passes through his mind. After a dramatic period of recollecting the sighting, he eventually finds out who she is, and ingratiates himself into her life by keeping company with her aunt, who cares for her. While he desires her erotically, the consummation of the relationship pales in comparison to the thrill he gets from plotting the seduction and observing her conduct from afar, and so he postpones the tryst for as long as possible. In an effort to conceal his intentions, he pretends to hardly notice her in the early stages of his visitations with her aunt, and even tries to set her up with a diffident young man who has fallen in love with her. This might seem risky, but he does it only to draw her closer to himself, which occurs through her being repelled by the young man. Johannes claims to “revel in possibility” as the relationship unfolds (E/O: 331). He delights in witnessing how each scenario he has thoughtfully arranged plays out, and also in ruminating on how best to achieve the desired outcomes in the future. One gets the impression that he prefers to recollect the affair and his schemes through the entries in his diary than to experience it in reality.

Johannes claims that his main goal is to slowly bring her to maturity by elevating her into a state of freedom (E/O I: 360). At the time of their meeting, Cordelia is still too naive to be properly reflective. As a young, innocent girl that seems to occupy what I have referred to as the public mode, she has little feeling for the erotic, and is not esthetically preoccupied with existence in the way Johannes is. By educating her about these matters, however, Johannes aims to develop her so that she will be liberated from the actual world and carried upward into the infinite realm of her imagination. He writes:

> What she must learn is to make all the motions of infinity, to swing herself, to rock herself in moods, to confuse poetry and actuality, truth and fiction, to frolic in infinity. Then when she is familiar with this tumult, I shall add the erotic; then she will be what I want and desire. (E/O I: 392)

The ultimate pleasure of the relationship, Johannes claims, will be when she gives herself up to him freely in erotic passion. But for her to do this, she has to first approach his level of reflection through an inner transformation that he will assist her in making. As a maieutic figure, Johannes initiates this development by getting her to imitate his thoughts and actions. He convinces her that marital engagements are boring, for instance, and pulls back from the relationship so that she gets a taste for seduction by believing she is the one seducing him. Once he feels she is ready to
experience her freedom, he sets her up to make the fall into the erotic. After he has accomplished his task, he leaves her, for she ceases to be interesting to him. He can then devote his intellectual energies to a new young girl in order to stave off boredom and imbue his life with esthetic significance.

Johannes does not describe his life as one of sorrow or despair, which might lead one to question whether a reflective aesthete could avoid despair entirely and find enjoyment in this sort of lifestyle. Under the views of Anti-Climacus and the Judge, however, a profound despair dwells within him, which he covers over with his esthetic ventures. In living out of the possibilities of his imagination, he has effectively severed himself from relations to the actual world and other people, and is more like a specter than a human being of flesh and blood. Genuine communication with others has become exceedingly difficult, since he is so inwardly focused on his relation to himself. We saw that inclosing reserve is a state of consciousness that begins to emerge in individuals in despair over something earthly, but for individuals like Johannes who have lost the earthly in toto, it is at risk of intensifying to become what Haufniensis calls “the demonic” (CA: 123). This is not the sensuous demonic that is capable of possessing the finite pole of the self, but rather the spiritual demonic, which endangers the self when it leans too heavily toward its infinite pole. He writes: “The demonic…wants to close itself off. This, however, is and remains an impossibility. It always retains a relation, and even when this has apparently disappeared altogether, it is nevertheless there” (CA: 123). As Haufniensis describes it, the demonic individual, in his isolation, shuns contact and communication with others, along with any help that they might provide. Yet for Anti-Climacus, Johannes' effort to become completely self-sufficient in inclosing reserve must inevitably fail, since in being constituted as a synthesis of the eternal and temporal, infinite and finite, and possibility and necessity, he exists essentially in relation to God, the world, and other human beings. He cannot isolate one relational aspect of the self—the self-relation—and remove the other aspects, for then he would cease to be a human being.  

241 Because living out of the imagination demands a

241 Given that the self is essentially relational for Anti-Climacus, there is a danger in misinterpreting his discussion of an “infinite” and “abstract” self. He is not suggesting that an authentic spiritual existence requires that an individual turn away from others and retreat entirely into himself in some sort of mystical probing for the divine within the self. Only the devil (or perhaps a demonic figure like Johannes) could be said to inhabit this lonely sphere, for “the devil is sheer spirit and hence unqualified consciousness and transparency” (SUD: 42). While the self can conceive of itself ideally as a “naked abstract self,” it must achieve its concretion and become actual through its relationships to other beings that are not itself, including God. Without these relations, an individual
lopsided emphasis on his relation to himself and his infinitude, with an intensified self-consciousness, he is in despair.

Although he still gets pleasure while being closed up within himself in esthetic reflection, his relationship with Cordelia suggests that deep down, he yearns for interaction with other persons, and does not want to be alone. His desires for both closure and openness with others are a further sign of his internal conflict. He does not desire Cordelia physically so much as he desires to develop her inwardly as a person. As he puts it, “she should not fall like a heavy body but as mind should gravitate toward mind” (E/O I: 360). In his hopelessly reflective state, the erotic is sublimated in such a way that it becomes a desire for non-physical communion with another person. In foregrounding the relationship between the individual and God throughout his work, and with his penchant for the poetic "idea" that inspires a romantic like the young man, Kierkegaard rarely considers the otherness of other human beings. I claim, however, that this desire for genuine contact with another person evinces the spiritual longing of Johannes, which he does not quite know how to address properly. This is not a naturalistic desire for finite goods of the flesh, or even for pleasure of the usual sort, but is a desire for something that cannot be given phenomenally in the world of experience. Only the reflective individual, in transcending the world and his concretion as a human being through his infinitude, can have this spiritual longing for contact with other people who are selves like him. Transcendence gradually builds within him as he becomes more self-conscious (particularly in the event of loss or affliction), and the basic desires and appetites of his natural spontaneity decline. With the pain and despair of spiritual transcendence comes a desire to transcend himself in the fullest sense, so that he could break free from inclosing reserve once and for all. While he achieves partial transcendence through his flights into the imaginary, this is not the complete transcendence that he longs for, and which I claim he unconsciously pursues through his maieutic relationship with Cordelia.

Because Johannes encounters Cordelia on esthetic terms rather than ethical or religious terms, the relationship just leaves him more enclosed and self-absorbed. He cannot get through to her on a personal level like he wants to, since in his artistic ploy, he refuses to disclose to her who he really is through his outward features and expressions. As an ironist, his communication with her does not reveal his true thoughts or feelings, but continually conceals them. Harries is could not be self-conscious at all, since he must be conscious of other things in order for him to be aware of himself as a self in relation to them. Without an other to gauge his own existence by, he is not a self at all.
right to point out that for the demonic Johannes, “dialogue inevitably degenerates into a monologue.” The faithless Johannes is ultimately forced to concede the unreality of Cordelia in a discussion of woman as “being-for-other” near the end of the diary, undoubtedly inspired by Hegel and his speculative attempt to reduce the other to the same (E/O I: 430). “She does not subsist out of herself,” he writes, but only in relation to man (E/O I: 431). In the final moment, he considers not just Cordelia, but all of nature to exist solely for him and his own esthetic enjoyment. In his effort to transcend the world and himself as a human being in it, he has ended up in total isolation within the confines of inclosing reserve, and has become completely detached from reality.

It is little wonder that A approaches the diary with great anxiety. As a reflective aesthete himself, he recognizes that this way of life culminates in the cold detachment of a figure like Johannes, which distresses him greatly. Johannes uses esthetic techniques for blunting the despair that his reflection has engendered, including a love of the accidental, the pursuit of the interesting, recollection, and the transference of life into art. Yet as the gloomy aphorisms in “Diapsalmata” show, these are only palliative measures. The deeper problem comes readily to light in the ghostly Johannes, who in a state of disintegration, is alienated from himself and the earthly in toto. The reflective aesthete has undergone a separation from his concrete existence as a human being, and as a result, his internal and external aspects are radically out of joint. Eremita says of A that “His exterior has been a complete contradiction of his interior,” and Johannes only brings this contradiction to its breaking point (E/O I: 4). This contradiction is a source of great conflict in the life of the individual, and indicates a rift in the self. As we will see in the next chapter, the Judge recognizes it as the problem plaguing A, and argues that one can heal it through an ethical reconciliation with one’s concrete existence. He believes that ethical commitment will allow the self to come out of its concealment in inclosing reserve, and disclose itself in worldly life through its obligations toward God, the world and others. In this way, the individual attempts to transcend himself by returning to the world, rather than fleeing further from it.

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4.4 On The Origin and Nature of Despair in Weakness

Anti-Climacus believes that despair in weakness stems from not wanting to be oneself due to some suffering, hardship, or loss in one's concrete existence that one recoils from. These would constitute the *makings* of despair, but if people like *A*, Johannes the Seducer, Marie Beaumarchais, and the modern Antigone were to will properly by wanting to be themselves before God, trusting that He will make things right in the end, they would not *be* in despair. This position, which foregrounds the will in the formation of despair, is in tension with his claim that despair in weakness is characterized by a break from immediacy, which is the state of being thoughtlessly absorbed in worldly affairs without knowing oneself. The problem is that as he describes it, reflection establishes this separation from the world and one's finite self, and so would seem to be the source of this form of despair rather than the will (SUD: 54). Anti-Climacus does little to explain the role that the will plays when the self separates itself from external conditions to turn in upon itself in thought, but we can follow his logic to see what view he would be committed to. The self could not choose to begin reflection, since as we have seen, it is incapable of choice before reflection occurs. The "spiritless" individual submerged in life in the world is blindly driven by immediate desires and bound up with external things, and so has no will of his own. In order to choose at all, he must be able to take a detached perspective on himself and his environment so that he can come to a general understanding of them, and thereby deliberate on alternative possibilities for action as a human being in the world. Therefore, the will presupposes reflection, and some external factor must elicit the self's activities in the first place, rather than the individual himself. This would suggest that despair in weakness is inevitable so long as reflection emerges in the life of the individual, regardless of whether he wills it.

This conclusion aligns with other important phenomenological findings suggested by Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms. I have shown that the "little dash of reflection" and volition that characterizes the inner lives of those in esthetic immediacy and the public mode is triggered by social factors like education, the transmission of language, and culture. For Anti-Climacus, however, this is not enough to arouse self-consciousness to the degree needed to become oneself in truth. To explain how this jolting of consciousness is possible, he appeals to despair over the earthly rather than assert that the individual becomes more self-reflective by bootstrapping off what little will he has, but here too we see that the enlivenment of the self's spontaneity is not
freely chosen, but is affected by an external factor. Consequently, despair in weakness does not
seem to originate from the self not wanting to be itself as he claims, but from reflection, as the
individual gains greater knowledge of himself and his defective existential condition upon
experiencing an earthly suffering. With the source of his painful separation from his concrete
situation being a reflective state of detachment, the will is a subsidiary factor. I have explained
that heightened reflection on oneself and existence expresses the inverted vitality of the person,
and that this inward turn into abstraction alienates the individual from his earthly circumstances.
This internal conflict that ensues in inclosing reserve is indeed likely to quickly galvanize the
will and lead the individual to not want to be himself in despair, or it might lead him to want to
be himself in faith or defiance, which as we will see in the next chapter, is a different form of
despair. But under Anti-Climacus' criteria, it seems impossible that the will of the individual
could be the original cause of this internal conflict through which despair becomes a noticeable
problem for him. Those willing to accept what is consistent in his account should therefore reject
the view that he is originally responsible for bringing despair upon himself.

If Anti-Climacus does not offer good enough reasons to think that the self causes itself to
despair by misusing its will, then one might think that the Judge might have the resources
available to salvage this view. Kosch, for instance, argues, "despair, for the Judge, is the
conscious or unconscious assumption of a passive or fatalistic attitude towards one’s existence,
motivated by a misconstrual of the nature of one’s agency".243 While Kosch is correct that the
Judge believes the kind of despair experienced by A has these features, she ignores that his
failure to appreciate himself as an agent, his fatalism, and his inability to act stem from him
being alienated from his concrete existence. The despair of the reflective esthete would therefore
seem to be engendered foremost by his intellectual capacity for detachment rather than by him
wanting to be alienated in this manner. Kosch disagrees on this point, claiming that for the
Judge, despair can only occur because one's misconception of oneself as an agent "is always in
some sense voluntary" and that despair "is in the first instance an act, not a psychological
state".244 In her view, the state of radical detachment which characterizes A's despair is a
voluntary one, and so the result of a real choice on his part.

Any interpretation of the Judge's thought that would understand despair in the esthetic

243 Kosch, Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling, and Kierkegaard, p. 142.
244 Ibid., p. 154
way of life to be the result of a choice conflicts with his puzzling assertion that the individual living esthetically is incapable of real choice. He writes to A:

The esthetic choice is either altogether immediate, and thus no choice, or it loses itself in a great multiplicity. For example, when a young girl follows her heart’s choice, this choice, however beautiful it is otherwise, is no choice in the stricter sense, because it is altogether immediate. If a man esthetically ponders a host of life tasks, then he, as is the case with you in the preceding portion, does not readily have one Either/Or but a great multiplicity, because the self-determining aspect of the choice has not been ethically stressed and because, if one does not choose absolutely, one chooses only for the moment and for that reason can choose something else the next moment… (E/O II: 167)

This formulation of the problem would appear to be paradoxical, inasmuch as those living esthetically could, even on the Judge's criterion, be said to be making choices. The Judge seems to resolve this when he claims that the individual who lives aesthetically "develops with necessity, not in freedom" (E/O II: 225). In other words, the choices he makes are determined by natural events that unfold spontaneously and by necessity, rather than by his own free acts. Because they are not self-determined, but are dictated by external influences such as vital processes of nature or other people, they cannot be considered choices in the strict sense. For this reason, the Judge claims that the development of the esthete "is a development just like that of a plant, and although the individual becomes, he becomes that which he immediately is" (E/O II: 225). Therefore, under his view, the kind of despair experienced by the individual living esthetically cannot have been freely chosen. There is a certain sense, then, in which A is correct when he says that all of his life has been fated, since in living esthetically, he has not made choices in earnest as a self-determining being. As the Judge writes, "no metamorphosis takes place in him, no infinite internal movement by which he comes to the point from which he becomes the person he becomes” (E/O II: 225). As we will see in the next chapter, he believes this inward transformation requires that the individual come to know himself apart from the multitude of transient conditions in which he naturally has his life. Upon gaining this awareness, he would become an internalist about his identity (if he was not already) by defining himself against external phenomenon, and would be in a position to choose himself in his essential freedom. Until A galvanizes his will through this pivotal choice, which would be informed by the knowledge of himself he has gained through his dreadful experience of alienation, he is in
despair, even if he does not know it.

The upshot of this is that, based on the phenomenological evidence Kierkegaard provides in the pseudonyms, despair in weakness does not begin through some poor decision that the individual has made, or with some wrongdoing. It begins through an increase in one's knowledge of oneself that is not willed, but rather elicited by external causes impinging on the individual. It is true that he most likely does not want to be himself in response to the encumbrances he experiences. He might choose to aggravate his despair by fleeing further upward into the intellect like A does and becoming more self-reflective, or he might choose to alleviate it by evading this reflection, and throwing himself into worldly affairs and pursuits. He might also do what Anti-Climacus believes he ought to do, and will to be himself before God in faith. One might be justified in holding him responsible for these actions, but since despair in weakness begins through reflection, one would not be justified in holding him responsible for being in despair in the first place, just as it would be unfair to do so in the case of the individual ignorant of being a self.

4.5 An Assessment and Conclusion

I have argued that in his self-authored works and those of his pseudonyms, Kierkegaard suggests that in all forms of despair, the problem is that the self is disintegrated and imbalanced as a paradoxical synthesis of the eternal and temporal, infinite and finite, and possibility and necessity. In despair in ignorance, this is because the individual is entangled in the temporal element of existence. This would seem to be a defect in creation more generally, which ends up compromising the self in its existence. Drawn into worldly pursuits, uncritical social conformity, or sensuality, and living for the moment, he lacks awareness of the chaos and anxiety that underlies life in the world, or the nothingness that imperils him in existence, however quietly. In despair in weakness, however, the self is imbalanced in the opposite direction in inclosing reserve, in part because it has a premonition of the terrible possibilities that threaten to be realized. It recoils from its finite or temporal condition in the world in reflecting upon both its earthly suffering and itself in its consciousness of this suffering. In not wanting to be itself in the event of it, it becomes increasingly aware of there being an aspect of infinitude and the eternal within it by which it knows itself to be stuck in this miserable condition, although this awareness will likely be vague at first. This eternal component of the self is not commensurable with the
temporal component, but contradicts it. In the process of negating it through acts of reflection, which conceptualize the world and bring its contents to comprehension, the self experiences opposition between itself and the world, and also between itself and itself as a human being that suffers in it as a psyche-body unity. When this activity intensifies, a reversal occurs in which the self inclines toward the eternal and infinite pole of its existence. Consequently, in both forms of despair, the eternal and temporal components of the self are out of kilter, which causes it to despair.

Anti-Climacus suggests that there is originally a lack of such opposition in the self, claiming that the eternal and temporal components of the self are well-integrated at the moment of its creation, when God "releases it from his hand" (SUD: 16). I have argued that this view is untenable on his own theory, since in its initial stage, the self is mired in the temporal pole of its existence while neglecting the eternal pole.\(^245\) I claim that in truth, this opposition bespeaks of a rift within the self that had existed well before it despaired over something earthly, but which had been concealed from awareness due to its absorption in the immediacy of worldly life, which pacifies it. This rift in the self prevents its eternal and temporal aspects from coinciding or aligning properly, and consequently, there is disharmony in it by its very nature.\(^246\) The conflict within the individual is initially smoothed over through the shallow harmony he enjoys in its original immediacy, but he has the potential to learn of this deeper disharmony when it worsens after he falls upon hard times. The friction between the eternal and temporal components of the self is unconscious at first, but is, as it were, just waiting for the right opportunity to intensify and become discernable in reflection. But here we see that in becoming conscious of being in despair, one gains knowledge of this divisive structure that was already in place.

Furthermore, it would seem that this structure is essential to the normal functioning of the self. It is necessary for reflective self-consciousness, which separates the knower from the object known in the act of apprehending it. It is also necessary for the will, which requires that one be able to detach oneself from one's first-order desires and attitudes so that one can objectify them, and decide which to endorse and which to reject. Since immediacy always consists of some

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\(^{245}\) See Chapter 2.

\(^{246}\) While Hegel had argued that the self coincides with itself, and can learn of this through scientific knowledge of existence as a system of reason, for Anti-Climacus, the phenomenology of human life indicates that the self does not entirely coincide with itself. This is because it is paradoxically constituted in bearing the psyche-body relation, which is a muddled compound of being and non-being. The existing individual despairs unconsciously in being embroiled in the nothingness of the world, which is an "alien power" that corrupts this relation by leading the self out of balance.
degree of reflection, and hence some degree of knowledge of oneself, this separation between self and world and the self and itself always exists in human life, although it is not obtrusive so long as one is ignorant of being a self. Yet it is prominent enough to start us trembling in anxiety from the moment of our inception, and make us prone to feelings of alienation and despair. To absolve God of the charge that he made us unstable and beleaguered in this way, which would risk casting into doubt his goodness, Anti-Climacus wants to blame the individual for it. This move, however, has no justification in the context of his phenomenology.

If the ways of life described under despair in weakness do in fact point to a problem in the self, I argue this is a tragic defect in one's spiritual nature that concerns one's intellectual or reflective capacity, and cannot be the result of the individual misusing his will as Anti-Climacus claims. This tragic defect in one's spiritual nature is evident in both forms of despair, but only becomes burdensome when self-consciousness intensifies, and one does not want to be oneself. The human being is therefore doubly defective in being created in the natural world out of nothing, and in being able to become aware of himself as imperiled and suffering in his earthly existence. When he becomes disenchanted with the world in despairing over something earthly or over the earthly in toto, he experiences a loss of meaning and enjoyment in life, and likely has trouble following social conventions that he once took for granted. As we have seen with someone like A, he also confronts difficult truths about existence that most people ignore. In seeking eternal rest from the noise and confusion of earthly life, Kierkegaard describes the whole wide world as a "prison" that traps the individual, and certainly it can seem this way for the individual who despairs over the earthly in toto (EUD: 350). He tries to escape it to the best of his ability through reflection, but his imaginative flight from the world leaves him isolated in inclosing reserve. In being turned in on oneself in reflection, one soon realizes that reflection, too, is "a snare in which one is trapped," and one's confinement in the world gives way to a narrower self-confinement, which intensifies the pangs of despair (TA: 89). Hovering in ideality, the individual clearly recognizes that he despairs not merely over the earthly, but more essentially, over himself as spirit. He might be able to make gains in escaping from the world by retreating into ideality, but he cannot escape from himself.

Of course, spiritual development also has its advantages in the form of liberation and enlightenment. Most tend to avoid the process of self-discovery because it is painful and deeply unsettling to emerge from the group and find oneself alone in existence, but the individual who
has the courage to go through with it cultivates his capacity to think for himself and make his own choices. The independent exercise of his spiritual capacities frees him from the bonds of the natural world and society, and signifies that a trap is in the process of being broken. Kierkegaard suggests that external powers arising from these temporal spheres are often not innocuous, but operate out of coercion in aiming to control one's beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors, and assigning one specific roles to fill. In stealing power from us so that we work in their favor and conduct ourselves accordingly, they also function to keep us in the dark about ourselves and sedate us with respect to our level of self-awareness. In an edifying discourse, he claims that the individual who is ignorant of being a self is "a slave in the service of the world" (EUD: 347). The individual who does not want to be himself in despair, however, is likely to resist being ruled by sensuous urges and those in positions of power, and to struggle for personal autonomy:

...if he nevertheless is unwilling to be like an instrument of war in the service of inexplicable drives, indeed, in the service of the world, because the world itself, the object of his craving, stimulates the drives; if he nevertheless does not want to be like a stringed instrument in the hands of inexplicable moods or, rather, in the hands of the world, because the movement of his soul [psyche] is in accord with the way the world plucks its strings...if he himself, even before the eye aims at something to make a conquest, wants to capture the eye so that it may belong to him and not he to the eye...well, then everything is changed; the power is taken away from him, and the glory. He struggles not with the world but with himself. (EUD: 308)

The greatest battle the individual who despairs can face takes place within himself, as he is a synthesis of contradictory elements. In his finitude, he is moved to act by vital forces that stir his cravings for things like sex, wealth, worldly influence and superiority as a psyche-body unity, and that keep him under the spell of moods and habit. In being brought up within a community and emulating its practices, other people direct him and shape many of his basic attitudes and desires, before he can decide whether they are ones that should be affirmed or rejected. He might believe he is free while being bound to immediacy in ignorance of being a self, but this is little more than an illusion. He must learn to control these inclinations and impulses that nature and society provoke if he wants to gain possession of himself and earn his freedom from earthly subjection. This can only happen by critically reflecting on his broader situation in his infinitude, and coming to understand the different possibilities available to him within the context of it. The steady commitment that genuine freedom of the will demands does not appeal to an ironist like
A, who is satisfied with a liberation of the intellect. However, a deeper understanding of oneself and the world in general, which he has attained through his detached standpoint, is indispensable to the task of willing as a self and shaping oneself in accordance with ideals one has chosen. Many are unlikely to arrive at this understanding and appreciate the inverted vitality of spirit, but when the threatening aspect of existence rears its head in the event of an earthly suffering or loss, it might become inevitable.

Since becoming spiritual leads to a form of liberation and enlightenment, it is questionable whether the human being's capacity for reflection is a defect at all. As I explained in chapter two, by negating the sensuous, reflection conceptualizes the natural world, and brings it to order and comprehension. In leading us out of a savage state of nature, it makes language, communication, and consequently civilization possible. Without using thought and the imagination to construct our dwellings and institutions, produce art and tools, and make the world a hospitable place, there would be no culture. Human beings would be no different from the beasts, which roam blindly in the sense that they are unable to reflect on what they are doing as they are doing it. The state of affairs in the world is not one that we in the first instance choose, but rather one that we find ourselves in the midst of as human beings. The kind of detachment that reflection requires can indeed cause distress and alienate us from conditions in the natural world, and also from ourselves in the case of self-reflection. When this intensifies to the point of despair, it can leave us feeling homeless and adrift, as A clearly demonstrates. Yet this separation can also serve us by bringing us into relation with a higher sphere of ideality and value, and ennobling us not only in our confrontation with nature and the elements, but also with the base nature in ourselves.

As a Christian who believes that being spirit puts the human being into correspondence with God, whom he regards as the highest good in existence, Anti-Climacus encourages the awakening of spirituality, and believes it is necessary for faith. He thinks that in spiritless ignorance, most people do not go far enough in cultivating their spiritual capacities in an effort to avoid despair, whether they do so consciously or unconsciously. Social affairs, earthly pleasures, and developments in the realm of culture and technology tend to occupy us so long as we are in the public mode, but this is only a preliminary phase on the journey of the individual toward God. Describing our extraordinary vocation, he writes:
"The possibility of this sickness is man's superiority over the animal, and this superiority distinguishes him in quite another way than does his erect walk, for it indicates infinite erectness or sublimity, that he is spirit...Consequently, to be able to despair is an infinite advantage, and yet to be in despair is not only the worst misfortune and misery—no, it is ruination." (SUD: 15)

Anti-Climacus believes that the human being is fraught with ambiguity in his paradoxical condition. As spirit, he has kinship with the divine and can soar in the sphere of ideality, with seemingly unlimited potential in comparison to other animals. However, his intellectual and imaginative capacities are both a blessing and a curse, as states like anxiety and despair illustrate.

One might look to human achievements as they appear in the external world as evidence of the sublimity of our nature or our "blessedness," but Kierkegaard only takes an interest in internal expressions of this as it emerges in esthetic, ethical, or religious ways of life. The reflective esthetes observe their own form of spirituality, whether wittingly or not, though they do not associate it with religion or the Christian God. For instance, when the young man of Repetition falls in love with the girl, he receives an intimation of something infinitely higher than anything earthly, which inspires romantic fervor in him. This blissful feeling comes upon him as a blessing for a brief period, but upon its departure, he feels cursed. He despairs upon recognizing the painful reality of things: the girl is not perfect like he had imagined, and the transcendent region he caught glimpse of is off limits for mortals like him. While the young man persists in seeking the glory of the infinite as a poet, Johannes the Seducer and A do so as ironists. One might be successful in this approach on occasion, like the Seducer was in his conquest of Cordelia, but it has many negative consequences. In ironic detachment, these individuals have emptied the ordinary world of meaning and substance and supplanted it with their own fantasies, and have become trapped in inclosing reserve. A's meditations reveal the unhappiness, boredom, and loneliness of this frivolous way of life, and its inability to fulfill his longing for unity and harmony in existence for any extended period.

The reflective esthete has secured negative freedom, or freedom from earthly constraints, but he struggles to employ this freedom in a positive way by taking an active role in his concrete existence. The intellectual strategies he has devised to defeat boredom and make life

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247 Fromm distinguishes between "negative freedom", or freedom from natural inclinations and traditional bonds of culture, and "positive freedom," or freedom to act in existence as a critical and responsible self. See Escape from Freedom, esp. pp. 31 & 108
interesting again do not suffice for the reconciliation he seeks. The Judge believes that A can break his enclosure and overcome despair if he wills it, but to do this, he must make an earnest commitment to live ethically. In assuming moral duties and taking full responsibility for himself and his actions, he would be able to open himself to the world and other people. In the Judge's view, the dreadful state of detachment A finds himself in precipitates the moment in which an ethical resolution can be made, as it makes a genuine exercise of freedom possible. Hence, the loss of integration that A experiences is painful, but invaluable in coming to know himself in truth. The Judge explains that this period of transformation can be difficult for many. He writes to A:

You are like a woman in labor, and yet you are continually holding off the moment and continually remain in pain. If a woman in her distress were to have the idea that she would give birth to a monstrosity or were to ponder just what would be born to her, she would have a certain similarity to you. Her attempt to halt the process of nature would be futile, but your attempt is certainly possible, for in a spiritual sense that by which a person gives birth is the *nisus formativus* [formative striving] of the will, and that is within a person's own power. What are you afraid of, then? After all, you are not supposed to give birth to another human being; you are supposed to give birth only to yourself. (E/O II: 205-206)

Many of us have a fear of knowing ourselves and becoming who we truly are because we are uncertain about what lies in store for us once we do. For his part, A has the presentiment of an inner transformation, but he resists it out of fear of what his life would become if it were carried through. On the other hand, he occupies a precarious position in his alienated state. The Judge writes to him, "you cannot stay on that apex, for it is true that your thought has taken everything away from you, but it has provided you with nothing in its place" (E/O II: 203). He therefore gives A two options: either he can inhibit his spiritual growth by remaining in a fatalistic mindset that sees nothing but vanity and meaninglessness in life, or he can carry through his despair by willing to be his true self, which is ethical in nature. The Judge argues that the latter choice is the only one capable of satisfying his spiritual longing, and restoring meaning and purpose to his life.

In fairness to A, perhaps his despair is not as debilitating one might think. It is questionable whether he would feel the need to make the transition into the ethical way of life that the Judge prescribes. A writes:
In addition to my other numerous acquaintances, I have one more intimate confidant—my melancholy. In the midst of my joy, in the midst of my work, he beckons to me, calls me aside, even though physically I remain on the spot. My melancholy is the most faithful mistress I have known—no wonder, then, that I return the love. (E/O I: 20, trans. modified)\textsuperscript{248}

In the final moment, \(A\) might not intend to overcome despair. His desolation is the single assurance that he has in life, the “knowledge of the truth” that he believes he has likely come to through his meticulous reflections (E/O I: 35). In a strange way, he ends up finding a certain degree of solace in his suffering, and might even take a masochistic pleasure in his love for the melancholic. This would be difficult for anyone in the thick of major depression or mental illness, which is likely to attend despair in its more advanced stages. A kind of serenity, however, might be possible upon having abstracted oneself from one's condition enough to closely reflect on it and come to a deeper understanding of it. Yet at the same time, this final movement in the esthetic phase would not be enough to overcome despair or defeat feelings of depression entirely, since the individual still remains encumbered by the world in his concretion, and is not wholly outside of it.\textsuperscript{249} While the gnostic forms of spirituality hold that knowledge of the truth leads to salvation, \(A\) vehemently denies that he has attained salvation with his dismal knowledge, and admits to having little else to expect from life (E/O I: 35). For this reason, the Judge advises him to save himself by embracing the ethical way of life.

\textsuperscript{248} I am following Hannay's translation of depression as 'melancholy'. Depression is too severe and debilitating to be an intimate confidant, and does not have the somber beauty of melancholy.

\textsuperscript{249} Thanks to Shelley Weinberg for raising this idea in her comments on a draft of this chapter.
Chapter 5
The Self Under Obligation

5.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, I argued that for Anti-Climacus, a reflective esthete like A does not want to be himself in despairing over being in the world. Delighting in ironic detachment and imaginative play, A flees from the part of himself that suffers through an earthly existence that has come to seem mundane to him. Frolicking in the infinite and possibility, his romantic stratagems transfigure the arid landscape of existence by endowing it with lightness and mystique, but they also alienate him from the world and himself insofar as he is situated in it as a human being among others. Without a good reason to participate earnestly in social events, and with little interest in popular culture, he surveys human life from a distance in the sphere of ideality, and has isolated himself from others in inclosing reserve. On reflection, existence only has esthetic significance for him, and is considered inscrutable and meaningless apart from its value as spectacle.

In his criticism of the esthetic way of life, Judge William would agree with Anti-Climacus that A is in despair. The Judge proposes a way out of personal disintegration in articulating an ethical way of life. In his letters to A, he attempts to persuade him that the spiritual development of the individual culminates in ethical action, and that A has good reason to approach life ethically if he intends to defeat despair. The Judge argues that the human being fundamentally aims at stability and coherence in his life as a result of his freedom, although he might ignore or forget this basic need by losing himself in sensual pleasures, esthetic diversions, or unreflectively following the actions of others. Until he realizes this essential goal or telos by knowing himself and wanting to be himself in truth, however, he would not attain

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250 Gouwens argues that the reasons the Judge gives for living ethically are "context-dependent," stating: "It is only by losing the desires of the aesthete and adopting the desires of the ethical person that one will come to see the ethical way of life as superior and “true.”" See Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker, p. 88. However, it is evident that the Judge intends to give an esthete like A reasons for living ethically that he will appreciate as someone in a painful condition that he would like rid himself of. As I show throughout this chapter, he does not preach about the benefits of ethical commitment to those already convinced, but intends to persuade those who would doubt that ethical individuals fare any better at combatting the miseries of life. The reasons he gives are therefore context-independent. It is a separate issue whether an esthetic individual or a disinterested observer is likely to think that he makes a convincing case for the superiority of the ethical way of life in his letters. This is why Eremita contends that the discussion between A and the Judge "has no conclusion" (E/O I: 13). It might even be the case that the Judge eventually abandons his position and comes to believe there are better reasons to live esthetically, which would count as a regress from an ethical point of view.
genuine and lasting fulfillment in his life, and so is in despair. For the Judge, ethical action provides fulfillment by endowing human existence with meaning and purpose, bringing enjoyment through the fulfillment of duties, and expressing human freedom in the natural world and society. The ethical life-view thereby empowers the individual so that he does not succumb to the impotence felt by A in his despair. Although the individual who lives esthetically will acquire a budding awareness of himself and his freedom as he becomes more reflective, the Judge contends that his conception of himself will be inadequate so long as he does not know himself as a responsible agent or want to be one. On his view, the individual can only become competent in this role through earnest reflection on ethical concerns, and by diligently adhering to ethical norms.

In proposing the ethical way of life as a solution to despair, the Judge elaborates on the general attitude and character of the person who has properly oriented himself to the world as a synthesis of the eternal and temporal. Given that the self has abstract and concrete aspects, he explains how to shape oneself into such a person, and the responsibilities such a life entails, by elaborating on these aspects of the commitment to live ethically. In section 5.2, I explore his claim that the ethical way of life necessarily follows from wanting to be oneself in earnest, which is a choice that those who live esthetically have yet to truly make. He believes that this resolution to change one's basic disposition, which might be described as a conversion of the heart, can only occur upon recognizing that this disposition is despair, and that one fulfills one's spiritual longing to become eternal through this conversion. In section 5.3, I explain why the Judge thinks that ethical commitment is necessary for achieving personal integrity and becoming oneself. He believes that by approaching life ethically, the individual can express his freedom in everyday life by fulfilling his obligations to himself, his family, society, and God. In section 5.4, I claim that for Kierkegaard, resolute self-assertion through the ethical project inevitably fails to bring the individual into harmony with the world as a free agent. While the Judge attempts to take his salvation into his own hands by perfecting himself ethically, his attempt to eliminate despair will not succeed of his own efforts. For this division within the self to heal, Kierkegaard

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251 In interpreting the Judge's conception of the ethical way of life, I am adopting the Kantian idea that a "change of heart" is needed to improve our basic moral disposition [Gesinnung], which is perverse due to our choosing to act under incentives other than respect for the moral law. See Religion Within the Bounds of Bare Reason, esp. p. 32 & 54. While there are remarkable similarities between the views of the Judge and Kant, I am not necessarily using this term in Kant's sense.
believes an awakening of the religious is needed, and an admittance of the need for God's grace to carry out what we cannot.

5.2 The Abstract Dimension of The Ethical Decision: Willing to be Oneself

In the second chapter, I explained that the Judge believes the immediate esthete is in despair due to seeking transient pleasures from external goods. Because this individual fails to live in accord with the eternal within him, his happiness does not last. In the fourth chapter, I explained that he believes the reflective esthete is in despair as a result of alienating himself from the world, from others, and from himself in inclosing reserve. However, this does not mean that those who live esthetically will become conscious of being in despair, much less know that these are the reasons for it. For instance, A never explicitly states he is in despair, even though an undercurrent of despair pervades his reflections on the aimlessness of existence. The Judge holds that in order for a quietest like A to truly admit to himself that he is in despair, it does not suffice to acknowledge it passively by observing his condition and noting the presence of despair, or by contemplating how meaningless or horrible things are. Rather than maintaining a detached point of view toward his life and seeing despair as something outside of him, he must re-engage with his life in a concrete sense by wanting to be in despair. The Judge believes that the individual will break out of his self-enclosure and bring unity to his life only when he chooses to despair passionately, with "all the power and earnestness and concentration of the soul" (E/O II: 208). As the Judge describes it, the choice of despair would lead the individual to learn the truth about himself, which he cannot do so long as he remains caught up in diversions and worldly pleasures in the esthetic or public mode. While these individuals are in despair, since it has not surfaced to conscious awareness, they cannot be said to be in despair "in truth." He writes, "in order truly to despair, a person must truly will it; but when he truly wills it, he is truly beyond despair" (E/O II: 213). Since no one really wants to remain in despair, choosing to deal with it directly by

252 Adopting a different strategy than Anti-Climacus, the Judge argues for the existence of unconscious despair in individuals living esthetically by appealing to cases of those who despair because they either have lost the object of their enjoyment, or cannot obtain whatever transitory thing their happiness has depended on (E/O II: 192). His point seems to be that they would already have been dimly aware that this dependence makes them vulnerable to hardship or despair, and so they must already have been in despair before having the more profound realization that they are in the event of a crisis or loss. Nevertheless, there are good reasons to reject the Judge's argument that such an event could not fundamentally change the mentality of the person. Recognizing that one might despair in the future does not mean that one is currently in despair, in the same way that the possibility of an event occurring does not entail that it is actually occurring. If one rejects this argument like one should, one might prefer Anti-Climacus' reasons for thinking that the individual who is ignorant of being in despair is nevertheless in despair. See Chapter 2.
bringing it to heightened awareness would prompt the individual to take action to defeat it, which the Judge believes will naturally lead him to the ethical way of life. Hence, this state of conscious despair is only temporary; once the choice to despair has been made, one would already have gained relief by identifying the problem and initiating the process necessary to overcome it. For this reason, the Judge admonishes A to give up idle contemplation of esthetic matters and change his basic attitude toward life by resolving to live ethically.

The Judge believes that by choosing to despair, one would come to know the truth about oneself for the first time, and that this is a spiritual act that would transform the character and disposition of the person. "When a person has truly chosen despair, he has truly chosen what despair chooses: himself in his eternal validity" (E/O II: 213). He claims that this knowledge is the ultimate aim of human development, since it indicates the full realization of our capacities. Borrowing from the virtue ethics of Aristotle, he thereby endorses a teleological conception of the human being. "The individual has his teleology within himself, has inner teleology, is himself his teleology; his self is then the goal toward which he strives" (E/O II: 274). He understands his view on this point to be in accord with the highest ancient wisdom:

The person who lives ethically has seen himself, knows himself...The phrase γνῶθι σεαυτόν [know yourself] is a stock phrase, and in it has been perceived the goal of all a person’s striving. And this is entirely proper, but yet it is just as certain that it cannot be the goal if it is not also the beginning. The ethical individual knows himself, but this knowing is not simply contemplation...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.” (E/O II: 258)

With his avowal of the eternal in the human being, there are some resemblances between the Judge's view and the Greek view that such knowledge pertained to the immortality of the soul. However, the Judge offers an original interpretation of the aphorism at Delphi by claiming that one truly knows oneself when one knows oneself to be in despair. On his view, the individual becomes aware of this either in realizing how terribly isolated he has become in reflecting on the nullity of worldly life, or upon having lost something transient that he had invested his life in, and that he had depended on for enjoyment. For Anti-Climacus, similarly, this is a result of suffering under a particular earthly difficulty or from feeling encumbered by the world in general. Because the Judge thinks that one despairs in truth upon having gotten a grip on oneself
after a period of dissipation in temporal conditions, he believes this knowledge demands the exertion of the will as opposed to merely thinking about oneself, which \textit{A} is already versed in by indulging in abstractions. To know oneself in the strict sense, one must want to retain a heightened form of self-awareness while confronting suffering and despair as a human being in the world, and not let oneself be drawn into an assortment of worldly engagements that would take one's mind off it. Throughout his works, Kierkegaard claims that this passionate concentration on oneself would involve things like critical self-examination, and reshaping one's life on the basis of ideals, principles, and commitments that are maintained over time. Such single-mindedness would involve recollecting these commitments and renewing one's resolution to maintain them, and also planning for the future. The individual living esthetically, however, is capricious, and has not yet made the choice to be an enduring self that engages in vigilant self-reflection while intending to get at the root of the problem of despair. On the Judge's view, the individual ought to make this choice to bring unity to his life and actualize his spiritual nature, rather than drift through it without making anything definite of himself.

The Judge therefore agrees with Anti-Climacus' claim that despair in the strict sense is a choice, and that one never truly despairs out of necessity (\textit{E/O II}: 213). For both figures, it is a state that one is responsible for being in, although as I explained in chapter two, it is difficult to see how those individuals who lack a significant degree of volition or reflection could be held responsible for it. He disagrees with Anti-Climacus, however, in contending that the choice to despair entails extensive self-knowledge and heralds the ethical way of life, although Anti-Climacus believes one is more likely to live ethically as one becomes more reflective in response to earthly suffering (\textit{SUD}: 55).\textsuperscript{253} Since the Judge believes the will is essential to being a self, he also rejects the view that the higher form of self-knowledge is disinterested, and consists only in someone learning certain facts about himself and being able to report on them.\textsuperscript{254} The self that knows itself is not only an intellectual being capable of thinking about its condition objectively,  

\textsuperscript{253} In Anti-Climacus' view, the ethical way of life that the Judge describes would be an active form of defiance, since the individual living ethically wants to be self-sufficient without admitting his dependence on God. See Chapter 6.

\textsuperscript{254} In recent times, Moran has argued against this view, which he calls the Spectatorial model of self-knowledge (\textit{Authority and Estrangement}, pp. 149-150). For Moran, self-knowledge involves an ethical dimension, in which the self takes a stance on its condition. In defense of this, he states that in ordinary life, we expect a person "to speak for his feelings and convictions, and not simply offer his best opinion about them" (\textit{Ibid.}, p. 91). He illustrates this point with a dialogue that none of us are likely to experience: "Do you intend to pay the money back?" "As far as I can tell, yes." (\textit{Ibid.}, p. 26). As quoted in Rudd, \textit{Self, Value, and Narrative}, p. 14.
but is also an agent passionately concerned about its existence as an individual, with the ability
to form intentions and take responsibility for itself. It depends on knowledge to guide it so that it
can make informed decisions within the greater context of the world, along with using its
imagination to consider different possible actions it might take, but following through on these
decisions is an act of will. Since the person must overcome despair of his own will, which many
underuse in being unreflectively moved by sensual desires, immediate inclinations, and the
ddictates of others, the Judge stresses that knowing oneself means being an agent who has taken
an interest in oneself. But on his view, one can only resolve to be oneself and bring unity to one's
life if one first chooses to despair.

5.2.1 Freedom as an Answer to Spiritual Longing

In the Judge's view, as spirit, the individual has an inner drive to fulfill his telos over the
course of his development by knowing and choosing himself as a free being. He refers to this
drive for self-determination, which is categorically distinct from natural drives or impulses that
determine actions of living things in time, as "the passion of freedom" (E/O II: 216). Until he
attains the freedom that he ultimately longs for as a spiritual being, he is in despair, even if he
does not know it. By choosing himself apart from any external influences that would motivate
him to do so by necessity, which a highly reflective individual like A is in a position to do, he
would learn that the self "is freedom" (E/O II: 214). Hence, in desiring freedom, one desires to
possess oneself as a responsible agent that knows that it exists independently of temporal
conditions affecting it as a psyche-body unity. The self that understands this recognizes that
natural or social factors do not necessarily determine its actions or choices, although they are the
predominant influence until he understands this. Consequently, self-knowledge is knowledge of
oneself as free, while the individual gains this knowledge after reflection alienates him from the
world and himself as a psyche-body unity. This state of alienation, which characterizes despair in
its more advanced stages, is necessary to choose oneself in truth, since it means that the human
being is set apart from the world that originally possesses him. In this state, he can reflect more
thoroughly on his lower nature, which is under the yoke of external powers that move him to act
in the esthetic stage. By becoming weaned from the world and its influence as a self, whose
powers of reflection and volition have gradually developed to the point that he can stand on his
own and think and choose for himself, he becomes capable of drawing sustenance from himself.
In gaining maturity as a self after a period of social upbringing in the natural world, he attains the true conception of himself as a free being.

According to the Judge, when the individual attains freedom by learning he is in despair, he would at the same moment have discovered himself as 'the absolute'. This is a term that he uses to describe the dignified character of freedom, which recalls the "naked abstract self" described by Anti-Climacus in his discussion of the infinite aspect of the self. He explains:

I choose absolutely precisely by having chosen not to choose this or that. I choose the absolute, and what is the absolute? It is myself in my eternal validity. Something other than myself I can never choose as the absolute, for if I choose something else, I choose it as something finite and consequently do not choose absolutely. (E/O II: 214)

The absolute is not an external object or condition, which exists among the "boundless multiplicity" that the self relates itself to in its engagement with the world (E/O II: 216). Because these things are constantly transitioning between being and non-being, they do not exist absolutely, but only relative to time, and so their actions are determined by principles of necessity in relation to other things in time. If one chooses the absolute, what is chosen must be changeless, unconditional, and exist at all times, and the Judge believes that the self meets this criterion in contrast to any external condition. Hence, in choosing himself absolutely in despair, the Judge believes that the individual accepts himself as existing independently of anything external or relative, or indeed, anything finite whatsoever. He can certainly relate himself to natural objects, people, situations, and events in time, but these relations do not essentially constitute him insofar as he chooses himself absolutely.

With these remarks, the Judge suggests that one has a reason to choose oneself absolutely if one wants to become autonomous, even though he does not use this Kantian term himself.²⁵⁵ For Kant, the will of rational beings is autonomous in that it legislates itself through its own principles. Similarly, for the Judge, the individual living ethically is autonomous in that he wills unconditionally commit himself to what is essentially his own. On his view, autonomy is not

²⁵⁵ I agree with Kosch that the Judge offers an ethics of autonomy, in which the will of the agent is the source of morally binding norms (Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling, and Kierkegaard, p. 155). Since the self is given to itself, however, the view that it gives itself the normative principles that it adheres to is complicated by an empirical factor. For the Judge, moral knowledge is not a priori as it is for Kant, and the self does not legislate itself by a purely formal law by which it can test whether an action is right or wrong.
ready-made, and does not come naturally or immediately to us. Instead, it is a possibility for the individual that can become actualized only later in his development, once he achieves a personal breakthrough through a conversion to the ethical. Autonomy is not simply one possibility among many that may or may not be actualized, but is distinctive in that it is the ultimate aim and thrust of the temporal development of the self. It is in the process of becoming actualized as the individual progresses through the esthetic stage, although many remain ignorant of their freedom as selves, and never fully actualize it. Of course, an individual living esthetically can make choices and engage in reflection, but insofar as he does not know himself as free, or chosen to will as the individual who resolves to live ethically has, he is not truly free (E/O II: 169). In pursuit of things like pleasure, money, social approval, and influence over others, the choices of the individual living esthetically are dictated by conditions outside of him. The norms and values that govern his actions are also acquired from his culture or other people. In these respects, his will is heteronomous, even though he is in on the path to autonomy. If the individual living esthetically can be said to have chosen himself by wanting to be himself in his basic enjoyment of life, it is only relatively.

Since the self is freedom, autonomy must originate in a free act, even though it is brought to the point where it can perform this act with the assistance of nature and society. These external powers are products of necessity that contribute to the growth and development of the self and its capacities, but its acts of reflection and volition are its own, and so are not products of necessity. However, they are originally bound by natural processes and social influences, and so are not free in the strict sense. For instance, the individual living esthetically is moved by inclination, or thinks, acts, and chooses as others do, or if he is more reflective, he might break with established norms or pursue pleasure and interesting subjects beyond the limits of what is socially appropriate. But once the individual becomes highly reflective and has firmly separated himself from anything external, he needs to become autonomous to bring unity to his life as a whole, and thereby defeat despair of its own free will. Because he is free, he can no longer depend on nature,

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256 The Judge argues that the will is not active in the individual in the esthetic stage of life, and so all of his choices are made out of necessity and not freely (E/O II: 166-167 & 225). However, I do not believe that this is an accurate description of the phenomenology of agency for individuals who have become reflective. External conditions are certainly powerful influences over the individual in the esthetic stage, and he might rightly be said to be in service to them. But insofar as he has attained a reflective form of self-consciousness, he ultimately consents to this, and makes choices that are in accord with them. It might be accurate to describe his will as heteronomous, but this is nevertheless a choice that he freely makes. He is no passive bystander to his actions, and has some say in what he does, even though sensuous forces or the rule of others are what primarily move him.
family, or society to maintain harmony with the world, which they fostered as long as the individual drifted through life with minimal reflection in the immediate esthetic or "public" modes of existence. The Judge claims that when the individual who has reached an advanced stage of reflection chooses to liberate himself from the multitude of external conditions that reflection and the will are originally in service to, "the personality declares itself in its inner infinity and in turn the personality is thereby consolidated" (E/O II: 167). Consequently, when the self chooses to realize its potential for autonomy as the absolute, it brings itself into clear focus for the first time. In gaining its composure, it refuses to remain absorbed in worldly life without much say in the matter. No longer tossed about amid the noise and confusion of the temporal, or being a passive bystander to earthly passions that move it without them being under its control, through its hard-won knowledge, it discovers its essential freedom, which it longs for as spirit.

Some might, of course, object that they long to know themselves in this wholly spiritual sense, and to take control of their life with such earnestness. An ordinary person might be satisfied with his identity as a member of society and the natural world, knowing himself as a white heterosexual American who occupies the role of a father, a teacher, or the like. He might have no need to call any of these beliefs into doubt, or to question whether the choices he makes are truly his own or only the result of social conditioning, or psychological or biological factors, so long as he feels free. For him, the only freedom worth caring about might consist in being able to pursue happiness in accordance with the laws of his country, and in not being imprisoned or oppressed by a tyrannical government, a difficult line of employment, or perhaps an overbearing family. The Judge, however, pities these lost souls in the esthetic mode who do not consider their lives at greater depth, and who have no inkling of their immortality or dignity as spiritual beings (E/O II: 169). Since he believes the telos of human life is spiritual freedom, it would seem that he must hold that these individuals long for such freedom while adrift in the temporal, though they remain ignorant of this in being preoccupied with external affairs. This longing for autonomy would all too often be quieted amid the hubbub of everyday life, or suppressed as the individual aims to satisfy his desires for worldly things or amusements. In his view, because the individual carries the eternal within him, which endows his life with an essential unity that counteracts the multiplicity of the world, the variety of temporal goals that one naturally aims at is unsuitable for any spiritual being to center his life on. Those living esthetically or in the public mode would
therefore experience internal conflict in wanting to be free of the external conditions that
determine their identity and shape their beliefs, attitudes and behaviors, while also wanting them
to continue to have dominion over them because of the pleasure, security, or contentment they
bring.

While the Judge's criticism of ordinary people can sound snobbish, it is indeed plausible
that many human beings experience internal conflict as a result of both wanting and not wanting
to be free from certain social and naturalistic influences or constraints. For instance, many people
would probably agree that they want to be their own person and be in control of their lives, while
all too often they let other people determine what they want, how they act and what they believe
out of a need to belong to a group. They might think they are making their own choices as they
conform to what the group has assigned to them, but without critically reflecting on what they
are doing and considering whether they should endorse its ideas or practices, it is quite clear that
these choices are not truly their own. Some of these individuals might also have little self-
control when it comes to curbing their earthly passions and appetites, and gain pleasure or avoid
discomfort by letting them go unchecked. These things can become obvious problems, such as in
the case of the unwilling addict, or the person who incurs a guilty conscience in going along with
the group. When this happens, the desire for personal freedom might become pronounced. For
Anti-Climacus, too, such dynamics are evidence of the interplay between freedom and necessity
that occurs within all human beings, who paradoxically exist as a synthesis of both components.

The Judge believes that there are individuals who become conscious of this kind of
spiritual conflict, although many will never reach a point in their personal development where
autonomy becomes a major concern. Describing the state of highly reflective individuals like A
who are on the brink of a spiritual transformation, and who long for the spiritual freedom that is
their telos, he writes: "As immediate spirit, a person is bound up with all the earthly life, and now
spirit wants to gather itself together out of this dispersion, so to speak, and to transfigure itself in
itself...If this does not happen, if the movement is halted, if it is repressed, then depression sets
in" (E/O II: 189). A person might want to avoid knowledge of her freedom or the wide range

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257 Fromm treats this phenomenon in greater depth in his psychoanalytic study of human freedom. See his discussion
of "automaton conformity" in *Escape from Freedom*, pp. 183-204.

258 Kosch argues against the view that on the Judge's view, despair occurs as a result of dissatisfaction from one's
intrinsic ethical telos not being fulfilled (*Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling, and Kierkegaard*, p. 146).
However, she contradicts what the Judge directly states, and ignores that he claims to be offering a teleological
conception of selfhood. See *Either/Or: II*, p. 274.
of choices available to her out of a natural fear of finding herself alone with her thoughts, with
the weight of existence bearing down on her. The anxiety that results from becoming
independent and standing on one's own apart from the crowd can be painful, and this is one of
the reasons why the Judge thinks the choice to be one's true self happens in despair. But as Kant
puts it while urging individuals to become enlightened by thinking for themselves, the danger of
walking without assistance from others and without being controlled by natural inclinations "is
not in fact so great, for by a few falls they would eventually learn to walk." The Judge believes
that if this process of self-realization is thwarted or inhibited by an individual on the brink of
self-discovery, then psychological disturbance will likely ensue, since at a deeper level, the
individual does want to be free. A is an example of an individual who resists becoming conscious
of his freedom, while being exceedingly close to gaining this awareness. In the Judge's view, his
malaise and overall sense of dissatisfaction will continue until this internal conflict is resolved,
and such pains are to be expected in the process of growth for spiritual beings that paradoxically
exist in the natural world.

In the last chapter, I explained that the individual becomes aware of spiritual longing as
he becomes more self-conscious, and his search for deeper meaning in existence intensifies. As
reflection increases, and the individual becomes more susceptible to suffering under earthly
burdens, the temporal loses the tight grip it formerly had on him, and transient goods no longer
draw his attention or satisfy him like they used to. As spirit, he desires something that the world
cannot offer him, even if he does not have a clear idea of what this higher good is. The reflective
esthete attempts to satisfy spiritual longing through art and idle contemplation, and while this
yielded brief moments of immense joy, he still felt his life was lacking something important. The
Judge believes that such individuals are in despair because they have not found the lasting
spiritual fulfillment they ultimately seek amid the transitory conditions of earthly life. The

259 See Kant, "An answer to the question: What is enlightenment?" in Practical Philosophy, 8:36.
260 Kosch argues against the view that despair can be understood as the result of the inability of esthetic criteria to
provide genuine and lasting fulfillment (p. 146). First, she argues that if this were the Judge's view, "he should be
unwilling to say of those immediate individuals for whom nothing had gone awry that 'these people were indeed
happy'—yet this is precisely what he does say...Those individuals who do succeed according to aesthetic criteria are
happy, enjoy themselves, etc.—and they are in despair." Not only does she overlook the Judge's claim that these
individuals cannot truly be happy so long as their happiness depends on external goods (E/O II: 252), but she also
fails to pick up on the Judge's sarcasm in the context of the passage quoted. In his wry depictions of esthetic
Judge refers to spiritual longing when he writes, “nothing that is finite, not even the whole world, can satisfy the soul of a person who feels the need of the eternal” (E/O II: 203). While he would certainly concede that the individual living esthetically experiences momentary pleasures, he does not believe this is the enduring type of satisfaction that the individual who has chosen himself ethically will derive from actualizing his freedom and becoming eternal. To distinguish this form of satisfaction from the momentary pleasures of the sensual life, I will refer to it as happiness. Like Aristotle, the Judge suggests that by nature, human beings ultimately aim for happiness, and that happiness is self-sufficient unlike pleasure, which depends on external conditions for its production. He claims, "it is indeed a superstition to think that something that lies outside a person is what can make him happy" (E/O II: 252), which would suggest that happiness can only arise from the activity of freedom occurring within a person. He believes that in choosing himself ethically, the individual will satisfy his spiritual longing.

The Judge describes this pivotal moment of conversion in a passage reminiscent of Kant's declaration of wonder at the starry heavens above and the moral law within:

When around one everything has become silent, solemn as a clear, starlight night, when the soul comes to be alone in the whole world, then before one there appears, not an extraordinary human being, but the eternal power itself, then the heavens seem to open, and the I chooses itself or, more correctly, receives itself. Then the soul has seen the highest, which no mortal eye can see and which can never be forgotten; then the personality receives the accolade of knighthood that ennobles it for an eternity. He does not become someone other than he was before, but he becomes himself. The consciousness integrates, and he is himself. (E/O II: 177)

When the individual, upon having isolated himself from the rest of the world, chooses himself earnestly in despair "with all the inwardsness of his personality," the Judge claims that "his inner

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individuals for whom everything continues to go well, and who get whatever they want in life, the Judge suggests that such individuals do not really exist. He therefore assumes "the opposite movement" and supposes none of this happens—that is, they despair (E/O II: 191-192). Additionally, she argues that if this were his view, "his claim should be that the lower pleasures of the aesthetic life are replaced in the forefront of the ethical individual’s life by the higher satisfactions of the exercise of virtue. Instead we find him arguing at length that what he himself labels ‘aesthetic’ satisfactions are consistent with and preserved in the life of duty (for instance, in his ‘aesthetic defense of marriage’)" (p. 147). Yet it is consistent for the Judge to hold that esthetic satisfaction is an important part of the ethical life while maintaining that this type of satisfaction alone cannot provide the lasting fulfillment that the individual seeks.

See Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book X, Chapter 7. Despite their similarities, their views are also distinct. Aristotle argues that the highest good is happiness and not freedom, while the Judge argues that the highest good is freedom, which yields happiness.
being is purified and he himself is brought into an immediate relationship with the eternal power that omnipresently pervades all existence" (E/O II: 167). He goes on to state that this means the self chooses itself "absolutely from the hand of the eternal God" (E/O II: 217). The individual thereby achieves a transfiguration in consciousness by which he understands himself in light of the divine as an immortal being, rather than as a being that only exists in relation to finite or "impure" things in the external world. Unlike the esthetic individual who is ignorant of his spiritual nature while unreflectively absorbed in temporal conditions, "the ethical individual is transparent to himself" in living under God (E/O II: 258). While A had described the eternal power at work in existence as a destructive vortex, the Judge believes that in personally discovering himself as the absolute, this power—or as he calls it, God—must be benevolent, and favor the development and integrity of persons. If it were a merely natural power, it could only create natural entities, and there would be no way he could have reached the sublime moment of the absolute choice. The Judge believes that can one align with the divine power in the purest sense and gain complete clarity about one's nature only by choosing oneself as a person, and that union with God is what one longs for as spirit. Unlike Anti-Climacus, who believes that God is "infinitely qualitatively distinct" from the human being in His sheer transcendence, the Judge believes that God is present in human consciousness. For the Judge, God does not dwell in utter mystery, far beyond the reach of human beings, but can become known to us when we choose ourselves absolutely in despair. If God were a transcendent authority who issued directives from outside of the self, then the individual that chooses to relate to Him would be heteronomous, and so would not be essentially free.

As the Judge describes it, the choice of oneself as the absolute is a moment of extraordinary spiritual significance, and a milestone en route to overcoming despair. In the way that the Judge frames it, it may seem like an attempt at self-deification, or at least an endeavor to be superhuman, but the Judge is certainly not suggesting that the individual created himself and the universe from scratch in the manner of a supremely powerful deity. The Judge emphasizes that in choosing himself absolutely, the individual receives himself from God, from whom he and the universe originated. However, once they achieve union in consciousness through the

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262 In a morbid speech delivered to a secret society known as Symparanekromenoi [The Fellowship of the Dead], A exclaims, "would that the vortex, which is the world's core principle....erupt with deep-seated resentment and shake off the mountains and the nations and the cultural works and man's clever inventions...I toast you, silent night, the eternal mother of everything! From you comes everything; to you everything returns" (E/O I: 168).
absolute choice, the distinction between them dissolves. On this point, the Judge coopts the German idealist thesis that the self posits itself in its existence, while rejecting Anti-Climacus' view that it was established by a power greater than itself. He writes:

I posit the absolute, and I myself am the absolute. But in other words with exactly the same meaning I may say: I choose the absolute that chooses me; I posit the absolute that posits me—for if I do not keep in mind that this second expression is just as absolute, then my category of choosing is untrue, because it is precisely the identity of both. (E/O II: 213)

In order for the individual to choose himself as the absolute, the absolute, or God, must have, at the very same moment, chosen him in the creative act. The Judge does not posit an unbridgeable gap between the human being and God as Anti-Climacus does, but thinks that the individual can fully participate in the creative life of God from within his concrete situation in the world. He is able to do this by shaping himself ethically, rather than straying from God by letting his beliefs, desires, and actions be determined by external causes in the esthetic mode. In harnessing the powers of the divine through his essential freedom, the individual is brought into the most intimate union with God as a spiritual being, creating himself while he is being created. There are certainly echoes of mysticism in the Judge's account, but the Judge insists that he is not a mystic in the traditional sense, since he does not think one should renounce the world and its pleasures to unite with God (E/O II: 247). Instead, one ought to integrate with the world through the ethical commitment for the sake of spiritual fulfillment.

As we will see in section two, where I elaborate on the connection between the eternal and the ethical as a way of life, the individual exercises autonomy in accordance with universally valid ethical principles rather than selfish desires or inclinations. For the Judge, the universal is divine, and so relating to God as a particular human being in time means that one's beliefs, motives, and actions correspond with a timeless ethical principle that governs human action. This protects it from the vacillations of the temporal, where feelings, attitude, and fashions are always changing, and lends stability, endurance, and coherence to the self. But rather than advocating for ascetic withdrawal or indulgence in metaphysical abstractions, he promotes an ethical brand of mysticism in which the individual forms attachments to people and things in the world to unite with it in a concrete sense.
5.2.2 The Rebirth of the Human Being as Eternal

In the Judge's view, this moment of self-discovery establishes an entirely new beginning in one's life. In choosing himself under God in despair, the person is transformed in such a way that he can be said to come into being for the first time, even though in a lesser form he had preceded the choice as a product of nature and society. The Judge draws an analogy between this event and procreation, stating that by choosing to be himself, the individual "gives birth to himself" (E/O II: 258). Of this birth of a new human being, in which the eternal emerges through a choice made in time, he writes:263

The choice here makes two dialectical movements simultaneously—that which is chosen does not exist and comes into existence through the choice—and that which is chosen exists; otherwise it was not a choice. In other words, if what I chose did not exist but came into existence absolutely through the choice, then I did not choose—then I created. But I do not create myself—I choose myself. (E/O II: 215)

This account is cryptic and alarmingly paradoxical, but the complication it describes recalls Anti-Climacus' notion that the self exists as a paradoxical synthesis of freedom and necessity.264 As Rudd explains, in this passage, the Judge attempts "to understand the tension between sense that we are responsible for shaping or authoring our own lives, and the sense that there is something distinct and definite about ourselves that has to be accepted as simply given."265 In response to this dichotomy, some philosophers argue that the human being does not have a fixed nature and is free to constitute itself as it likes, while others argue that it comes into existence with a fixed character that it is unable to effectively change, however hard it tries.266 The Judge, however, seeks to find some middle ground between these two positions, and to negotiate the tension between freedom and necessity in the self throughout his account of the ethical. His point is that,

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263 The Judge does not reference St. Paul in his discussion of a second birth, but there is certainly a Pauline influence in his account. According to St. Paul, Christ tells us "to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness." See Ephesians 4:22-24 (ESV).

264 In this passage, the Judge addresses what Korsgaard calls "the paradox of self-constitution" (Self-Formation, p. 35). The problem is that self-creation seems impossible, since the self would not be able to create itself unless it already exists, while if it exists, it would have no need to create itself. The Judge tries to navigate this difficulty by arguing that the self chooses or shapes itself from raw materials of life that are given to it, rather than creating itself. On this view, human freedom is not a pure activity of self-constitution, but has both active and passive dimensions.

265 Rudd, Self, Value & Narrative, p. 3

266 Rudd cites Sartre as a proponent of the view that the self does not have a fixed nature, and Schopenhauer as a proponent of the view that the self has a nature, which is a determinate brute fact that it must ultimately accept, however much it resists this. See Self, Value, & Narrative, pp. 31-34.
in the first period of human life, in which the individual lives esthetically, he exists with a specific set of characteristics, desires, and abilities that are there without him having chosen them. As a creature of natural necessity, he exists in relation to people, places and things in this world, and aims for things like survival, pleasure, and the like. These conditions determine his nature and identity, without him having decided on any of this for himself. As the Judge puts it, "his self consists of this multiplicity, and he has no self that is higher than this" (E/O II: 225).

The Judge insists that the human being does not create himself, and suggests that it is God who creates the natural world and human beings *ex nihilo* by actualizing possibilities in the temporal. He states, "whereas nature is created from nothing, whereas I myself as immediate personality am created from nothing, I as free spirit am born out of the principle of contradiction or am born through my choosing myself" (E/O II: 215-216). Although the individual exists in the esthetic stage of development as a psyche-body unity that is capable of some degree of reflection, he does not exist absolutely in his eternal form. In existing within the temporal, which Kierkegaard describes as a kind of nothingness that produces anxiety, he is embroiled in contradiction as a muddled compound of being and non-being, and is originally without a proper understanding of God.\(^{267}\) He therefore exists in a volatile condition in the natural world as a mortal being, but he does not have to remain in it; as spirit, the individual "according to his possibility is eternal and becomes conscious of this in time; this is the contradiction within immanence" (CUP: 578-579). While Hegel had rejected the principle of contradiction in proposing an identity between being and non-being, and so would not see this contradiction as a problem, the Judge refuses to follow him in veering into speculative thought.\(^{268}\) Freely affirming his existence as spirit in time, he chooses to be in the fullest sense, and thereby become eternal and autonomous. To actualize the possibility of being eternal and resolve the contradiction that compromises his existence, he wills to be himself apart from the multiplicity from which he had originated in time. The self that emerges as eternal is "absolutely different from his former self" that existed in the esthetic mode (E/O II: 215), and yet it is still he himself, since he still exists

\(^{267}\) See sections 1.3.2 and 2.3.

\(^{268}\) In the notes to their translation of *Either/Or II*, the Hongs cite multiple passages from Hegel that indicate he rejects this the Aristotelian principle that the same thing cannot both be and not be at the same time and in the same respect (pp. 482-483). For instance, Hegel writes, "Contradiction is the very moving principle of the world: and it is ridiculous to say that contradiction is unthinkable. The only thing correct in that statement is that contradiction is not the end of the matter, but cancels itself...The proximate result of opposition (when realized as contradiction) is the Ground, which contains identity as well as difference superseded and deposited to elements in the completer notion." See *Hegel's Logic*, p. 174. See also my brief discussion of Hegel's dialectic of mediation on p. 113, fn. 163.
concretely as a human being in the world. While he does not deny his mortality as a human being upon resolving to be himself, he does think that his life in time is transfigured under God when he chooses himself absolutely, and that this gives him profound responsibilities. In the next section, I explain how the temporal, which is originally outside of the self, is "taken up" or absorbed by the eternal when one wills to live ethically, as opposed to the individual remaining absorbed in worldly pursuits.

The Judge therefore believes it is a mistake to conceive of the self as eternal, or as timeless, before it chooses itself, as philosophers and religious thinkers have been accustomed to do. On these theories, which understand the eternal altogether abstractly, the self merely contemplates its eternal nature, which exists as fixed without him having chosen this. The Judge, however, offers an existentialist conception of the human being that foregrounds freedom rather than necessity, and draws a firm distinction between existence and essence. On his view, the eternal aspect of the self does not always exist, but must come into existence through a concrete process of construction that occurs in time. The eternal is initially a possibility for the individual, who becomes eternal in time by willing to actualize it, and this bears strict ethical requirements that will bind him to people, events, and things in the world. Because the eternal is part of our telos as beings who have a drive for freedom, the possibility of becoming eternal is not just one possibility among others that may or may not become actualized; it is essential to us in that we are in the process of actualizing it as our reflective and volitional capacities develop in existence. Becoming eternal certainly involves recollection and rational thinking, but one does not recollect that one is necessarily eternal as Plato held. Hence, although the self is essentially eternal, it does not exist as eternal until it chooses to become so at a moment in time. When this happens, a personal breakthrough is achieved, and the individual becomes autonomous.

It should be noted that in affirming that the self exists concretely in time while choosing to become eternal at a certain point in its life, the Judge rejects the notion that the self is an eternal substance that is self-identical, and which bears properties that change over time. The person has the wrong idea about who he is, the Judge claims, if he believes that "he could be changed continually and yet remain the same, as if his innermost being were an algebraic symbol that could signify anything whatever it is assumed to be" (E/O II: 215). This would entail that the

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269 Climacus admits that it is incomprehensible how something that is eternal can have a beginning in time, but believes that this is nevertheless the case. See p. 56, fn. 91 for a discussion of this difficulty.
self always was eternal, and not that it has the possibility of becoming eternal, which it might not choose to actualize. He therefore conceives of spiritual freedom as a changeless activity that emerges in time rather than as a substance.

One might object that because the self is essentially eternal, and aims to become this throughout the course of its development, it cannot be free. It would seem that its destiny is determined for it in advance, without it being able to choose it. The Judge, however, has a response to this worry. While all human beings are essentially eternal, and carry this spiritual potential within them, they are free to choose whether they will actualize it (E/O II: 205-206). However, the Judge believes that the individual will remain in despair if he refuses to actualize it, because in longing for freedom from the temporal as spirit, he inevitably wants an eternal form of existence, and he will not ultimately be fulfilled until this is attained. For instance, he might choose to remain in the esthetic stage of life, experimenting with different roles, occupations, or identities in an arbitrary fashion as he exploits the various possibilities for self-creation available to him. But as we saw with the reflective esthete, while this unconstrained venture of the imagination might sound like freedom, it remains geared towards pleasure and amusement in the temporal, and will not provide him with lasting spiritual fulfillment. It also alienates him from the world and from himself as a human being in it, leaving him isolated in existence. The Judge believes that once the individual becomes self-enclosed through the development of reflection, he must become autonomous to will to open himself to everyday life in the world, but he is not required to make the choice to convert to the ethical. But on the Judge's view, if he does not work to establish a harmonious relationship with the world through the modest constraints of the ethical way of life, he is imprisoned within himself, and not truly free.

The Judge recognizes that on his view, radical measures need to be taken on the path toward self-realization, and that this would include acquiring a startling new conception of one's nature as the absolute. He explains that he is "fully aware that there is an earnestness about this that shakes the entire soul; to become conscious in one’s eternal validity is a moment that is more significant than everything else in the world" (E/O II: 206). Despite the difficulties and anxieties that attend this process, the Judge believes that as persons, it is in our nature to seek spiritual fulfillment as our telos. Our spiritual longing for freedom can indeed be quieted or suppressed, whether it is through the pursuit of sensual pleasures or interesting material for
observation as in the esthetic way of life, or through worldly activities that allow us to keep our attention occupied on things other than ourselves. Yet the Judge believes the desire for union with God persists alongside these diversions, and we are in despair until it is achieved. In his view, this will not happen until we turn inward and come to terms with our despair, which lurks within us so long as we invest our life in external conditions that are never really under our control. But in order for despair to be defeated and not simply gawked at, he believes one's freedom must be directed towards a concrete task that would galvanize his will while reconciling him with himself, society, and the world. He contends that the ethical way of life is perfectly suited to ground the self’s freedom through its demand for action chosen out of a sense of responsibility toward oneself, humanity, and ultimately God. It therefore brings the eternal and temporal aspects of the human being into agreement with one another.

5.3 The Concrete Dimension of the Ethical Decision: Reconciliation in the Ethical Mode

For the Judge, knowing oneself is necessary for transforming one's moral character and re-orienting oneself in existence, but it is not sufficient for spiritual health. If an individual were to stall in abstractions at this point, without wanting to use his freedom to engage with people and affairs in the world, then he would remain beyond himself in despair like the reflective esthete, and would be horribly alienated from himself and from life in the world. In this section, I examine the Judge's contention that once one has chosen oneself absolutely, ethical action is needed to properly establish oneself in existence in one's essential freedom. Once the ethical is implemented in daily life, it is supposed to eliminate all the trappings of despair and enable spiritual fulfillment by providing the individual with (a) an eternal aim or purpose, (b) an internal condition for his happiness that lies within his power, (c) a way of reconciling himself with life in the world, and (d) a project that vivifies his will and anchors him in his concrete existence. This attitude adjustment that occurs after living esthetically requires that the individual use his freedom responsibly by assuming a lifestyle motivated by duty, which would give him the satisfaction of realizing the universally human as a particular individual. By coming to appreciate the humanity in every person, and focusing on our similarities rather than personal or cultural differences, he connects with the human race. After explaining how the individual is to change his basic disposition so that it is no longer despair, in the final part of this section, I go into some practical commitments that the individual living ethically ought to have on his view. The
performance of duty gives him a reason to live, and would include things like marriage, work, and friendship.

5.3.1 Re-entering The World When Choosing Oneself

Because choosing oneself absolutely in despair means choosing oneself apart from any finite or temporal condition whatsoever, it is, in the first moment, a choice to experience oneself as alienated from the world, and by extension, from oneself as an embodied human being within it. The Judge plainly suggests this when he states, “For the person in despair...it is no rhetorical expression but is the only adequate one when he sees on the one side the whole world and on the other side himself, his soul. In the moment of despair, the separation is evident" (E/O II: 221). In willing despair, the individual recognizes that he has become free from external conditions that would define him, but that he lacks integrity in existing both eternally and temporally. He is therefore divided against himself, occupying an ambiguous position that is both terrible and sublime. According to the Judge, he does not despair over the eternal aspect of his existence, since this divine attribute of his nature is precisely what "fills him with an indescribable bliss and gives him an absolute security" as the object of his spiritual longing (E/O II: 231). What he despairs over is being submerged in the temporal, which draws him away from the fullness, permanence, and changelessness of the eternal. The Judge indicates this by stating, "when I despair, I despair over myself just as over everything else. But the self over which I despair is something finite like everything else finite, whereas the self I choose is the absolute self" (E/O II: 218-219). Hence, in the first moment of the more profound kind of self-knowledge, the individual faces a world that has come to seem completely foreign to him, and devoid of meaning or value. As an occupant of it, he has become a stranger to himself. The experience of this terror impels the individual to complete the transition into the ethical stage, where he can work toward perfecting himself in everyday living in a world that will gradually come to seem familiar and meaningful again. As Kant puts it: "Only the descent into the hell of self-cognition can pave the way to godliness."^270

Like Anti-Climacus, the Judge does not seem to be suggesting that two different selves constitute a single individual, but rather that the individual consists of two conflicting aspects that need to be unified in order for despair to be resolved. One can refer to these different aspects

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by speaking of a "finite self" and an infinite or "absolute self," but really there is only one self that does not fully coincide with itself in oscillating between its eternal and temporal components during its passage through time. In the esthetic stage of life, in which the individual is heteronomous, his "finite self" is overemphasized, as he is drawn toward relative ends in the world. After serious reflection on himself and existence, the individual becomes capable of choosing himself as absolute over and against this multiplicity of external conditions that had determined his character and way of life as a "finite self". Upon collecting himself through the absolute choice, he discovers an internal condition to center his life on as an "infinite self", and things outside of him no longer possess him or define him. His identity will not be foisted upon him, but will be of his own making, and so he will be able to determine the definite characteristics that he has as a "finite self". But in gaining the freedom he had longed for as spirit, he despairs over his entanglement in a world that now seems alien to him, and in affairs that he has come to see as fleeting and empty.

Although the temporal is the ultimate contributor to despair, the Judge does not think one should divest oneself of it or fail to perceive significance or value in the world, since the eternal becomes actualized in one's existence as a human being. As a psyche-body composite that exists in relation to people and things in the world, the temporal is in fact an essential part of the human being, and he needs to care about his concrete situation to achieve wholeness and unity in his life. A Stoic might object to this approach as a way of attaining virtue, and advise us to regard the world with indifference. On this view, external objects and affairs are distractions or temptations whose influence one should aim to be rid of, so long as one wants to be self-sufficient and in control of oneself as a rational being. Those who retain attachments to external objects are prone to emotional instability and suffering in being affected by things that are beyond their control, and so they will not be able to achieve lasting happiness in life. However, as Furtak notes in his Kierkegaardian criticism of Stoic thought:

...the achieved calm of the sage who can drift through any situation without the risk of being moved is attained at a price: to be free from the burden of perceiving significance in life is to be closed off to the experience of value. Complete independence from contingent events can be preserved only by a person who remains in a state of dangerous estrangement. But it is as participants, not as bystanders, that we are
able to find meaning in the world. Stoic morality is consistent with, and may even entail, an existential despair...\(^{271}\)

The Judge agrees with the Stoic that one should seek wholeness within oneself, but since the self is ineluctably associated with objects and events in the world as a concrete being, this cannot involve a renunciation of it. If an individual were to refuse to care about things in the world, and intended to become emotionally detached from states of affairs in it, he would be divided as a self, and would remain self-enclosed. Even if the Stoic succeeds in achieving a tranquil state of apathy through this strategy, by not opening his heart to people, objects, or conditions outside of him, he would be unable to achieve the happiness that arises from attaining harmony in one's existence.

In embracing his life as a whole with his new understanding of himself, the individual who has chosen himself ethically affirms the goodness of everyday life in the world. However, he initially has the problem of integrating the eternal and temporal components of his nature. Unfortunately, it is difficult to see how this union between essentially dissimilar things could be accomplished. When the self is considered absolutely, apart from any definite concrete entity or external determination, it would seem to exist as a pure abstraction barred from contact with anything in the world. If an individual were to remain suspended in this state, without any intention to engage with the world or the finite aspect of himself, radical isolation would be insurmountable, along with the most aggravated kind of despair. To defuse this worry, the Judge clarifies that the self that is chosen absolutely in despair has both abstract and concrete dimensions: "But what is this self of mine? If I were to speak of a first moment, a first expression for it, then my answer is this: It is the most abstract of all, and yet in itself it is also the most concrete of all—it is freedom" (E/O II: 214). The Judge explains that the self so chosen would only seem to be an abstraction initially, and that in order for an individual to understand himself properly, he must also see himself in his given concretion:

\[\ldots\text{at the first moment of choice the personality seemingly emerges as naked as the infant from the mother's womb; at the next moment it is concrete in itself, and a person can remain at this point only through an arbitrary abstraction. He remains himself, exactly the same that he was before, down to the most}\]

insignificant feature, and yet he becomes another, for the choice penetrates everything and changes it. Thus his finite personality is now made infinite in the choice, in which he infinitely chooses himself. (E/O II: 213)

On his account, the self does not remain timelessly hovering above the world in choosing itself out of it, for then the individual would be something like a pure spirit dissociated completely from its embodied condition. Obviously one's freedom is not empty so long as one perceives oneself to be a human being in the world, with ties to one's embodiment and the surrounding world. Consequently, the self does not refuse to involve itself with the surrounding world upon making the absolute choice, but rather wills to give concrete content to freedom by wanting to be itself. It therefore affirms that it wants to be "this specific individual with these capacities, these inclinations, these drives, these passions, influenced by this specific social milieu, as this specific product of a specific environment (E/O II: 251), or what Anti-Climacus would call its "finite self." This choice is not determined by causal processes unfolding by necessity within the external world, but occurs through an original act of self-determination that can only be realized once the person has found himself, bare and naked, at a point outside of the world. The Judge summarizes the act of appropriation through which freedom "clothes" itself in its concretion by stating: "The true concrete choice is the one by which I choose myself back into the world the very same moment I choose myself out of the world" (E/O II: 249). The individual thereby takes the first step in resolving the painful separation that occurred through the absolute choice by identifying with his embodied condition as a free agent. Someone who conceives of himself in a purely spiritual way has the freedom to choose not to make this identification, but if he does not, he will remain disintegrated as a self.

While the individual longs for freedom, in despair, he recognizes that this cannot be won in a vacuum. According to the Judge, the freedom that he seeks cannot be a purely negative freedom that characterizes an ironist like A, who has made himself light and airy by withdrawing into his imagination. In the same way, it cannot be attained in a Stoical fashion, or through the speculative thought of the philosophers, which is "calm and free" in its disinterested contemplation of the universe. Instead, freedom must be realized positively through ethical

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272 In a nod to Descartes's expression for the certitude of the cogito, the Judge states: "Personality, as the absolute, is the Archimedean point from which one can lift the world" (E/O II: 265).
273 See Bertrand Russell, The Problems of Philosophy, p. 158.
action that has real consequences, and the resolution to live ethically gives his existence substance and weight. Consequently, in longing for freedom, one longs for unity between the eternal and temporal components in oneself, and not for the eternal alone. In forging this unity by wanting to be itself in its concretion, the self intends to overcome alienation and restore a sense of belonging in the world, while still retaining its autonomy. The Judge believes that if the individual succeeds in establishing this union, he will attain happiness, since his longing for freedom would be fully satisfied. Hence, in choosing himself absolutely in time, the possibility of being eternal becomes actualized in a concrete sense, and he achieves integrity as a self. By cultivating this union between the temporal and eternal aspects of oneself through the ethical way of life, the Judge believes that despair can be defeated.

5.3.2 The Transfiguration of the Self in Freedom

The Judge nevertheless has something peculiar in mind when he states that the self becomes itself by choosing itself back into the world after choosing itself out of it. In order for freedom to emerge in truth, the self, in a state of detachment from the world, must assimilate the world and its concretion into itself as spirit. By doing so, the self takes up an anthropocentric relation to the world, revolving around itself rather than external objects. It cannot retain possession of itself in freedom by being assimilated into the world in unreflective pursuit of external objects, since then it would be in the clutches of the temporal and the externally determined sequence of events that happen out of necessity. Supposing that it were even possible to become immersed in life in the world after one has become so detached from it through heightened reflection, this would be a regress to the unreflective immediacy of the esthetic mode, and "to damage one's soul" by forfeiting one's eternal aspect (E/O II: 220). The Judge describes the process of reconciliation between self and world that occurs through the absolute choice by stating:

In the moment of choice, he is in complete isolation, for he withdraws from his social milieu, and yet at the same moment he is in absolute continuity, for he chooses himself as a product. And this choice is freedom’s choice in such a way that in choosing himself as product he can just as well be said to produce

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274 This alteration in life-view might be described as a Copernican Revolution in consciousness, much like the kind endorsed by Kant. For Kant, we should understand the formal structure of objects as originating in a priori concepts of the mind, rather than in mind-independent objects as had traditionally been held. See the Preface to the second edition of Critique of Pure Reason, Bxvi (p. 110).
himself... As product he is squeezed into the forms of actuality; in the choice he makes himself elastic, transforms everything exterior into interiority. He has his place in the world; in freedom he himself chooses his place—that is, he chooses this place. (E/O II: 251)

The self is originally a product of nature as God's creation, but once it has separated itself from nature and society by becoming absolute, it must appropriate its concrete existence by bringing its worldly life into accord with its spiritual life. The Judge explains that this act of self-constitution is "a movement from himself through the world to himself," indicating that he moves himself to embrace life in the world out of his longing for unity and wholeness, rather than anything else in the world motivating him to do it (E/O II: 274). He claims that in doing this, all of his history becomes "my personal deed in such a way that even that which has happened to me is transformed and transferred from necessity to freedom" (E/O II: 250). This does not mean that he morally approves of everything he did or of what happened to him in the past, but rather that he accepts it all as his own, however unpleasant some of it is. In establishing continuity with his embodied condition and his external environment by taking it all up in freedom, he becomes his own maker, and although he exists eternally, he acquires a personal history in time. In acquiring a personal history through this passionate involvement with existence, his life no longer consists of a series of loosely connected events that do not amount to anything more than fragments in his memory, or as a mere period of world history. In firmly identifying with the person he was in the past as eternal, he conceives of the many episodes of his life as being bound together in such a way that they compose a unified whole. In bringing synchronic and diachronic unity to his life through the assertion of will, he intends to resolve the internal conflict that is characteristic of despair.

The Judge's account of self-constitution is strange, but there is a rationale behind it. In choosing himself in a concrete sense, the individual no longer considers his human condition as foreign or alien to him, or as the product of external causes, or even as his fate. He does not want to admit that he exists as a human being without him willing it, since then he would no longer understand himself as being in possession of his life. To prove to himself that he is free, and avoid feeling powerless and passive to greater forces outside of him as A does, he chooses to make his concrete condition an essential part of himself. In becoming active as a free agent, he wills to take responsibility not only for everything that he does, and for everything that he did in the past, but for everything that has happened to him. Since these events happened to him prior
to the absolute choice, they had occurred naturally without him truly willing them, but upon recollecting them, he assumes responsibility for them. This action demonstrates the extreme measures the Judge will take to elude the fear of viewing his entire life as the outcome of circumstances beyond his control. This is an anxiety that is liable to send him into despair.

While it is part of his strategy for defeating despair, it seems that the Judge is only deceiving himself in believing that what he had no choice in is really something he freely chose. In admitting that his specific background as a human being is originally a product of necessity, the Judge recognizes that things he does not control determine a huge portion of his life, and so it would seem that he could only pretend to be his own make. The Judge might respond to this worry by acknowledging that God created these conditions *ex nihilo*, but since he attains unity with God in choosing himself absolutely, he can come to deem them his own product. However, one does not need to endorse the theism of Anti-Climacus to cast doubt on this self-positing thesis. Fortunately, his account does not hinge on the radical notion that he is responsible for his entire constitution as a human being, and for everything that has ever happened to him, whether it is a case of bad luck or merely being born. One can therefore reject this effort to harmonize the self with the natural world while still finding merit in the Judge's position. His view is consistent with a weaker conception of freedom, where the autonomous person holds himself responsible for some things in his life but not others, and does not admit complete control over every aspect of it. For example, he might take responsibility for his actions and character as a human being, but not for his place of birth, how he was raised, or for the fact that he is a human being and not another animal. Some things can remain accidental. In section 2.5, I explain that repentance, love, and work can also serve as binding powers in the ethical mode where a heroic effort of the will of the kind he describes might fail.

Because the self is absolute in its freedom, the Judge does not believe that it has an essence in the way that other things in time do. For example, it is in the essence of a table to serve a certain function—namely, to support physical objects—and it is not free to do otherwise. However, when he has become free by choosing himself absolutely, it is up to the person to determine his essence by deciding what to make of himself as a moral agent. The individual living esthetically is not able to genuinely decide on this, since he lacks knowledge of himself.

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275 Thanks to David Sussman for raising these objections.
276 In section 1.2.1, I provide Kierkegaard's reasons for rejecting that the self posits itself in its existence.
and his freedom. Of course, since he is a human organism, he is a different kind of thing than a table, but the Judge believes both are similar in that they are causally necessitated to do what they do. He states that in his immediacy, the individual who lives esthetically "develops with necessity, not in freedom; no metamorphosis takes place in him, no infinite internal movement by which he comes to the point from which he becomes the person he becomes" (E/O II: 225). With "a development just like that of a plant" (E/O II: 225), his actions, attitudes, and desires are determined by natural necessity, without him stepping in to alter the natural course of things through higher-order volitions guided by reflective judgment. Consequently, the self does have an essence in being eternal (E/O II: 160), but this essence is originally minimal and not yet actual. The person must flesh this out for itself and actualize the potential to be eternal by deciding on what he must do to live ethically, and willing this into being.

Since the individual living esthetically is entangled in life in the world, which consists of contingent products of creation, the Judge believes that everything is equally accidental for him, even if he believes that certain traits or characteristics belong to him essentially. These things exist by chance and could just as easily have been otherwise, even though they are subject to natural necessity in being created by God. Insofar as this individual exists amid the transient conditions of the temporal, and defines himself solely by them, his life is "totally inessential" (E/O II: 260). However, this is not the case for the individual living ethically, who has become conscious of his spiritual essence, along with his need to realize his essence in existence by becoming what he is. The Judge explains that, for the person who is determining himself ethically: "Everything that is posited in his freedom belongs to him essentially, however accidental it may seem to be; everything that is not posited in his freedom is accidental, however essential it may seem to be" (E/O II: 260). We have seen that this is a step that the reflective esthete does not make in seeing his whole life as a cosmic accident. In becoming highly reflective, A had realized how contingent and inexplicable the human condition is. He admits to feeling like a child out in the middle of the ocean who is supposed to learn to swim, without knowing what is supporting him, what had put him there, or where he is headed (E/O I: 31-32). Not only do such realizations terrify him, but they also contribute to a form of alienation that is characteristic of despair.

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\[277\] This is a notion I have adopted from Frankfurt. For my discussion of the main points of Frankfurt's moral psychology, and the ways in which Kierkegaard departs from him, see section 1.4.3.
The individual who has decided to live ethically, however, has a way of coping with his contingent existence that takes him out of a helpless state of passivity. In wanting to be himself in his concrete situation, he chooses to take responsibility for his life, and wants to support himself in the ethical project. By becoming responsible for himself and his actions, he "possesses himself as an individual who has these capacities, these passions, these inclinations, these habits, who is subject to these external influences, who is influenced in one direction thus and in another thus" (E/O II: 262). In directing his life autonomously in the ethical mode, he does not conceive of his life as the product of alien forces, or as something that merely happens to him, but instead, thinks of it as being of his own making. He is, after all, the absolute, and in finding himself in essential agreement with God, who had originally created the world and human life *ex nihilo*, he no longer perceives the things he stands in relation to as being alien to him. In choosing what concrete qualities belong to him essentially, the individual reconciles himself with himself, the world, and ultimately with God, whom he trusts will continue to support the ethical project.

The Judge's choice to make what is already and necessarily given in his life essential to him would seem to be evidence that he only pretends to rule himself, while recognizing that he is ruled by his physical and psychological constitution, together with events unfolding in the world. The Judge indeed makes himself vulnerable to such criticisms, but he is not saying that the autonomous person cannot go on to make significant changes to his life to convert to the ethical mode, or that these changes would be the product of necessity rather than free choice. Rather, his claim is that the person who has chosen to become autonomous accepts full responsibility for the person he is, and for the changes that he will go on to make. On his libertarian account of freedom, the choices he makes as an autonomous agent are not determined by natural, logical, or historical necessity, but are determined by him alone (E/O II: 174). As the absolute, he transcends any finite system that would contain him. The Judge explains that the "interior deed" that corresponds with his choice to become autonomous "belongs to him and will belong to him forever; history or world history cannot take it from him; it follows him, either to his joy or to his despair" (E/O II: 175). He can, however, decide that certain elements within a given system belong to him essentially, and he must do this with the specific features of his life to recapture the joy of life in the world and defeat despair.

On the Judge's libertarian conception of freedom, freedom does not come to the human being naturally or as a matter of course, but must be chosen in an act of self-determination. This
raises the question of how someone could choose himself into this if he did not already have this freedom by nature. It would seem that one must already be free to make the choice to become free. In response to this worry, one can recall that on the Judge's view, the individual living esthetically has the potential to become free, but is not yet actually free. However, as a spiritual being, his ultimate aim is freedom, and he is in the process of actualizing this potential in the world as his reflective and volitional capacities develop. These capacities require the right type of physical and psychological constitution for their realization, but they also require a period of social conditioning in which the individual acquires language and is educated on the norms and practices of his culture. As these capacities develop and are exercised in the habits and routines of daily life, freedom gradually emerges in his life, and the individual matures as a spiritual being. As this happens, he begins to think for himself, and will likely challenge some of the beliefs and values he has inherited from his culture. He might also be experiencing detachment after dealing with suffering or loss, or from feeling unfulfilled, and this would lead him to critically question his purpose and the greater significance of things. Hence, there is a sense in which such individuals who are on the precipice of despair are free, but they have not used the freedom they have achieved to resolve to take control over their lives by choosing themselves absolutely. They remain bound by external conditions in pursuit of transient pleasures or contentment, even though these bonds have loosened or disintegrated, and their knowledge of themselves is inadequate. A is an example of a person who has come to the position where he can choose to take control of his life and restore the unity with the world that he lost through heightened reflection, but because he resists becoming conscious of himself in the fullest sense, he is not yet autonomous. He can become free in the absolute sense only if gains this awareness and carries through his development by choosing himself apart from anything external.

The Judge's account of human freedom prefigures the anti-essentialism of later existentialists like Sartre, but it is important to note that the Judge does not believe that the human being has no essence, or has the freedom to create his own essence and set his own ends in whatever way he wants. “The person who chooses himself ethically has himself as his task, not as a possibility, not as a plaything for the play of his arbitrariness” (E/O II: 258). As a reflective esthete and ironist, A had attempted to imaginatively invent himself in a whimsical fashion, exploring different identities without making anything definite of himself or establishing a firm and stable character. One might conceive of these as free acts to the extent that they are
done without external compulsion, but this unprincipled use of freedom is not true freedom, on
the Judge's view. However detached and independent the individual has become in reflection,
and however crafty he might be in his scheming or role-playing, these arbitrary "free acts" of
self-creation are in thrall to empty sensuality, and are performed for the sake of transient
pleasure. The reflective esthete lives in an episodic and even chaotic manner, without having
earnestly collected himself through the eternal element in him. Without maintaining consistency
and coherence in his life through a principled commitment to live ethically, he cannot maintain
his composure in the process of reflecting and willing. If he cannot do this, he cannot be said to
truly make his own decisions, and so is not truly free, however much he claims to be.

True freedom, on the other hand, requires integrating oneself with oneself and the world,
and thereby eliminating the despair that characterizes the ironist. It is therefore subject to certain
constraints that significantly narrow the possibilities for what one can genuinely choose to be.
The Judge explains:

...this distinction [between the essential and the accidental] is not a product of his arbitrariness so that he
might seem to have absolute power to make himself into whatever it pleased him to be. To be sure, the
ethical individual dares to employ the expression that he is his own editor, but he is also fully aware that he
is responsible, responsible for himself personally, inasmuch as what he chooses will have a decisive
influence on himself, responsible to the order of things in which he lives, responsible to God...essentially
only that belongs to me which I ethically take on as a task. (E/O II: 260)

The only rational outcome of the absolute choice once it is properly implemented, he believes, is
the ethical way of life. While the individual does not originally choose to be a human being in
the natural world, his specific, concrete characteristics become essential to his identity when he
appropriates them in freedom. Since they become of his own making, he holds himself
accountable for them all. In accepting responsibility for himself, for the people he is related to,
and for the contingent features of his life, and embracing it all as an ethical task, he sincerely
affirms that he wants to be the particular human being he is, and to be a part of the milieu that he
resides in. He cannot endeavor a wholesale revision of social conditions or the natural world,
which largely determine his concrete situation. So long as he does not decide to accept himself in
these conditions wholeheartedly, and form lasting bonds to them, he is in despair.
This change of attitude is a dramatic reversal of course, given that his earthly condition had been the occasion for his despair when he was living esthetically. If we follow Anti-Climacus on this point, we must conclude that in recoiling from this condition through reflection in the esthetic mode, the individual who has now chosen himself ethically did not want to be himself in a concrete sense. Instead, he sought freedom from his earthly condition by detaching himself from it, and used his imagination to experiment with his life in whatever way he fancied. It is strange that he would change his mind so drastically by deciding to live ethically, but the Judge thinks he will be liable to do so once he recognizes how deep in despair he is. One need only consult a ghostly figure like Johannes the Seducer, who lives entirely out of his imagination without truly relating himself to others, to appreciate how horrible the isolation of inclosing reserve can be, and how desperate one might be to find a way out of it. As Climacus puts it in reflecting on the main theme in Either/Or, "With the passion of the infinite, the ethicist in the moment of despair had chosen himself out of the terror of having himself, his life, his actuality in esthetic dreams, in depression, in hiddenness" (CUP: 258).

By learning the truth about himself in choosing himself ethically, however, the individual realizes there is no need to despair after all, and that his previous attitude had rested on a mistaken conception of himself. Not only can he attain the freedom he longs for as spirit, but in uniting with the eternal God, he will also be able to open himself to the world, to others, and to himself, while nevertheless thinking for himself and being in firm command of himself. His position is similar to those in the immediate esthetic or public modes in that these individuals also enjoy an intimate connection with the world, but since they do not know themselves as spirit, they do not possess these qualities, and so are underdeveloped as selves. In becoming independent by liberating themselves from their primitive earthly condition, reflective esthetes like Johannes and A have reached a stage of personal development in which they can realize their latent spiritual capacities in existence if they will it. To carry it through and overcome despair, however, the Judge believes they would need to return to the reality of life in the world, and find ground beneath his feet again by affirming it wholeheartedly.

5.3.3 Restoring One's Bond with the World Through Repentance

On the Judge's view, choosing to make the many contingent features of one's existence essential features of oneself does not suffice to bring them into full agreement. Once a human
being has isolated himself in despair to the extent that a reflective esthete has, and becomes acutely aware of his freedom and responsibility, he becomes aware of himself as guilty. The Judge writes, "only when I choose myself as guilty do I absolutely choose myself, and if I am at all to choose myself absolutely in such a way that it is not identical with creating myself" (E/O II: 216-217). The ironist believes he can use his imagination to create himself out of the nothingness of possibility, conferring his own meaning onto things while heaping scorn on a mundane reality that has lost significance for him. The individual who chooses himself ethically, however, does not think of this choice as an arbitrary act of self-creation that occurs apart from his relations with others, or independently of the concrete conditions that have made him who he is. In affirming his guilt, he accepts that there are definite faults in his character, and that the mistakes he made in living esthetically have substantially shaped his current condition. Recognizing that he cannot start from scratch, and that he is not a blank slate, he does not abstract himself from it, or from the errors of his past that have contributed to it, but bears full responsibility for it. In admitting that he had been prone to selfish and unprincipled conduct, he also admits that his personal history, in which he stands in relation to all of humanity, "contains painful things" that he takes responsibility for (E/O II: 216). He therefore recognizes the powerful influence that social or environmental factors have had on him, and knows that this could occasionally lead to wrongful beliefs, attitudes, or actions, but he admits that he was complicit in this. By aiming to live ethically, however, he acknowledges the freedom he has to reform his character and perform the right actions in the future. In acknowledging his corruption as a member of nature and society, he does not focus on particular actions that made him this way, but in despair, views himself as essentially guilty.

Although reflection on one's guilt is painful, the resultant despair is a felix culpa, or a fortunate fall, because it culminates in the moment in which one can choose to adopt the ethical way of life as an autonomous agent. Convinced that this is the highest achievement for a human being, the Judge states, "any human being who has not tasted the bitterness of despair has fallen short of the meaning of life, even if his life has been ever so beautiful, ever so abundantly happy" (E/O II: 208). Fortunately, in seeking atonement for his flaws and misdeeds, the liberated individual has recourse to repentance. The Judge claims, "choosing oneself is identical with repenting oneself, because repentance places the individual in the closest connection and the most intimate relation with an outside world" (E/O II: 241). The individual who has committed
himself ethically regrets that he did not take ethical demands seriously enough in the past, and that he had wronged himself and others in numerous ways, but his remorse binds him to himself, and strengthens his attachments to the people around him. For this reason, the Judge states he "repents himself back into himself, back into the family, back into the race, until he finds himself in God" (E/O II: 216). By reaching out to others and embracing his concrete condition in repentance, he affirms that he belongs to the world essentially as a human being, while still remaining his own person. This act of repentance is different from ordinary acts of repentance in that it has humankind in its purview rather than select individuals, and so is ultimately directed to God, from whom humanity originated. However, it is similar to standard acts of repentance in that it intends to establish an intimate bond with its target. Through this sweeping act of repentance, he opens himself to human life in general, rather than despair over it like the reflective esthete.

To prevent the ethical way of life from being confused with the religious way of life, it should be said that although the Judge proclaims himself a Christian, and views himself as essentially guilty in relation to God, he does not seek atonement in Christ. He expects that reconciliation with God and the world He created will be achieved not through Christ's death on the cross, but through his own efforts. He does not repent out of concern for future salvation in a world to come, but because it yields immediate results in resolving despair. Stressing the importance of repentance, the Judge acknowledges that if it were an illusion, and failed to unite him with what he repents to, he would remain alienated from the world and in despair, much like the reflective esthete (E/O II: 238). The Judge hopes that repentance will be met with forgiveness (E/O II: 237), but since God is not a particular person that can forgive such acts, this would mean living in harmony with the social order. Since he believes the individual living ethically achieves this union, he must think repentance is successful if it is undertaken earnestly. In possessing himself, and in caring about people and things outside of himself in repenting to them, the individual is assured of salvation in the present moment, and does not have to hope that it arrives later (E/O II: 216). His religious views are therefore ancillary to the ethical commitment. God serves to underwrite the ethical project, rather than making demands that might conflict with it.

The Judge believes that repentance is also a crucial expression of personal responsibility and freedom (E/O II: 251). By momentarily taking leave of the bustle of everyday life and reflecting on oneself in a composed manner, one takes responsibility for oneself and all of one's
previous actions, including those that led to despair. Because repentance demands that the individual examine himself closely, the Judge recognizes there is a sense in which it isolates him. This individuating effect might seem counterproductive in overcoming despair, but because it is directed outwardly, "in another way it binds me indissolubly to the whole human race" (E/O II: 239). From such passages, one can see that the Judge values repentance for its paradoxical character. Not only does it unite the autonomous individual with the surrounding world, but it also maintains a degree of separation between them so that freedom of thought and the will is preserved. Since the self is the absolute, this is a separation that actually exists and should be acknowledged, although it can be mitigated when he commits himself to the world, to others, and to God in repentance. It is not necessarily a one-time act that would permanently cure him of despair, but would need to be repeated if he notices the relations that he bears with them weakening.

An important outcome of repentance is that the individual repenting becomes intensely conscious of himself as a free agent, which the Judge believes is essential to living ethically. On the Judge's account, the ethical way of life requires a vigilant awareness of one's actions and disposition to ensure that one acts responsibly under the given circumstances. While it involves external actions with real consequences, these actions are the product of intentions that the individual closely supervises, and this makes all the difference in determining whether or not the action was undertaken ethically (E/O II: 174). He states:

But to choose oneself abstractly is not to choose oneself ethically. Not until a person in his choice has taken himself upon himself, has put on himself, has totally interpenetrated himself so that every movement he makes is accompanied by a consciousness of responsibility for himself—not until then has a person chosen himself ethically...not until then is he concrete, not until then is he in his total isolation in absolute continuity with the actuality to which he belongs. (E/O II: 248)

The Judge believes that in internally monitoring one's condition in this way, and being cognizant of those things which might get in the way of carrying out one's responsibilities, one becomes self-disciplined, and this is needed to maintain a firm and stable character. In a nod to the virtue ethics of the ancient Greeks, he explains that the person living ethically "possesses himself as a task in such a way that it is chiefly to order, shape, temper, inflame, control—in short, to produce an evenness in the soul, a harmony, which is the fruit of the personal virtues" (E/O II: 262). In
controlling the volatile moods, passions, and desires that arise in him through higher-order volitions, the individual living ethically retains his integrity as a person, while the individual living esthetically, in his whimsical toying with life, sorely lacks this. Sensuous desires, unbridled passions, and appetites rule the esthetic individual in his pursuit of transient pleasure, but the ethical individual both rules himself and is ruled by himself as an autonomous agent. The conflict one has with one's natural impulses and inclinations indicates division in the self. But as Aristotle explains, the individual can overcome this by educating them, so that he has the right passions for the right things on the right occasions. As he continues to work on himself and struggles for sovereignty over himself, his passions and inclinations would gradually become aligned with his will. Once they have reached equilibrium, psychological conflict would be eliminated, and virtue would be attained. On the Judge's view, by achieving unity with God, himself and the external world through repentance, and unity within himself through controlling his natural impulses, freedom is realized in existence, and despair is defeated.

5.3.4 The Call of Conscience: Integrating the Universal and Particular

We have seen that the desire to overcome despair would motivate the reflective esthete to adopt an ethical way of life. In realizing how isolated he has become by disengaging from everyday life in the world and indulging in reverie, despair reaches its culmination. While he learns of his freedom in choosing himself absolutely, the freedom he discovers also makes him feel guilty and produces anxiety. The need to rid himself of his negative thoughts and feelings spurs him to break from his self-enclosure and open himself to daily affairs, projects, and relationships with other people. Anxiety, guilt, and despair can therefore be productive in the sense that they are able to rouse individuals to positive action and jolt them back into participation in the world. It is true that a reflective esthete like A is highly active in thought, but he shuns earthly action in approaching his life as a spectator, and thinks he has lost the ability to care about anything. The Judge, however, advises him to translate this activity into ethical action, and suggests that nihilistic thoughts and painful feelings in individuals like A might eventually inspire him to become passionately concerned about ethical matters. “The crux of the matter, then, is the energy by which I become ethically conscious, or, more correctly, I cannot become

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278 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, Chapter 6 (1106b10-25)
279 I call the tenability of this position into doubt in section 3.3.
ethically conscious without energy. Therefore, I cannot become ethically conscious without becoming conscious of my eternal being" (E/O II: 270). This passionate energy that fuels things like repentance and ethical commitment does not come from thin air, or even from the individual conjuring it up out of nothing through the will. It comes from the psychical pressure that is released when he resolves to open himself to ethical engagement with the world upon choosing himself absolutely.

According to the Judge, the decision to channel "the energy of despair" bottled up within oneself into concentration on ethical pursuits generates a momentum that allows one to proceed through everyday life in the world passionately, and without reservation. This individual discloses himself through sincere speech and behavior, and does not conceal his true feelings about things in the way that the reflective esthete does (E/O II: 322). For the Judge, true freedom cannot lie in ironic detachment, duplicitous dealings with others, or in a listless refusal to take anything seriously. These negative attitudes deprive life of its impetus, and exacerbate the conflict between self and world that characterizes despair. Instead, freedom is realized in existence when one becomes interested in ethical action, and is directed by the need to eliminate the guilt, anxiety, isolation, and despair that would otherwise mar freedom. By committing oneself to the ethical way of life, one fits in with the world and society again.

The Judge believes that good action comes naturally from those who have become enlivened by making the ethical resolution. By willing with energy and passion, the individual will come to recognize what the right thing to do is, even if some mistakes are made along the way. Because the Judge intends to avoid the pitfalls of reflection, and the paralysis of choice that can occur when confronted with too many options, he thinks little time should be spent on deliberating about what one should do (E/O II: 164). He writes:

...what is important in choosing is not so much to choose the right thing as the energy, the earnestness, and the pathos with which one chooses. In the choosing the personality declares itself in its inner infinity and in turn the personality is thereby consolidated. Therefore, even though a person chose the wrong thing, he nevertheless, by virtue of the energy with which he chose, will discover that he chose the wrong thing. (E/O II: 167)

So long as one becomes intensely conscious of what one is doing, and wills to be oneself earnestly and penitently, one would not fail to consistently do good deeds. In claiming that the
activity of freedom results in good actions, the Judge adopts Fichte's view that wrongful action results from the failure of the agent to exert himself in his willing. Fichte argues that such laziness arises from inertia or sluggishness that stems from our animal nature, and that this is capable of compromising the will by impairing our cognition of what it is we should be doing. It is not that this laziness makes us avoid doing what is right when we have a clear understanding of what this is, but rather that it obscures or distorts our understanding of it by dulling our reflective capacity. The Judge does not elaborate on this idea in much detail in his letters, but it is suggested when he refers to the "confused excitement of dark impulses" that affect the individual living esthetically (E/O II: 59). It also emerges when he chastises the reflective esthete for idly contemplating life rather than participating responsibly in everyday affairs (E/O II: 195).

Kierkegaard also alludes to it in his later religious works. For instance, in an edifying discourse, he compares the temporal to a "parasitic plant" that can entangle the individual in worldly concerns if he does not resist this by cleaving to God (CD: 98). On both views, these are signs of despair, even if the individual is not conscious of it.

Of course, this is all quite vague, and raises questions concerning what the good is, where it originates, and how it is determined. Like Kant, who locates the good in the nature of persons, the Judge argues that goodness originates in autonomy, and cannot be derived from states of affairs or consequences of actions. The Judge defines the good as freedom, and as such, it is not dependent on external conditions that would determine it (E/O II: 224). For this reason, the good is not to be defined by the adherence to contracts or positive laws, whether actual or idealized, as the contractarian claims, or by pleasure as the utilitarian claims (which would be an esthetic thesis). Similarly, the good does not exist outside the individual as an object to be known through reason or moral intuition as realists would hold, since this would mean that the will is heteronomous, and therefore unfree. But his identification of the good with freedom does not make the Judge a moral relativist who thinks anything goes when it comes to deciding what acts are good. He claims:

> The good is because I will it, and otherwise it is not at all. This is the expression of freedom, and the same is also the case with evil—it is only inasmuch as I will it. This in no way reduces or lowers the categories

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280 See Fichte, *Fichtes Werke*, IV 199. As quoted in Kosch, "Kierkegaard's Ethicist," p. 272. I have argued that the Judge's account of the ethical way of life is eclectic, but Kosch makes a strong case in claiming that the primary historical model for his position is Fichte, rather than Kant or Hegel.
of good and evil to merely subjective categories. On the contrary, the absolute validity of these categories is declared. (E/O II: 224)

Under ethical considerations, the distinction between good and evil does not arise out of necessity, but through the will of the person who has chosen himself absolutely. In other words, it is only when one chooses to live ethically that the difference between good and evil truly comes to light. Those who live esthetically might speak of things as being or good and evil, but since their actions are based on subjective interests and motivated by immediate feeling or inclination, "this difference is latent" (E/O II: 223). This does not mean that they are caught up in evil, but rather that they are essentially indifferent to good and evil alike, given that they have not understood what these are by having realized their freedom (E/O II: 169). By knowing the demands of the ethical through an energetic involvement with existence, the self-actualized person would hold an objective criterion for judging what things fall into these categories.

The Judge claims that the criterion that guides the person living ethically toward the good is dictated by the universal, which is an ideal present in all human beings that constitutes the formal basis for ethical norms and practices. He states that the presence of the universal in the human being demonstrates that there is a "rational order of things" (E/O II: 292), which suggests that he offers a rationalist account of the ethical way of life. In being rational, the universal is "abstract" and "takes the form of law" (E/O II: 255). On this point, he seems to follow Kant in taking reason to be universally valid for human beings, and to supply them with a law that regulates their thoughts and actions with necessity. But with his notion of autonomy, he departs from Kant's view that the will gives itself a law by which it can judge whether or not a specific intention or action is moral (E/O II: 264). For Kant, an action is moral if it can be willed as a universal law for all rational beings, where immoral actions are those that cannot consistently be willed or conceived of as laws of this kind.281 The Judge, however, suggests that moral deliberation begins with a comprehensive assessment of the specific features of one's concrete circumstances, and not with a general principle that is used to test the fitness of an action for universal legislation. In assuming the form of law, the universal does not command or prohibit any particular actions, but only enjoins the individual to become himself. It therefore prescribes that he uses the material conditions he is situated in "to transform himself into the universal

281 See Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, pp. 34-36.
individual" (E/O II: 261). With an assessment of his particular conditions in hand, he aims to follow this prescription in daily life and do what is necessary to realize the universal in existence. In figuring out what specific actions he must take to obey this command, his central task in living ethically is to become himself through participation in life in the world.

In defense of this as the supreme moral imperative, the Judge rejects the formalism of Kant, which he suggests denies the self its "living interaction with these specific surroundings, these life conditions, this order of things" in treating it too abstractly (E/O II: 262). Criticizing the notion of pure rational agency, the Judge explains that the individual actualizes his potential to become the universal individual "not by taking off his concretion, for then he becomes a complete non-entity, but by putting it on and interpenetrating it with the universal" (E/O II: 256). From this, one can see that the Judge appropriates the German Idealist notion that every human being is both an individual and the universal. The universal is common to all human beings, despite our particular differences as individuals, and initially exists within us as potential to be realized (E/O II: 261). In this way, each one of us is essentially the universal individual, and is connected with all others. Of course, in emphasizing the concrete dimension of human existence, the Judge believes that our specific characteristics and circumstances define us in large measure. However, he insists that if we are to live ethically and not egotistically like those who live esthetically tend to do, we ought to set aside our differences from others, and not attribute much importance to what makes us unique or different (E/O II: 228). By appreciating what makes all of us the same, we would value the humanity in every individual, and expand our domain of concern beyond the narrow confines of our personal lives. When one's particular condition corresponds with universally human values and characteristics, freedom becomes actualized, and one's telos is fulfilled. When this happens, one becomes what one essentially is, and despair is eliminated.

Unfortunately, the Judge does little to explain how one would actually achieve this unity in practice, and does not provide an adequate account of the kinds of beliefs, practices, norms, and values one would have to endorse to shape oneself into "the universal individual." Since the universal has a social basis in being shared by all human beings, it would seem that the individual would have to take the customs and norms of his milieu into consideration when determining how he should apply the universal in his particular case. However, the Judge never suggests that the individual should accept his cultural endowment without scrutiny, and without
being willing to reject beliefs and practices that he deems morally wrong upon reflection. While he seems to think reason is pivotal to a proper understanding of right and wrong, his failure to elaborate on this point or explain the connection between reason and the universal is a shortcoming in his thought.

To get a better sense of what the Judge likely has in mind, one can consult the writings of Fichte, who also believed that ethics was grounded in autonomy of the will, and that freedom is the final end of morality for human beings. In contrast to Kant, and like the Judge, Fichte argues that moral cognition begins with a careful assessment of one's concrete situation rather than with an abstract rule by which to test particular actions for rational consistency. On his view, with "absolute freedom from all limitation" as the guiding principle of morality for rational beings, the individual must determine how to act given the definite limitations of his situation. As he draws on background beliefs about the natural world, society, history, natural laws, empirical regularities, and the like to negotiate this tension in a particular case, a specific imperative is produced. This imperative directs him to perform that action that seems best to promote freedom from external determination and limitation, both for himself and for other rational beings. These specific imperatives will vary based on the unique circumstances that the agent acts under. However, they have a universal character insofar as they are ones that would be produced by any rational agent who has those background beliefs in those circumstances, and whose cognitive capacities have not been dulled by his animal nature.

Fichte claims that in this way, the moral law prescribes that we act as if we were "everyman," or as any rational agent in our situation would, and this lends objectivity to his account. We fail to act as "everyman" when we do not cognize our duty correctly, and with the right amount of energy. The individual knows that a specific action is in accordance with the moral law not by judging whether it could be willed as a universal law for all rational beings, but when he obtains a feeling of certainty that it is the appropriate action for any rational being with those background beliefs in those particular circumstances. Fichte describes the feeling of the universal validity of one's judgment as a subjective conviction of one's duty, or "the voice of conscience." Since morality is universal to humanity, an agent's intentions and reasons for

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284 Ibid., IV 233.
285 Ibid., IV 166F.
action can and should be publically discussed and scrutinized, and he might be decide not to act on them after such dialogue occurs. However, the conscience of the individual is the final authority when it comes to moral decision-making, and the independence of rational agency from anything external to it remains the ultimate goal of it.\footnote{Ibid., IV 230-233.} It is therefore possible for clashes to ensue when one's conviction does not align with public opinion or the standards and practices of one's culture. Individuals should take them into consideration in moral reasoning, but this does not necessarily mean that they should defer to their culture or custom. In cases where public opinion rests on a mistake or deception, or is irrational, this would mean surrendering one's freedom and becoming dependent on external conditions. Fichte thereby reformulates the categorical imperative of Kant, stating: “always act according to your best conviction of your duty; or: act according to your conscience.”\footnote{Ibid., IV 156 – emphasis in original.}

The Judge's views on how to integrate the universal and particular in practice suggest that he has a similar position. Both take the specific features of the individual's concrete condition to be central to moral deliberation, and the Judge echoes Fichte when he claims that "the secret that lies in the conscience" is that "simultaneously it is an individual life and also the universal" (E/O II: 255). For the Judge, the "universal individual" that one is tasked with transforming oneself into "is not only a personal self but a social, a civic self" (E/O II: 262). This individual is therefore committed to the freedom of other people in virtue of them having the universal in common. However, while the "universal individual" is civically engaged, one does not become certain about what one's duty is by appealing to an external authority (E/O II: 263). Since individuals occupy different situations and do not share exactly the same skills, abilities, history, or background beliefs, they cannot necessarily tell one another what their duties are. Moreover, to decide this for another individual would be to deprive him of his autonomy, which is unethical (E/O II: 291). Similarly, because the particular duties an individual has are contingent on his concrete situation, they cannot be stated in abstraction from it. Kant rejected this view in denying that certain actions, such as false promising, are ever morally permissible, but the Judge has good reason to hold it. If a madman tells you he will find your friend and kill him unless you promise to do it for him, and you suspect he can carry this out rather quickly, you should tell the false promise before alerting the police. In rejecting Kant's formalism, the Judge thinks it is always
possible for an individual to determine what his duty is on any given occasion under the direction of his conscience (E/O II: 264). Fichte agrees that it is wrong to try to impose the dictates of one's conscience on another individual, and that one should let him follow his conscience.\textsuperscript{288} However, since morality derives from reason, which provides a universally valid criterion for moral judgment, it is expected that consensus on moral issues can be reached. Their agreement on this point is additional evidence that the Judge is indebted to Fichte more than any other thinker with his account of the ethical life.

As the mark of the conscience, the Judge believes that the universal has profound spiritual significance, and that it first becomes prominent in the life of the individual when, in despair, he comes to know himself in freedom as the absolute. Associating it with the eternal power that is omnipresent in existence, or God, he writes:

\begin{quote}
...the universal can very well continue in and with the specific without consuming it; it is like that fire that burned without consuming the bush. If the universal human being is outside me, there is only one possible method, and that is to take off my entire concretion. This striving out in the unconstraint of abstraction is frequently seen...But that is not the way it is. In the act of despair, the universal human being came forth and now is behind the concretion and emerges through it. (E/O II: 261)
\end{quote}

By likening the universal to the fire through which God appears to Moses, the Judge suggests that it is a divine principle that lends continuity to human life, which is otherwise subject to fluctuating moods, feelings, and attitudes in the temporal.\textsuperscript{289} Because it is abstract, it is "without the means for accomplishing the least thing" (E/O II: 255), although one can respond to one's "calling" to shape oneself into the universal individual if one wills to follow one's conscience. However, one should not answer the call of conscience by alienating oneself from the world and repudiating one's accidental characteristics, as some mystics who attempt to align themselves with the divine would do (E/O II: 292). Because it is within oneself as a particular human being, it exists alongside the concrete, and one answers its call by resolving to "work the accidental and the universal together into a whole" (E/O II: 256). Since it is impotent, the universal is not itself the eternal, but rather the form that the individual living ethically bears in mind when transforming his material conditions as a human being under the eternal, or God.

\textsuperscript{288} \textit{Ibid.}, IV 233
\textsuperscript{289} See Exodus 3:2.
However, the individual should not value his particular traits too highly, as those living esthetically do when they define themselves by what makes them different from other people. As he becomes the universal individual, and comes to respect our shared humanity, he would have to reject those accidental characteristics that conflict with the universal. For example, he could not have an allegiance to a particular tradition that is prejudiced against other humans based on race, class, nationality, or gender, and could not put his private interests ahead of everybody else. The Judge contends: "The higher an individual stands, the more differences he has exterminated or despaired over, but he always retains one difference that he is unwilling to exterminate—that in which he has his life" (E/O II: 228). On the ethical view, then, the real worth of the individual lies in his ability to instantiate the universal, and his accidental characteristics are worthless so long as he has not assimilated them into it through acts of will. The Judge believes that the more that one realizes the universally human, the more spiritually developed one's life is, or as he puts it: "The genuinely extraordinary person is the genuinely ordinary person" (E/O II: 328). With such passages, the Judge gestures toward the cosmopolitanism of the Stoics, who deemed themselves "citizens of the world" based on the common humanity we possess through our capacity to reason. As Nussbaum explains, the Stoics believed that in sharing this divine capacity, "We should view ourselves as fundamentally and deeply linked to the human kind as a whole, and take thought in our deliberations, both personal and political, for the good of the whole species." This idea is compatible with the preservation of local communities and forms of government, and so coincides nicely with the Judge's high estimation of the concrete. It also echoes the Judge's point that we should not let accidental characteristics divide us from our fellow human beings.

The upshot of all this is that, while the individual is free to determine his essential characteristics and actions on the Judge's view, he is constrained in this as long as he intends to reconcile himself with life in the world by willing the good. To will the good, he must will earnestly and with energy, and not succumb to idleness, which excessive reflection in the esthetic mode would likely lead to. He must also follow his conscience by determining what the universal demands in the particular situations he finds himself in, and acting on these demands. In making a principled commitment to become the universal individual by living ethically, human freedom is promoted across the board. Evil has the opportunity to arise when the balance between

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290 See Nussbaum, "Kant and Stoic Cosmopolitanism", p. 6-7
freedom and nature is not maintained in the life of the individual, or when nature inhibits freedom by dulling one's reflective and volitional capacities. For instance, individuals who perform wrongful or injurious acts are often motivated by natural inclinations or crude desires, without them seriously considering the effects that their actions will have on themselves and other people. Evil can also arise when the humanity of other people is not respected due to the failure of the universal to emerge in the wrongdoer's life. For instance, prejudice results from believing that the qualities of one's own group are superior to those of others. In these cases, accidental characteristics that are thought to be special are used to justify maltreatment and exclusion, while our common humanity is disregarded. Given that the good is freedom, the Judge argues that one is not actually free to choose evil, since this would be a contradiction. For this reason, he denies the possibility of "radical evil," or that an individual could know what is right and freely choose to do wrong (E/O II: 173-174). The goal of the ethical, then, is to elevate the human being so that his actions are freely chosen with a clear understanding of right from wrong, and are not motivated by natural impulses or inclinations, which are liable to lead him into error by making him act stupidly.

5.3.5 The Life of Duty

Under the Judge's account, duty denotes the responsibility individuals have to transform themselves into the universal and achieve unity in their lives. He explains: "Duty is the universal; it is required of me... On the other hand, my duty is the particular, something for me alone, and yet it is duty and consequently the universal" (E/O II: 263). Hence, the presence of the universal within the individual makes certain actions necessary, and duty is the expression for this necessity to act in accordance with the universal. Because the individual performs her duties by willing to do them as a free agent, the necessity of duty is a higher-order necessity that is different from natural necessity. It does not compel action by external force or pressure, but is a constraint that freedom imposes on itself in virtue of having the universal within it. The individual might fail to perform her duties, although she must do them if she intends to maintain her freedom, and not allow her actions or character to be determined by natural causes or social influences. As an autonomous agent, it would be a mistake to take other human beings or

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291 Kant argues that radical evil is possible, and occurs when we are conscious of the moral law, but are moved to act by self-love or inclination rather than respect for it. See Religion Within the Bounds of Bare Reason, pp. 35 & 40.  
292 The Judge again follows Kant on this point. See Kant, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, pp. 16-17.
external states of affairs to be the source of one's duties. However, it is also important not to conceive of oneself too abstractly, and deny that one's concrete context is essential in determining the content of one's duties, along with the person one is. The Judge returns to the metaphor of the self having to clothe itself in its concretion when it is navigating the tension between freedom and natural necessity in discerning its duties. He states that the individual living ethically "has put on duty; for him it is the expression of his innermost being" (E/O II: 254). In emphasizing the concrete dimension of selfhood, the Judge claims that duty is an expression for the indebtedness of free agents to their historical existence, which is originally given to them as a product of natural necessity. He states, "since he has not created himself but has chosen himself, duty is the expression of his absolute dependence and his absolute freedom in their identity with each other" (E/O II: 270).

It follows that when the individual aims to figure out what his duty is by following his conscience, he does not only aim to learn something about himself, but also about his place in the external world. The goal is to determine how best to apply the universal given the specific features of one's situation, and this situation includes states of affairs and historical conditions that are outside the individual. This might mean that he adopts those duties that are standard in his culture based on his specific skills, characteristics, and abilities. However, he might reject them if current social practices go against his conscience, and are incompatible with the advancement of human freedom more generally. With duty being intrinsic to one's nature as the universal individual, it follows that one will have many particular duties to oneself and others in society. Because the good is freedom, the individual wills the good amidst the necessities of daily life by performing these duties with passion and energy as an autonomous agent.

Since to be an autonomous agent is to act of one's own accord as the universal individual, duty ought to be the principal motivation in human action, rather than desires that are satisfied by external goods, which stem from one's animal nature. Although the Judge disagrees with Kant about how reason legislates morality, he appears to borrow Kant's notion that actions that have moral worth must be motivated by duty towards universal law. For the Judge, however, this law prescribes that one transform oneself into the universal individual, or that one diligently maintains this state insofar as one has actualized this ideal and become that. Each one of us is essentially the universal individual, but we not do not exist as the universal individual until we commit to an ethical way of living. By working through despair under a resolution to become
oneself, and accepting one's obligations as a self, one takes full responsibility for oneself and one's actions. In having a sense of purpose and direction through the performance of duties, and finding happiness through free action, the world comes to seem like home again, and life takes on new meaning. One's capacities of thought and volition are therefore brought into agreement with nature and society as one lives to fulfill one's obligations toward them.

Because the universal is abstract and internal to the autonomous person, the Judge tries to refrain from telling anyone what his or her specific duties are as an external authority (E/O II: 264). Although it is generally up to the agent, as his own authority, to determine what his duties are, the Judge invokes a few core duties that he believes are necessary for resolving despair. The duty that he has the highest regard for is marriage (E/O II: 302), which "provides the universal" as the highest expression of love in the human race (E/O II: 89-90). He argues that marriage is a duty for those who have been through despair because it is the purest action one can take to free oneself from the trap of self-enclosure that ensues in the reflective stage of the esthetic mode.

Marriage is a result of loving another person deeply, and this means going out of oneself to give oneself to the beloved (E/O II: 109-110). The dutiful acts of self-giving that occur in marriage include paying attention to the needs of the beloved and having concern for him or her, or for the family both are raising, and such devotion to others is incompatible with excessive self-reflection. In his inner reserve, the highly reflective individual tends to hold himself back from social engagements, concealing his thoughts and feelings about things and refusing to dedicate too much energy to his relationships with others. Marriage disrupts this pattern of action and promotes true freedom by requiring "honesty, frankness, openness, understanding" in an intimate relation to another person (E/O II: 116). The lover will naturally have erotic feelings that stem from an immediate desire for his or her partner, and so marriage includes an esthetic element. However, marital love transfigures erotic love by being an act of will, rather than a passing feeling or desire for pleasure (E/O II: 31-32). The married person does not simply have this desire for the other person, but wants to go on having this desire for the person. As long as the marriage is exclusive, he will resist erotic desires for others that might crop up in him.293

Because the marital bond entails a stable commitment to a husband or wife that is to be fulfilled in everyday life in the world, the Judge states it is an expression for the unity of the eternal and temporal in existence (E/O II: 94). It is therefore a symbol of the union the individual living

293 See Frankfurt, *Reasons of Love*, p. 16.
ethically would maintain with the world in repenting toward it and appropriating the specific features of his situation in freedom.

The Judge contends that it is every person's duty to become open to others in maintaining a fellowship with the community as the universal individual. As a result, friendship is another basic duty for those living ethically (E/O II: 322). He argues that if a friendship is to have ethical significance, it cannot be rooted in emotions like sympathy, or passive feelings that spring up naturally in those living esthetically (E/O II: 321). As marriage shows, love for others can be volitional, and must be so if friendship is to have more than esthetic significance. Love that is volitional also tends to have a permanence that the more immediate form of love lacks in originating in lower-order desires and affects. For instance, the Judge explains that a friendship that rests on ethical grounds lasts even if the friend dies, since the deceased friend is likely to be recollected by one who has committed to the friendship (E/O II: 321-322). Friendships held by those in the esthetic stage, however, are likely to end when interaction with the other person is no longer pleasurable, or when he no longer stands to benefit from him. These friendships are also likely to depend on accidental traits that the individuals have in common with one another, such as their interests, hobbies, looks, background, or class. If they no longer share much in common along these lines, then the friendship ceases. When the friendship is the product of an ethical commitment, however, these accidental traits will not matter much. They will not be ignored, but one will be able to look past them by focusing on the common humanity in the other person (E/O II: 256). By attaching oneself to others through marriage and friendship, and affirming them as particular duties one has, one transforms oneself into the universal individual through practical involvement with the world. As the individual integrates with the world after a period of heightened reflection on it, and acknowledges his duty to love people in it, despair is eliminated.

Lastly, another important duty on the Judge's account is that of working for a living (E/O II: 282). Only rarely does a human being not have to work to get what she needs, and in this sense, work is an action that expresses the universal in human life. Consequently, if one intends to be the universal individual, and to be "essentially on the same level as all other human beings" (E/O II: 293), one should make work one's duty. The Judge argues that work signifies our capacity to control nature through our own activity, and so evinces human freedom. "It is precisely by working," he writes, "that a person liberates himself; by working, he becomes master over nature; by working, he shows that he is higher than nature" (E/O II: 282). Of course,
this sounds like a rather idealized conception of work, and the Judge recognizes that work is a necessity for most of us, who have no choice but to work if we want to survive. In this respect, we do not really seem free, and seem to be subject to nature in the same way that other living things are. However, the Judge explains that plants and animals are different in that they do not have to exert themselves through work like we do in actively taking control over our situation as civilized persons. Natural forces alone control them, but this complete lack of freedom is an imperfection that shows they are without the dignity that we possess as free persons who can direct our own lives amid nature's flux, however limited we might be in this project (E/O II: 282-283). As the Judge puts it: "It is beautiful to see a providence satisfy all and take care of all, but it is even more beautiful to see a man who is, so to speak, his own providence" (E/O II: 282). While a reflective esthete like A languished in idle contemplation, and considered himself powerless in the face of nature, making work one's duty empowers the individual so that he can become aware of his freedom as a willing participant in civilized life.

In finding beauty in the performance of duty, whether it is marriage, work, friendship, or something else, the Judge insists that the ethical view of life does not do away with the esthetic, but ennobles it by seeing it under the aspect of the universal. In assigning duties like work and marriage that bring out the universal in existence, the Judge believes that the ethical view "conceives of the human being according to his perfection, views him according to his true beauty" (E/O II: 288). Those who have not adopted the ethical standpoint can appreciate beauty in nature or art, but this beauty depends on the sensuous, and so they are limited to finding it in contingent conditions. They are not able to appreciate the highest form of beauty, which transcends the fleeting moment of sensuality, and this is to endure as the universal individual. In answering the call of conscience by realizing the universal, the Judge believes that the ethical cast of ordinary life will captivate the individual with its beauty, and that this will reconcile him with existence in a way that art cannot do for more than a brief period of time. He says to A:

As far as poetry and art are concerned, may I remind you of what I mentioned earlier, that they provide only an imperfect reconciliation with life, also that when you fix your eye upon poetry and art you are not looking at actuality, and that is what we really should be speaking about. (E/O II: 273)

By rousing our intellect and capturing our imagination through sensuous means, art has the ability to transfigure the ordinary conditions of existence, raising life into the sphere of ideality.
The harmony that obtains between the imagination and our lived condition when we are provoked by artistic beauty generates pleasures that are highly desired by the reflective esthete. But if esthetic contemplation is pursued to radical lengths and for extended periods, it yields diminishing returns, and can have negative consequences. As we have seen with A, who attempts to turn his life into a work of art, it can produce a perpetual state of detachment, inspiring a plethora of ideas but leaving the individual with no firm bearing in reality. These poetic individuals are lost in the sphere of possibility, dreaming their life away without paying heed to the necessities of everyday life, which they cannot reconcile themselves to. In this state of imbalance, which the Judge conceives as despair, it is difficult to gain pleasure from ordinary life. The ethical, however, bridges ideality and reality by issuing normative demands that are to be met through participation in the world. According to the Judge, the beauty of performing one's duties as the universal individual draws one into existence, and produces the consistent happiness one yearns for while living in despair.

The Judge believes that the ethical way of life rejuvenates the individual by reintegrating him with a world that he had become alienated from due to the development of reflection. It also reintegrates him with himself as an embodied inhabitant of it. This form of integration is superior to the type experienced by the immediate esthete or the conformist in the "public" mode. These individuals are indeed integrated with the world or society, but they are neither free, nor aware of themselves as eternal under the guidance of the universal. Without knowing themselves adequately, they are driven by their immediate inclinations and desires, or by the beliefs and attitudes they have adopted from their culture, without much critical reflection on them. As a result, they drift from one moment to the next without comprehending their lives as a unified whole, and are disintegrated as selves. This begins to change as freedom emerges in the individual. The reflective esthete has started to think for himself and make his own choices, questioning his inherited beliefs and values, and not letting other people dictate his actions. However, this break from the established order leaves him detached, and without any stable principle to govern his conduct or give him direction. The individual living ethically recognizes that these ways of life are signs of personal disintegration, and in coming to know himself, discovers "what is the most inward and holy in a human being," which is "the binding power of the personality" (E/O II: 160). He believes that through an effort of the will, he can finally achieve integrity as a self and defeat despair on his own under the direction of the universal,
which sends him back into the world to fulfill his duties as a human being. While meaning in life had been lost when despair had surfaced in the reflective esthete, the ethical project gives life new meaning and purpose through its emphasis on personal responsibility. The duties the individual performs ground his freedom in worldly action, and his earnest dedication toward realizing the universal in his life makes the world appear to him in its full beauty. In this way, the ethical way of life heals the division between self and world that had occurred through the emergence of freedom, and makes the world home again by restoring the attachments one originally had to it.

5.4 The Inability of The Ethical to Resolve Despair

While the Judge argues that despair can be defeated through the ethical way of life, it is clear that Kierkegaard believes that it will prove to be a failure if it is carried through without self-deception. He does not stage a dedicated attack on the ethical way of life in the manner that the Judge does with the esthetic way of life, but his criticisms can be extracted from works following Either/Or. The most general statement of his critique is given under the pseudonym of Climacus, who argues that the individual who has isolated himself from the world in despair cannot reconcile himself with it without divine assistance (CUP: 257-258). The thought seems to be that when the individual becomes an autonomous being, he will have attained a degree of reflection that makes it impossible to return to life in the world without feeling alienated from his earthly condition, or even his lower nature as a psyche-body unity. He intends to rely on his own powers to achieve balance and harmony in his life, but he is unable to curb reflection once he has actualized this capacity to the extent he has. Similarly, once he knows himself in having chosen himself absolutely, it is impossible to get rid of this knowledge that has liberated him from external influences. As a result, he remains a self-enclosed individual who has taken flight in the imagination, without being able to devote himself wholeheartedly to worldly enterprises, or to people or states of affairs in existence. As Thomson puts it, the Judge's letters "do not bear witness to a character firmly anchored in the concrete through action, but to an extravagant bourgeoisie who has substituted a romance of the commonplace for the aesthete’s diary of seduction."294 Throughout Kierkegaard's works, this state of disintegration is characteristic of despair in its advanced stages.

294 See Thompson, Kierkegaard, p. 163
Of course, there are questions concerning what reason Kierkegaard has to conclude that the individual would not be able integrate with the world or himself of his own will, assuming that he embraces the human condition as a free agent under ethical obligations. Commentators often take him to be posing a single compelling objection to the ethical, but I believe that his attack is multi-pronged. In this section, I argue that there are three different lines of criticism that emerge from Climacus' objection to the ethical as a solution to despair. First, the individual living ethically will be unable to fully recover from despair after discovering himself in this condition. Second, he will be constrained by the monotony of everyday life, and will likely become bored with his tasks and unfulfilled by preoccupying himself with ethical duties. Third, he will be guilty for his failure to meet the strict standards that he attempts to live in accord with, and will be disquieted by the corruption and vice he finds within himself that he cannot remove. I argue that the first two lines of criticism are rather weak, but that the third has more force. For Kierkegaard, these problems within the ethical should motivate a conversion to the religious way of life.

5.4.1 The Indelible Mark of Despair

As I mentioned at the end of section 2.2, in the way that Kierkegaard describes it through the pseudonyms, there is an internal conflict present in the ethical mode that would suggest despair remains an issue in it. The individual who has chosen to convert to an ethical way of life does so after despairing over the world as a whole, and after having lost a sense of meaning and direction in life in the esthetic mode. As Anti-Climacus describes it, in recoiling from his earthly situation, which has brought great hardship and suffering on him, he becomes detached from ordinary events, and does not want to be himself. According to the Judge, when he chooses to live ethically, his basic disposition changes, and he begins to view the world as a venue for personal growth, love, and renewal, rather than as a hostile environment that is not conducive to his happiness. In approaching life with an ethical purpose, he now wants to be himself, and to be a contributing member of the community that he resides in. This radical change of heart is not inconceivable or contradictory, but it would seem that it would be difficult for a person to affirm the goodness of life in the world after seriously calling this into doubt. The negative attitude he had previously maintained toward it would likely have left a lasting impression on him, leading to tension in his position. It is difficult to conceive of him as embracing life in the world.
unreservedly in the way that the Judge describes, without him being unsettled in doing so. Hence, there is a worry that the individual living ethically has reached the point of no return in despairing, and that it lurks within him, even though he does his best to conceal this from himself. He cannot restore himself to spiritual health of his own powers, but must depend on divine intervention for this. As a result, he would turn to a religious way of life that disavows participation in worldly life, without deceiving himself about being satisfied with it.

This objection to the ethical way of life might ring true for those dealing with the repercussions of major depression, but the notion that despair is a prerequisite for ethical living is not entirely convincing to begin with. Throughout the pseudonymous works, Kierkegaard suggests that a thoroughgoing depression is necessary for coming to know oneself and willing to be oneself in truth. If a person does not endure a prolonged period of suffering that makes her raise serious questions about who she is or what significance life has for her, while doubting that the cultural narratives handed down to her suffice to answer them, then she has not realized that she is free. Consequently, she cannot commit herself to the ethical project, and remains in the esthetic mode. Kierkegaard suggests that the emergence of freedom in her life will be attended by melancholy, since in no longer being unreflectively absorbed in worldly affairs, she will feel alone and without guidance in existence, with infinite possibilities having opened up before her. Even if we concede that this process will generate painful emotions, it is unclear why it has to be triggered by great suffering, or why it must involve a negative attitude towards life or the world in general, or even why it must result in a lifestyle like that of the reflective esthete. Any human life will contain episodes of sorrow, anxiety, guilt, and doubt with respect to a variety of issues, without these states having to be grave or long-term. It might be that the pain experienced after the more profound realization of one's freedom is also short-term. In other words, perhaps one can live ethically without having to deal with the internal conflicts that are likely to linger after an intense period of despair, and in such cases, the objection is unfounded.

It would seem, for instance, that a proper moral education could facilitate a transition to the ethical mode, without the individual needing to endure intense despair or to adopt the standpoint of ironic detachment to reach this stage of personal development. As the Judge describes it, there are not likely to be enormous differences between the ethical way of life and ordinary ways of living that involve adherence to a customary form of morality within a stable community. Unlike those in the "public" mode, who act under a conventional system of norms
and values without understanding the metaphysical basis for this, and without taking control of their own lives to a remarkable degree, the individual living ethically understands why an ethical orientation is important to maintain. In learning about the capacity for human beings to transcend their natural condition as free agents, and about the universal that lies within us as rational beings, the individual living ethically has reflected on the reasons that people tend to act in accord with rules and values in society. Yet as an avowedly ordinary human being, he is different from them only in doing more consciously what they do without thinking too much about it. Because he has a heightened awareness of his freedom, he would work harder on perfecting himself morally, and would be more diligent in performing his duties and sticking to ethical principles. But unless his community is seriously corrupt, or he lives in an inhospitable environment for human freedom due to war, an oppressive government, or the like, he would likely adopt the same sort of standards and practices as common people. The ethical way of life is therefore a fuller realization of a morality of custom. The proximity of these ways of living would suggest that a good upbringing and an education that encourages critical thinking might be enough for a person to arrive at an ethical standpoint much like the one the Judge describes, without her having to discover her freedom in a state of depression or despair. Since a change of heart is also conceivable for those who have been through an intense form of despair, we should look for reasons that the ethical way of life is one of despair that do not rely on individuals having a previous history of it.

5.4.2 The Longing For Relief From Boredom and World-weariness

In his letters, the Judge explains that the reflective esthete would regard the ethical way of life, or any conventional form of living, as despair because he deems the tasks and routines of ordinary life to be an impediment to freedom. The individual living ethically convinces himself he is free, but he is in fact subjected to necessities like work, raising a family, and fulfilling obligations to his community or spouse. He therefore deceives himself about his freedom. Of course, he thinks that these actions are freely chosen, and dignifies them with the title of duty, but this a polite way of ignoring that he has submitted to circumstances beyond his control. The

295 It is perhaps unlikely that this person would subject their standpoint to rigorous philosophical interpretation, and so the kinds of realizations that the Judge has could remain implicit for him. I do not believe a person needs to read the Judge's letters (or Kant) to direct his life under universally valid ethical principles as an autonomous agent, although such reflections would certainly help him understand his position. On the other hand, this understanding could give him a better sense of direction in life, and equip him to work toward perfecting himself morally.

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Judge remains unfazed by this criticism, admitting it is noble to submit to duty (E/O II: 128). On his view, the ethical way of life demonstrates that freedom and necessity can be united in a human life, without this relationship being discordant. The esthete disputes this easy unity and raises a deeper problem for the ethical when he describes the ethical way of life as tedious, and as a dubious glorification of the mundane. "Is there anything more boring than this straitlaced conformity that suppresses everything and clips its wings" (E/O II: 206). The suggestion is that the individual who resolves to fulfill his duties might be enthusiastic about it initially, but his satisfaction is not likely to last for long. His spiritual longing will not cease so long as he is stuck with the repetitive and predictable tasks of daily life, and he will eventually find himself going through the motions while becoming conscious of his bondage to the world. Content with being just like everybody else, he is settled in his existence as the universal individual, but this is a mediocre existence that offers little adventure or excitement, and he knows it. The esthete decries "the unavoidable habit" and "dreadful monotony" of marriage, which he thinks cannot preserve the splendor of the first moment of falling in love, however much it seeks to recover this magic (E/O II: 125). In short, the individual living ethically does not really want to live like this. Freedom cannot find its home in the world, which confines with its familiarity, sameness, and lack of mystery. As a result, the individual living ethically is in despair, ultimately desiring an escape from it.

The Judge, however, thinks beauty, love, and happiness can also be found in the tasks and routines of everyday life, and so is unconvinced by the esthete's callous objection. Certainly there are people capable of loving their children, family, or spouse over the years, without this love fading or going stale. People also can take pleasure in their work, without finding it dull or wearisome most of the time. In defense of marriage, the Judge argues that the duties, rituals, and repetitive tasks that the esthete detests are a way of preserving love in its originality throughout the passage of time, and that a commitment to them shows it has something eternal within it (E/O II: 137-139). If the eternal was not there to elevate love through its presence in the inwardness of consciousness, it would be momentary and capricious, and could not endure through changing conditions in themselves or the world. For this reason, love in the esthetic stage is inferior to love

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296 Nagel raises a worry similar to that of the esthete, stating that those who are in "assiduous pursuit of mundane goals" will experience "the main condition of absurdity—the dragooning of an unconvinced transcendent consciousness into the service of an immanent, limited enterprise like human life." See "The Absurd," p. 726.
that has been sanctified by ethical commitment. Needless to say, it is novelty and variation that
the esthete seeks in his effort to regain the joy of experiencing things for the first time, and so he
cannot fathom that it is possible to take satisfaction in the continual performance of duties. For
the Judge, he does not point to a weakness in the ethical position with his criticism, but only
betrays his immaturity as a human being.

The Judge concedes some ground to the esthete, however, when he admits that there are
times when he feels "desolate and lost" after completing his duties for the day. Recalling
Kierkegaard's sentiment that he was "an eternity too old" to be moved by the success of
_Either/Or_ among the gossipy public of his time (POV: 36), the Judge writes:

It sometimes happens to me—to be sure, very rarely now, for I try to counteract it...that I sit and settle into
myself. I have taken care of my work; I have no desire for any diversion, and something melancholy in my
temperament gains the upper hand over me. I become many years older than I actually am, and I practically
become a stranger to my home life. I can very well see that it is beautiful, but I look at it with different eyes
than usual. It seems to me as if I myself were an old man, my wife my happily married younger sister in
whose house I am sitting. In such hours, time almost begins to drag for me... (E/O II: 307)

Fortunately, these episodes of detachment are brief for him, and he claims to be able to snap out
of them and become an enthusiastic participant in time again by watching his wife busily take
care of things around the house. Needless to say, he could be doing things that are less creepy to
occupy himself, like reading a book or tending the garden, but there is a worry that similar
episodes will come more frequently, and that the life of duty will prove to be uneventful and
unsatisfying to him. If he becomes listless, and is consistently alienated from his life in the world
in the way that the reflective esthete is, this is a sign that his despair was never resolved properly,
and that he had been concealing it from himself by preoccupying himself with duty.

Still, periods of unhappiness, boredom, or weariness should not have to be a real concern
for the person who has committed himself ethically. Some vacillation in moods and attitudes
should be expected over the course of any human life, and it would be odd for a person never to
experience bouts of unhappiness. Perhaps this person is generally happy with the ethical way of
life, and in this case, the esthete's objection is unconvincing. However, if the ethical way of life
becomes too boring or wearisome for the individual, or if he becomes terribly unhappy in it, it is
unlikely that he will want to regress to an esthetic way of living in an attempt to overcome
despair. If we assume that he has moved beyond the irony and romanticism of the reflective esthete, then it would have been played out, and he will recognize that the esthetic is also despair. Having experienced the shortcomings of both stages, he recognizes that neither can satisfy his longing for freedom as spirit. It is at this point that Kierkegaard proposes the religious way of life as an alluring option for the individual that seeks escape from the suffering of human existence. On his interpretation of Christianity, Anti-Climacus states that faith is the terminal stage in the development of despair, and occurs when the individual eliminates despair by wanting to be himself before God (SUD: 14-15). In his account of the ethical, the Judge conceived of the person living ethically as having a relationship with God, but this occurs within an ethical context rather than a religious one, and is expressed through his relationships with other people. Like Kant, the Judge believes that the will of God does not defy human comprehension, but that we know it when we understand what reason demands of us morally, and that this takes the form of universal law. Kierkegaard, on the other hand, takes the ethical to be incongruent with the religious, given that God's will has to be discerned through biblical revelation and taken on the basis of faith (JP II: 1273). If God, as an external authority, did not reveal his will by means of historical conditions, it would be incomprehensible to us, and in this sense: "Faith is against understanding" (FSE: 81-82).

Under the pseudonym of Johannes de Silentio, Kierkegaard uses Abraham as a model of faith, with the aim of showing how ethical and religious obligations can collide, and how strange and inscrutable God's demands on us can be. In Genesis 22, God tests Abraham's loyalty, commanding him to offer his son Isaac as a burnt sacrifice on Mount Moriah. Abraham obeys his orders, binding Isaac and laying him on an altar he builds there. At the moment Abraham draws the knife to slaughter him, God rescinds the command and blesses him, having seen that he rightly fears Him. de Silentio argues that Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son demonstrates that the "knight of faith" will undertake a "teleological suspension of the ethical" in prioritizing his duties toward an omnipotent God (FT: 54-60). In preparing to murder Isaac for the sake of pleasing God, Abraham rejects the father's ethical duty not to kill to his son. As an individual, he thereby occupies a lonely position outside of the universal, or indeed, the human community in general. In choosing to suspend the ethical, the knight of faith adopts a standpoint similar to that of the reflective esthete, who had dissociated himself from ethical constraints for the sake of his own pleasure or amusement. de Silentio calls this "infinite resignation" (FT: 35) But on de
Silentio's interpretation of the story, in his love for people and things of this world, Abraham did not stop with resignation, but had faith that God would not ultimately require Isaac of him, or that he would restore him to life after he was sacrificed. In getting Isaac back after divesting himself of him, de Silentio imagines that Abraham joyfully returns to everyday life in the community, and loves his son just as much as he did before (FT: 36).

de Silentio argues that this happy reconciliation could only happen if God willed it "by virtue of the absurd", and that if a person were to try to achieve it of his own will after such a harrowing ordeal, he would have to resign himself to being "a stranger and an alien" in the world (FT: 50). "To exist in such a way that my contrast to existence constantly expresses itself as the most beautiful and secure harmony with it—this I cannot do" (FT: 50). The individual living ethically desires this unity between the infinite and finite aspects of the self, but as we have seen, he might admit of weariness, boredom, and continued suffering in his effort to establish it on his own terms. For de Silentio, this harmony between contradictory elements that he tries to forge as a reflective person is paradoxical, and so could only come to exist by virtue of the absurd. Consequently, one must depend on the grace of God for its realization, and this could motivate someone living ethically to turn to religious faith, where what is impossible on human criteria is believed to be possible for God. If God intervenes to bring the free person into accord with his surroundings, so that he handles the necessities of daily life with joy and ease, then despair is eliminated.

There is obviously something repellent about the religious way of life as de Silentio conceives it, and it was certainly his intention to draw this out. He thinks we should approach Abraham with a "horror religiosus" (FT: 61), rather than assume faith comes easily like so many in his generation had been accustomed to do. On the other hand, it might be alluring for those who have become disenchanted with the ethical way of life because it holds out the prospect of happiness and relief from suffering where human efforts to achieve this have failed. Kierkegaard states that for a Jewish knight of faith like Abraham, faith is concerned with happiness in this life, while for a Christian knight, it is only concerned with an eternal happiness in a world to come, and will involve continual suffering in this life (JP II: 2221).²⁹⁷ Kierkegaard concedes that

²⁹⁷ Some commentators have grossly misunderstood Kierkegaard’s mature view on Christian faith by mistaking it for the view expressed by de Silentio in Fear and Trembling. Hall, for instance, argues: "In the logic of the Kierkegaardian framework, faith is the opposite of a religion and philosophy of resignation and refusal: existential faith for Kierkegaard is always essentially worldly; a religion and philosophy of resignation and refusal are always
the truth of Christianity is uncertain (JP II: 1154), and that in requiring faith, it offers us no guarantees about our future happiness. This would seem to be a strike against it, but in the way that he describes it, the life of faith is not tedious or boring, and this is another reason why it might appeal to an individual living ethically. He refers to it as a "venture" that unsettles the individual in his everyday existence, creating conflicts with other people and even initiating "a struggle with God" (JP VI: 6385). Because Christianity demands that the individual renounce worldly goods, and insulate himself from the greed, lust, selfishness, and materialism that prevails in the world, Christians believe:

...truly to keep close to God definitely means suffering in this world...for them the mark of the sign of the God-relationship is the opposition of the world...But in dull and lackluster moments they sink down from this high intensification—and now the change takes place—it seems to them that the world’s opposition perhaps proves that they are wrong, it is perhaps arrogant of them to have ventured out this way, so that they almost repent and regret as guilt was their most honest enthusiasm. This, you see, is spiritual trial. (JP IV: 4379)

For Kierkegaard, "spiritual trial" [Anfægtelse] denotes the anxious periods of doubt about what God's will is, or whether it is His will that one endeavors an intimate relationship with Him. The Judge thinks the individual living ethically would have a relationship with God, but this is mediated through the universal, and finds expression chiefly through human institutions like the family, state, or community. However, with his new understanding of God, the religious individual has renounced all this in deciding to enter into "an absolute relation to the absolute" (FT: 55). While the Judge identified with God, or the absolute, in choosing himself in despair, the religious individual does not, and instead conceives of himself as a free person in relation to a transcendent God that freely established him. In suspending the ethical through his acts of

essentially, however subtly, other-worldly" (The Human Embrace, p. 16-17). He goes on to claim that for Kierkegaard, faith requires that "the whole of the finite world, every inch, is embraced at the very dialectical moment when the possibility of giving it up is existentially (in fear and trembling) realized" (Ibid., p. 27). Undoubtedly this is what many Kierkegaard commentators wish he would have said about the Christian faith, but throughout his writings on this topic, Christianity is marked by voluntary renunciation, and even a disdain for the naturally human. Hall's misreading of Kierkegaard's conception of Christian faith demonstrates the confusion readers can get into when they do not heed Kierkegaard's admonition to not attribute the works of the pseudonymous authors to him.

This experience is also described by Luther, who considered such severe trials [Anfechtungen] central to the Christian faith. For Luther, trials can arise when it seems to the believer that God is contradicting Himself, or that He is playing a game with the faithful, or when he or she questions the meaning of suffering. See von Loewenich, Luther's Theology of the Cross, pp. 134-139.
renunciation, and devoting himself to God in prayer and supplication, the individual takes himself to be higher than the universal, much like Abraham did. Since the Christian approaches an awesome God of his own free will, and at his own peril, Kierkegaard admits there are dreadful periods where he feels "as if he were venturing too boldly in literally involving himself personally with God and Christ" (JP IV: 4372). While he fears that he might be transgressing his boundaries as a finite human being in aiming to get close to God, he has faith that God sends spiritual trial to humble or test him, and not to frighten him back into his old ways of living. He therefore advises those who experience it not to avoid it by lapsing into worldliness, but to "go straight toward it, trusting in God and Christ" (JP IV: 4023).

The Christian experience that Kierkegaard describes is appalling, and it is natural to ask why a human being would ever choose to endure such an ordeal. There is of course the promise of an eternal happiness free of all suffering if one passes the test God puts him through, which might sound attractive, but Kierkegaard also suggests that the religious life is fascinating in a way that the ethical life is not. The individual living ethically is content with being an ordinary person who lives the same kind of life as everybody else, but the religious individual thinks of his own life as extraordinary in choosing to relate himself personally to God, outside the confines of the universal. He recognizes that approaching an unknown God in this manner might be a terrible mistake, but his simultaneous attraction and repulsion is part of a mystical adventure that excites him, even though this consists in anxiety, uncertainty, and insecurity. These dark and unsettling feelings might sound undesirable, and certainly contribute to even more suffering, but they are enlivening with respect to one's inner life, spurring the imagination, passion, and volition. Recalling the notion of inverted vitality that I explored in the third chapter, Kierkegaard writes, "a human being cannot in the deeper sense live without relating himself to the unconditional; he expires, that is, perhaps goes on living, but spiritlessly" (POV: 19). The individual living ethically relates to God, or the unconditional, through his commitment to perform his duties, but given its proximity to the public mode, there is a worry that it will degenerate into an impoverished form of spiritual life. There is "peace, safety, and security" in

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299 Kierkegaard elaborates on this point elsewhere, writing: “Spiritual trial...can never fail to appear if one is to exist religiously, consequently as an actual, definite, particular man—for example, I Søren Aabye Kierkegaard, thirty five years old...living on such and such a street—in short this whole concretion of trivialities, that I dare relate myself to God, refer all the affairs of my life to him. No man has ever lived who has truly done this without discovering with horror the horror of spiritual trial, that he might be venturing too boldly, that the whole thing might really be lunacy” (JP IV: 4372).
the ethical, which instructs us to settle into ordinary conditions in the world (E/O II: 323), but as a result, it is not likely to energize us or generate much passion in us like religion can. Since we risk sinking back into worldly life by pursuing the ethical, thought and volition risk being dulled, and to live in this state of imbalance is to be in despair.

Kierkegaard believes that Christianity is capable of drawing a person's interest and raising his awareness by instructing him that what he is seeking is not here in the world, but is to come after death. He writes:

Oh, whoever you are, even if you feel ever so grievously trapped in the lifelong confinement of suffering, alas, like a trapped animal in its cage—see, this prisoner paces around the cage every day, measures the length of the chain in order to have movement—so if you also measure the length of the chain by proceeding to the thought of death and eternity, you gain the movement enabling you to endure, and you gain zest for life! (FSE: 100)

On Kierkegaard's view, the Christian life produces tremendous suffering for a human being, but this is a testament to his longing for God, and is even pleasing to Him. Perhaps there is something masochistic about the God-relationship, yet Kierkegaard insists "to want to suffer and to choose sufferings...is a wish that never arose in any human heart" (UDVS: 250). As a Christian, Kierkegaard desperately seeks an end to his suffering, but given that God is absolutely different from anything of this world, it is an inevitable consequence of seeking a close relationship with Him while being ineluctably situated in the world. If one loses a sense of meaning and purpose in life after getting worn out with ethical tasks, and feels like one's life has stalled, Christianity gives meaning to one's suffering, and assigns the task of completing one's spiritual development through union with God. It is unlikely, however, that anyone would take up a life of angst and renunciation simply because they might get bored with their staid and predictable lifestyle. It is also prima facie plausible that a person could be content or happy with this lifestyle, without thinking that he is in despair. We should therefore look for a more convincing reason for holding that the ethical way of life is despair.

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300 It is sometimes argued that Kierkegaard is a masochist. For instance, in his commentary on the upbuilding discourses, Sheil, writes: "Kierkegaard's masochism is not to be held against him. On the contrary, it is most interesting. It is how he unhooks subjectivity from the mundane, turning hardship into joy by receiving it with thankfulness just as the omnivorous aesthete insulates himself with the interesting" (Kierkegaard and Levinas: The Subjunctive Mood, p. 92).
5.4.3 Guilt and Moral Disquietude

One common interpretation of Kierkegaard's criticism of the ethical standpoint is that it offers no good remedy for the guilt that the individual will have for not living up to ethical standards. Mackey eloquently defends this criticism, stating:

Of course the Judge is no stranger to guilt. But he takes his guilt as a moral challenge, when in fact he would be better advised to see it as moral defeat. For the affirmation of guilt does nothing to get rid of it, and this is the tragedy of the ethical life. If a man is to achieve selfhood by freedom, he must shoulder responsibility for the past…But he is incapable of eliminating or reforming that past and therefore barred from meeting the absolute demand of duty…In any case, freedom, which is potent to make a man guilty, is impotent to remove guilt.\(^{301}\)

The Judge would object that he has recourse to repentance in alleviating guilt for wrongs he had committed while living esthetically, and for his personal flaws, but this is a meager solution for someone who admits to being essentially guilty. The type of repentance that he describes is not directed toward anyone in particular, and does not concern any particular wrongs, so forgiveness is impossible. Even if other people did forgive him for particular misdeeds, this would not rid him of the mental burden of having done them to begin with, or repair the damage to his character that they have contributed to. As Mackey notes, repentance "is a confession of ethical insolvency" that "declares the bankruptcy of him who repents," and so cannot adequately resolve the guilt that the individual experiences.\(^{302}\) Because he would have isolated himself in guilt, with no possibility of remission, he remains in despair.

Kierkegaard suggests that those who live ethically do not only have to deal with guilt for mistakes they made in the past, but also for their present failure to conform to ethical demands. At the same time, these are too rigorous for any human being to successfully meet, which leads to tension in the ethical standpoint. Under the pseudonym of Vigilius Haufniensis, Kierkegaard introduces an idealist conception of the ethical that sounds more exacting than the one the Judge offers, while remaining Kantian in spirit. He states:

Ethics proposes to bring ideality into actuality. On the other hand, it is not the nature of its movement to raise actuality up into ideality. Ethics points to ideality as a task and assumes that every man possesses the

\(^{302}\) Ibid., p. 91
requisite conditions. Thus ethics develops a contradiction, inasmuch as it makes clear both the difficulty and the impossibility. What is said of the law is also true of ethics: it is a disciplinarian that demands, and by its demands only judges but does not bring forth life. (CA: 16)

If we modify the Judge's position so that boredom and clemency are out of the question, then the claim is that it is impossible for anyone to fully transform himself into the universal individual due to human limitations and deficiencies, which stem from existing temporally. However, in issuing from the eternal component in the human being, the universal requires that we continually meet this standard in everyday life, and to the extent that we do not, we are responsible for this failure. Consequently, the individual living ethically is guilty for not realizing the ideals that govern his life satisfactorily, and this discrepancy generates the kind of internal conflict that is characteristic of despair. Since repentance cannot resolve this conflict, the individual fails to integrate his life as the universal individual, and so cannot achieve his telos of his own powers.303

The limitations that hamper the realization of ethical ideals would include character flaws and imperfect behavior from the past that has irrevocably influenced us, but Kierkegaard discusses additional limitations that arise from the temporal character of human existence in other pseudonymous works. Climacus, for instance, argues that ethical action requires that we spend time deliberating on our actions, but this results in wasted moments that could be used for other ethical tasks (CUP: 526). Derrida raises a similar worry when he argues that by dedicating our time, energy, or resources to certain people, we are neglecting others who would benefit from our attention.304 These are not wasted moments per se, but it means that as finite beings, we are forced to make sacrifices that are problematic on ethical grounds. Along with competing obligations that need adjudication, there is also the worry that regardless of how much we exert ourselves in deliberation, we are liable to err when determining what action is appropriate in a given situation, or who should benefit from it. Not only are we susceptible to being misled by selfish inclinations or psychological quirks, but our earthly situation can also leave us with too many variables to take account of, resulting in an obscured understanding of our duties. Moreover, if human beings are not to collapse under the weight of ethical demands, they need time for rest and diversion, but this too leads to wasted moments, and the individual will never

303 See also Taylor, *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship*, p. 234.
304 See Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 68
know how much time is acceptable for these purposes (CUP: 495). Since there are innumerable problems in the world that we could be working to resolve, ideally we would not have to take any time off for leisure, but since we are physically and psychologically incapable of enduring this, we have to make compromises. But as Haufniensis puts it: "Ethics will have nothing to do with bargaining" when insisting that the individual perfect his conduct and character (CA: 17). Because the individual living ethically will be beleaguered by human imperfections while trying to achieve his aims, he will be burdened by guilt, and an awareness of his impotence to do anything about these things. For Kierkegaard, this spiritual conflict leads to despair.

I believe these are serious worries for those who are sincere about living ethically, but it is not clear why they have to be racked with guilt or anxiety upon recognizing their imperfections and limitations, especially since they have no real control of this. Kosch objects to this as a convincing criticism of the ethical, stating that it is a duty not to allow oneself to be paralyzed by guilt in a manner that would threaten ethical action. She also argues that if one cannot eliminate guilt for one's past, then one would have a duty to put the past behind and start afresh. I agree that it would be wrong for those who live ethically to let guilt interfere with their ability to carry out their duties, but even so, it might still remain a psychological burden for them. Hence, one can imagine someone living in despair while doing her best to respond to ethical demands. Against Kosch, I am sympathetic to the Judge's concern that it is impossible to put the past behind us, and to change the way we think about ourselves and move on. As human beings living concretely in time, our identity is irrevocably linked to our past, and events in the past leave a lasting impression on us, shaping our present understanding of the world and ourselves. Our past follows us, impacting what we do, how we feel and think, and the attitudes and beliefs we have. We cannot just slough it off at will, and any commitment to modify one's character will be met by psychological resistance in these domains that we must constantly struggle to overcome. Those who think we can convert to the ethical easily make the mistake of conceiving of the self as an unreal abstraction, or altogether infinitely, when in fact it has infinite and finite components that need to be integrated. To understand the self as making a clean break

305 Kosch, Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling, and Kierkegaard, p. 164. Kosch argues that Kierkegaard's criticism of the ethical is that it assumes persons are responsible for their actions, while being unable to explain how evil action can be imputed to them (pp. 169-174). Kosch identifies a complication for any ethical theory that takes moral standards to originate in autonomy, but this is a theoretical difficulty, and would not explain why the ethical standpoint is, in practice, one of despair. This theoretical difficulty might prompt moral philosophers to adopt a religious paradigm to understand how good and evil action is possible, however.

306 Thanks to David Sussman for this objection.
from its past is also to deprive it of its unified character, and consequently, its integrity. If one does not admit continuity with the past, one's life lacks coherence and wholeness over time, and to live in this fragmented state is to be in despair.

Given that the past is part of us, and that this inevitably contains faults and mistakes, I believe that some remorse is in order if we are to live ethically, but it is not obvious that this has to lead to despair. It is true that ethical ideals will exceed what we can actually hope to realize, but we have probably not done all that we could to realize them, and an acknowledgment of our shortcomings is appropriate. Nevertheless, it would be pathological to allow oneself to be consumed by guilt, and to insist on bringing it to mind all the time. Not only would this seem forced, but the crippling effects of it would also get in the way of performing one's duties, and lead to more moral failure. The ethically committed person should instead use his energies to look toward the future and strive for continual moral improvement. It is tempting to suggest that he should be satisfied if he does his best in carrying out this task, but as Climacus points out, this maxim is problematic, and is likely to be asserted by those who have not truly experienced the anxieties and difficulties of this way of life. “Where, then, is the boundary for the single individual in his concrete existence between what is lack of will and what is lack of ability; what is indolence and earthly selfishness and what is the limitation of finitude? . . . Let all the dialecticians convene—they will not be able to decide this for a particular individual in concreto” (CUP: 490). The person living ethically will likely have lingering doubts about his moral character, and question whether he is doing all that he can to improve himself in this regard, which would be a source of guilt as well. Such doubts can be productive, and push him to do more to better himself in his daily life, but they can be paralyzing if he focuses too heavily on them. Perhaps the proper balance can be attained if he remains critical of himself, but does not let it get to the point that it brings him to despair of his efforts. If he puts his heart into fulfilling his duties while allowing for moments of doubt, it would seem he would be establishing harmony between the infinite and finite aspects of himself in the way the Judge describes.

Kierkegaard suggests, however, that this task is easier said than done, and that the Judge's optimism that it can be achieved ethically is unfounded. I believe that on the account of human psychology he provides, the most serious problem for those of us who are sincere about living ethically is not a guilty conscience, periods of dullness or boredom, or a previous history of despairing over oneself or the world in general. It is rather dissatisfaction with ourselves that
results from having to anxiously battle what is base and unruly in us, which he interprets as sin in his religious writings. The Judge does not consider this a major obstacle, arguing that the ethical way of life will yield happiness by integrating the self with itself and the world. In support of this claim, he proposes a eudaemonistic theory in which happiness arises from virtue. Virtue requires that a person be in firm command of himself, and that he act in accordance with rational principles in transforming himself into the universal individual. However, happiness and virtue can arguably come apart, and are even likely to if one aspires to a change of heart by living ethically. The reason for this is that the ethical individual maintains an intense form of self-awareness to keep check on himself and improve himself morally after acknowledging past wrongdoings, but this disrupts those pleasures that are produced through the satisfaction of earthly desire or appetite. Many of these desires are selfish, and not all of them are morally approvable on reflection, so this person will either find himself suppressing them or repudiating them through higher-order volitions. As a result, he will have to renounce many of those pleasures he previously enjoyed in the esthetic mode, and will need to engage his critical capacities to discern which of his passions, feelings, and desires are consistent with an ethical life. If he is not vigilant about maintaining the right sort of conduct, feelings, and attitudes at the right moments following his conversion to the ethical, he risks giving up self-control and regressing to the esthetic, where he lacked autonomy and was unmotivated by duty. As we have seen, this condition is capable of yielding pleasure or contentment, but it is also despair. Because the ethical way of life is not generally favorable to integration with one's lower nature as a psyche-body unity, disquietude and despair remain an issue in it.

As a eudaimonist, the Judge would object to this by saying it is not pleasure from external goods or internal goods that are beyond his control that the virtuous person seeks, but happiness, and that this originates within him when he performs his duties as a free agent. It is doubtful, however, that happiness could be produced through the self's own activity, or that it is a state that one can bring on oneself. As Anti-Climacus puts it, "happiness is not a qualification of spirit" (SUD: 25). If an individual could will his own happiness or imagine himself to be happy, whether it is through performing his duties or some other practice, everyone would be doing this, and people would not have to battle protracted mental illnesses like depression. When happiness arises in human life, it is a sentiment that comes upon us like a gift of fortune. It typically arrives when conditions in our life are satisfactory, such as when our jobs or relationships are going
well, or when we are having success with our projects, or when we are in good health. Unfortunately we do not always have much control over conditions like this, and when things are not going well for us, or we have bad luck, we tend to be unhappy. Of course, we might want to do things or see people that make us happy, but happiness in these cases depends on being in a situation that affects us, and this is different from it originating in the will. The Judge might respond by saying that this conflates the state of happiness with the feeling of pleasure, and that because happiness arises from the proper exercise of the self's reflective and volitional capacities, it is a state of flourishing of the human being that might not be pleasurable. But if happiness is not necessarily pleasurable, then it should be admitted that it is compatible with all sorts of painful feelings and terrible misfortunes, and then it hardly seems worthy of the name. Hence, ethical engagement is not guaranteed to resolve despair or bring happiness.

The transformation from the esthetic to the ethical is difficult to accomplish in practice not only because it limits pleasure and sets a standard that is impossible to meet, but also due to intractable vice, which is a problem both for persons and society in general. The esthetic mode provides the conditions for a rather unreflective, pleasurable life in harmony with nature and society, but both tend to indulge the sensuous element in the human being, which is indifferent to ethical ideals. Although there are social standards in place in a morality of custom, which precedes a genuinely ethical way of life, much of what is often tolerated in society, such as greed, lust, domination, exploitation, conceit, and consumerism, cannot hold up to moral scrutiny. In fact, our current social structures support and even encourage a great deal of selfish and vicious behavior that people derive pleasure from, and in refutation of the Judge, some of the worst offenders would claim to be happy with their lives. On the Judge's account, these actions are vices when they demean human freedom, either in oneself or in others, and behavior like this is ultimately detrimental to us. As Kierkegaard explains, we might think we are free when we are in possession of worldly goods like wealth, power, status, and so on, but these frequently end up possessing us as we struggle to secure them, thereby enslaveing us to worldly desire and vice (EUD: 164-165). Regardless of where our vices originated, whether it is in our animal nature, or through social conditioning, or in prior choices we have made, we all have them, and we all have to continually struggle to overcome them to do our best in realizing ethical ideals. The effort to transform oneself into a virtuous person is therefore likely to require intense reflection on oneself and one's motives, and inhibiting oneself from acting, feeling, and thinking in ways that one
naturally would. Unfortunately, these disruptive acts foster internal division in the self rather than promoting happiness. On top of the corruption the ethical individual must confront in his own heart, which he is unable to get rid of through his own efforts, he will also have a harsh awareness of the world's cruelties and injustices, and the preventable suffering occurring in it. As a result, he will be alienated not only from himself, but also from the world and society, and this too is a source of despair.

Following Aristotle, virtue ethicists would object that the state I have been attributing to those living ethically is characteristic of continence rather than virtue. They would argue that psychological conflicts of this sort can be eliminated through the attainment of virtue, or mitigated as one approaches virtue. Through moral education, training, and disciplining of sensuous desires and appetites, the person would act virtuously immediately and by inclination. He does not have to exert himself to override inclination or purge himself of vice and impurity. After transforming his disposition and character so that they accord with ethical ideals, he would eventually become inclined to act out of duty, or from rational deliberation.\(^\text{307}\) However, Kierkegaard suggests that this is a pipe dream of speculative philosophers who have not tried earnestly implementing the ethical. It would be impossible on the tripartite view of the self that he offers, which posits a gulf between the spiritual and the natural, which we are embroiled in as a psyche-body unity. For psychology harmony to occur, earthly desires and appetites would have to come into essential agreement with the will after freedom becomes actualized. But since these belong to two fundamentally different orders of activity that are conjoined while existing in opposition in the self, a robust harmony should not be expected, and even seems impossible. A skeptic of eudaimonism can concede to the virtue theorist that inclinations or lower-order desires are obedient to the will, given that they need the person's consent before they move him to act. Nevertheless, it is implausible that this obedience is analogous to the relationship of a father to his biological son who is eager to cooperate and learn from him like Aristotle suggests.\(^\text{308}\) It is more like the relationship of a man steering a wild horse to get to his final destination. The horse desires to explore the terrain and do its own thing, even if it leads the man off course or into trouble. As a result, it causes him all sorts of frustrations and difficulties as he tries to keep it under control. For those living ethically, who have to combat pernicious desires

\(^{307}\) See Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book I, Chapter 8 & Book III, Chapter 9

\(^{308}\) Ibid., Book I, Chapter 13 (1102b13-1103a4)
and attitudes that they have inherited from nature, society, or mistakes and experiences in the past that have irreparably damaged them, it is unlikely that the conflict between their higher and lower nature will resolve properly. Because the individual living ethically has curbed sensual pleasures, and is disquieted by the corruption he finds in himself, which has made it impossible to realize the ideal he aspires toward, unhappiness and despair remain an issue in the ethical stage. His predicament is much like the horseman who might have made strides in taming the horse, but who despite that, cannot reach his destination, and is now stuck wandering the terrain.

5.5 Conclusion

As Kierkegaard represents it through his pseudonyms, the ethical way of life is supposed to bring balance and harmony to the lives of those who commit to fulfilling their daily duties. The Judge claims that ethical living has made him happy to be a participant in the world, but there are concerns that it might get tedious, and that it might be unable to restore those who have despaired in the past to health. More worrisome is the fact that his personal transformation must remain incomplete, since he will be unable to attain the ethical ideal that governs his life. He will be disquieted by the errant ways of his heart, and will have guilt for not being able to rectify it. Because of his mistrust of himself, he will remain self-enclosed, and withdrawn from existence in a state of heightened reflection. If he continues to seek a solution to despair, de Silentio suggests that faith is a way to abolish this internal conflict and attain psychological harmony with himself and the world. However, this is different from virtue, and would involve breaking ethical commitments if God demands it. The reconciliation with existence the ethical person aims at can only occur by virtue of the absurd, or if God willed what is impossible on any human criterion through an act of divine grace. Unlike de Silentio, Kierkegaard endorses a Christian interpretation of faith, which promises the forgiveness of sins and spiritual liberation through the Atonement. The Christian believes that through Christ's sacrifice, his guilt and suffering will

\[\text{Reference: p. 165}\]

\[\text{In arguing against the view that Kierkegaard criticizes the ethical for being unable to deal with guilt, Kosch claims that divine grace and forgiveness cannot be solutions to guilt for those living ethically. She notes that on his view of Christianity, forgiveness does not eliminate past guilt, and grace does not make ethical demands easier to fulfill, or reduce the psychological burden of not fulfilling them (Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling, and Kierkegaard, p. 165). Consequently, these cannot be incentives for ethical individuals to adopt the religious way of life, since it would then be subject to the same problems as the ethical way of life. I agree with Kosch that Kierkegaard believes Christianity offers no reassurance that sins will be forgiven, and that the true practice of Christianity would involve ever-greater psychological strain for those trying to fulfill its rigorous demands. However, she ignores the reason that a person would incline to Christianity after despairing of the ethical project. For Kierkegaard, the Christian does not intend to secure his welfare or happiness in this life through the forgiveness...}\]
be eliminated after death, although he must endure continual tribulation and temptation in this life due to his sins. Rather than attempt to reconcile with the world like the ethical person does, he should renounce it, and view worldly pursuits as an obstacle to his relationship to God (UDVS: 228). If he rejects Christ's offer of redemption, then despair will continue, and he risks facing perdition after death. If he accepts it, then he has faith that Christ will satisfy his longing for freedom by ushering him to heaven, where he will attain blessed union with God. To conclude my assessment of despair in Kierkegaard's work, in the next chapter, I return to Anti-Climacus, who examines despair while presupposing the truth of Christianity. He claims that those who will to be themselves without depending on God are in despair, regardless of whether they live esthetically or ethically.

of sins, but in the afterlife, where his eternal welfare is at stake. In faith, he believes that despair will be permanently cast out after death through the grace of God. The hope is that spiritual purification will resolve despair, and this is something we cannot accomplish of our own powers, as we have seen through the shortcomings of the ethical way of life.

In an evocative depiction of self-alienation that must have inspired Kierkegaard's account of despair, St. Paul explains the problem that the Christian will experience in trying to attain the Christian ideal of his own accord. "For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin." See Romans 7:14-25 (ESV). While the Christian has faith that he will be delivered from this miserable condition, the ethical person senses it, but has not yet endowed it with religious significance.
Chapter 6
The Self in Rebellion

6.1 Introduction

Throughout his works, Kierkegaard suggests that the spiritual activity of reflection disturbs the primordial unity that the human being enjoys in the earliest period of life. In this state of raw immediacy, he is integrated with his natural condition as a psyche-body unity, with his natural drives and inclinations prevailing over his spiritual nature. Reflection occasions a break from the life of immediacy, separating him from objects and events in the natural world while bringing them to comprehension. The state of disintegration that ensues within the self creates a host of internal conflicts between his spiritual capacities and the natural capacities he shares with other animals as a psyche-body unity. As we have seen in the case of the reflective esthete, at the culmination of spiritual transcendence, the individual becomes self-enclosed through the intensification of self-consciousness. In inclosing reserve, he conceives of himself altogether abstractly, in opposition to the contents of his psyche, external objects, and even the whole world. Although this state of isolation produces great suffering and despair, it enriches one's inner life, and has the potential to lead to a higher unity centered on the person and his relationship with God.

According to Anti-Climacus, the spiritual unity of the person does not come smoothly or naturally like the psychical unity of the animal or mere human being does, and mere knowledge of one's transcendence does not suffice to achieve it. It must be forged in one's concrete existence in a practical way through ideals and commitments that one has chosen as authoritative after thinking for oneself about how to live. Anti-Climacus believes that most of us imperfectly realize this higher unity because we let other people dictate our thoughts, beliefs, and actions, or are absorbed in worldly matters in an uncritical way. Not using the medium of temporality to develop ourselves spiritually, we only take half measures in the process of self-actualization, and lack integrity and coherence as selves. Without a significant degree of inwardness, we are either ignorant of ourselves or do not want to be ourselves in truth.

While the conscious forms of despair can be painful, when the self takes flight or recoils from its earthly existence through reflection, it will have benefitted by beginning to learn of its transcendence, and becoming spiritually vitalized. However, Anti-Climacus claims that he might
not have become reflective enough to induce the “total break” with immediacy that entails full knowledge of himself as absolutely distinct from any externality (SUD: 55), or in other words, as free. This break from the temporal, which is necessary for a genuinely spiritual way of life, becomes immanent as despair worsens, and the self goes on not wanting to be itself in the face of existence. If reflection leads to this break, and the individual does not use his freedom to will to be himself before God in faith, Anti-Climacus claims that despair becomes even more aggravated, and is likely to turn into a form of defiance. The person who despairs in defiance wants to be himself, but the self he wants to be is not the self he was made to be by the greater power (or powers) that brought him into existence. Anti-Climacus therefore rejects the self-positing thesis that the Judge endorsed. The thought seems to be that because the self did not establish itself in its existence, it is not its own ground, but depends on something else in existence to ground it and provide it with its identity. On this view, the kind of absolute freedom the Judge describes is vacuous, and the self cannot provide itself with rules for action that have determinate content. As a human being, it needs to regulate itself by a criterion that would have authority over its life, and it cannot supply itself with empirical rules that would aid it in navigating the particular conditions of its existence. Before it became conscious of its freedom, it would have sought such direction from its natural drives and inclinations, family, society, culture, the state, or the like. But in discovering its freedom, in defiance, it breaks from its origins, and wants to choose its criterion for itself. While what brought the self into existence might be given a secular interpretation, as a Christian, Anti-Climacus understands it as God. He believes that as despair intensifies, and the individual increasingly finds himself on his own in existence, he comes closer to acknowledging that God has ultimate authority over his life. When this happens, he will look to revelation for positive guidance on how to live.

Anti-Climacus assumes the truth of Christianity throughout his account of despair, but uses this position to generate reasons for thinking human autonomy fails on its own terms. Accordingly, he distinguishes between active and passive forms of defiance. These differ with respect to the basic attitude the individual has toward the world and the greater powers that shape his life. In section 6.2, I explain that the self in defiance is active when it intends to overcome despair through its own efforts, neglecting its relation to external factors that would constrain it by focusing on improving itself in an abstract sense. This individual might believe he has defeated despair in discovering his freedom and becoming interested in himself as an agent, but
Anti-Climacus believes he will fail. He will still have problems finding meaning and significance in life due to how detached he has become from his own life, and will achieve little success in changing himself in a concrete way. However, I argue that important objections can be raised that would challenge his hyperbolic account of the defiant individual, and that these demonstrate that this individual is not necessarily in despair. In section 6.3, I explain that the self in defiance is passive when it realizes that it is unable to remedy its suffering of its own accord, but is still free to rebel against the powers that afflict it in its concrete existence. This rugged individual might take satisfaction in his rebellion for some time, but I claim that Anti-Climacus has good reason to think that he is in despair. If an individual intends to achieve integrity and overcome despair, it would be best for him to will to be himself through an active form of defiance that rests on rational principles and ethical ideals that govern the concrete conditions of his life.

6.2 The First Form of Rebellion: The Self That Acts in Defiance

As Anti-Climacus describes it, when the individual is active in defiance, he continues to keep his distance from his concrete existence in inclosing reserve, indulging in abstractions and fantasy rather than opening himself to earthly engagement. But instead of not wanting to be himself, in a self-aggrandizing way, he wants to be himself, and to contend with the world or the greater power or powers that sustain him in existence as a way of life. To a great extent, he retains his identity in this opposition, and depends on it as a source of meaning in his life. Rather than fall deeper into despair through his knowledge of the break with immediacy, he adopts this basic attitude in an effort to defeat despair on his own, and to resolve existential problems like the loss of enjoyment, value, and meaning that plague the reflective esthete. Despair in defiance best illustrates Anti-Climacus’ contention that despair is not an emotion that affects us, but is a condition that we bring upon ourselves. Because the individual who acts in defiance assumes autonomy and self-sufficiency in willing to be himself, Anti-Climacus describes it as the “misuse of the eternal within the self” (SUD: 67). While freedom gradually emerges as a reality in the human being as he transitions through the different forms of despair, in defiance, it reaches its crowning moment as the individual becomes conscious of his eternal aspect. He might not grasp his eternal aspect altogether theoretically, but it will become an active presence in his life as he develops spiritually, and intends to maintain a stable identity.
In becoming acutely self-conscious by means of his infinite component, he gains freedom by detaching himself from his finite aspect that is entangled in life in the world. As inwardness intensifies, he transcends the powerful flux of the sensuous, which had formerly controlled him without him having any say in the matter. Of course, since the self consists of finitude, the sensuous continues to influence his thoughts, emotions, and desires, which move him to act in the temporal realm, although it has lost much of the power it previously had over him. In becoming capable of thinking for himself from a detached point of view, the defiant individual can deliberate on which of these should constitute his character and move him to act. He can also decide who or what he will care about and what will be meaningful to him. Frankfurt believes that as persons, most of us earnestly shape our lives by working through the immediate contents of consciousness in this manner, but Anti-Climacus believes that most people are not very reflective, and so only do so occasionally. In his view, the will and critical self-examination only become prominent in the stage of defiance, when the person is no longer absorbed in worldly affairs, and will not allow external powers to determine his identity. Until we reach this stage of development, our sociocultural milieu and natural predispositions predominantly influence who we are and what we care about. Even if we believe we are making our own choices in these matters, we are much like automatons, drifting through life without really knowing ourselves.

With an intensified self-consciousness, the defiant individual would not only enter into conflict with his natural drives and inclinations. He would also have set himself apart from the social order and its directives, rejecting the uncritical conformism of those in "the public mode," whose beliefs and values are largely determined by others. In transcending the world, he refuses to let himself be possessed and controlled by natural forces or the will of others in society, even though he remains bound to the world through his temporal aspect. At this point, rather than admit its dependence on an even greater power that brought it into existence as a self, and that dictates how it should live and what it ought to become in temporality, the defiant self “wants to be master of itself or to create itself” (SUD: 68). Jealous of its freedom and independence, it also refuses to yield to a greater authority than itself, or more specifically, to God, who has endowed him with an essence that he ought to actualize. Without being willing to receive guidance about how to approach his life from the greater power that established him, the individual "does not want to see his given self as his task" or telos, which he should aim to bring into existence (SUD: 68). Rather than use his freedom in obedience to this power, he devises his own tasks, goals and
values, stubbornly making of himself what he pleases. In gaining possession of himself, he takes full responsibility for himself and his actions as an agent, despite the external conditions that largely determine his identity and form of life.

By exploiting the freedom that accompanies being clearly aware of oneself as an "infinite self," the defiant individual wants to transform the concrete conditions he has inherited by necessity. Anti-Climacus explains that as an embodied human being, the individual has a specific character, predispositions, natural capacities or talents, and also belongs within a certain social context with standards and norms in place. But upon negating this aspect of its existence through reflection, the defiant self “wants first of all to take upon himself the transformation of all this in order to fashion out of it a self such as he wants” (SUD: 68). At first glance, it might seem he is suggesting that the self-reflective individual should not use the freedom he has through his infinitude to extensively reshape himself if he intends on overcoming despair, but should sit tight and be satisfied with the kind of person he is already through his cultural upbringing or natural necessity. The Judge articulates a position much like this with his account of "esthetic earnestness" (E/O II: 225). The esthetically earnest individual has a certain natural capacity, disposition, or talent that he decides to concentrate on developing to the exclusion of other possible projects he might take on. In reflectively endorsing the person he is already, without choosing to make significant changes to his character or lifestyle, it would seem that he would be willing to be himself, as opposed to remaining ignorant of himself or not wanting to be himself by fleeing from his earthly situation. Without wanting to transform his situation like the defiant individual does, it might be thought that he would be able to defeat despair by achieving a kind of balance between the infinite and finite aspects of himself.

This cannot be the way to become spirit in actuality and defeat despair, however. The reason for this is that those living esthetically or in the public mode are in despair in acting mostly out of their natural spontaneity, and the esthetically earnest individual lives much like them. He differs from them only by being self-reflective, and by resolving to do what already comes naturally to him. By embracing a worldly lifestyle, he forgets his eternal aspect and ignores his essence as spirit, which it is up to him to actualize. Anti-Climacus therefore suggests that the individual ought to abandon this way of life and use his freedom to spiritually transform himself in existence en route to defeating despair. As a Christian, he does not believe that freedom should be used in an arbitrary way, or even in a principled way insofar as this proceeds
under the constraints of his own ideals. The Kantian view that there is a moral law that we give to ourselves as rational agents, for instance, would not pass muster on his view. The individual should bind his freedom by depending on normative guidance from a higher authority, or more specifically, from the power that brought him into existence. However, by assuming that it is in full possession of itself as an agent, the defiant self severs itself from this power, or from the idea that there is such a power that constrains its freedom and sustains it in existence (SUD: 68). In the next section, I explain why he believes human autonomy results in despair, before going on to pose objections to his view.

6.2.1 Why the Self that Acts in Defiance is in Despair

Anti-Climacus argues that the individual will invariably come up against obstacles in rejecting a heteronomous orientation, and will not be able to defeat despair by asserting unqualified autonomy. The first reason he gives is that, much like the reflective esthete, the defiant individual relates to himself mainly through "imaginary constructions" in the realm of possibility, exaggerating its infinite aspect and not making much contact with the reality of its situation (SUD: 68-69). In paying close attention to himself in his self-enclosure, he might think he is capable of making great advances in transforming himself to his liking, but this is a pretense. He can never get far in changing himself concretely in the way he wants, since the kind of person he intends to be does not accord with the kind he was established to be. He is indeed free to fantasize about the person he wishes to be and the kind of world he wants to inhabit, which he might strive to bring into being. But since he has little power to change his condition to reflect the idealized state he has imagined, and will not admit his concrete limitations as part of himself, Anti-Climacus states, "this absolute ruler is a king without a country" (SUD: 69). Because his lofty aspirations do not coincide with the reality of his situation, he is disintegrated as a self, and so remains in despair.

The defiant individual will likely occupy himself with imaginative pursuits and abstractions to avoid the experience of earthly suffering, and by extension, the suffering of being conscious of oneself in the midst of this. Defiance therefore has much in common with despair in weakness, which is the form of consciousness that precedes it on the path of personal development. Like despair in weakness, it can be characterized as a kind of flight from one's earthly existence, or even as an attempt at escaping from it, which must fail insofar as one is
embroiled in the world as a human being. The defiant individual consequently despairs for many of the same reasons as the reflective esthete. Unlike the individual who despairs in weakness, however, he will have a more positive outlook on himself in wanting to be himself, even if he does not choose to view conditions in the world in the same light. He gets satisfaction from being in command of his own life, deciding what will have meaning and importance for him, choosing his goals and projects, and determining what he will value. Rather than partake in the ironic play of a figure like A, who would rather experiment with different identities and frolic with possibilities at whim, the defiant individual cares about making something definite of himself, and maintaining a coherent set of beliefs and stable patterns of action. He recognizes the vanity of a profligate lifestyle like A’s, and intends to avoid such pitfalls that would bring him to despair.

The defiant individual might believe he has defeated despair in gaining control over his thoughts and emotions and earnestly shaping himself into the person he wants to be, but on Anti-Climacus’ view, he would be in denial. Because he cannot ultimately make his concrete existence correspond with his ideals, or perfect himself in the way he would like to, there is a deeper conflict occurring within the self that he has repressed from conscious awareness. He wants to live with integrity, but he cannot ultimately achieve it. Hovering over the world in inclosing reserve, which earthly suffering and hardship had originally forced him into, he overestimates his autonomy and self-sufficiency, and is now likely to overlook or even forget about such suffering. Of course, he has become well aware of the turmoil and danger that lurks within the temporal through the advancement of reflection, unlike the individual in immediacy, who remains mostly ignorant of it. But rather than distract himself from existential suffering by immersing himself in worldly affairs and material consumption like those who are ignorant of being selves, he distracts himself through fantasy and preoccupation with himself. This is similar to the strategy adopted by the reflective esthete, although the reflective esthete will not care so much about his personal development or taking responsibility for his life, and so will not be as true to himself. However, the reflective esthete will likely be more honest in confronting his existential crisis, whereas the defiant individual has the mistaken impression that he can overcome this on his own by working on himself and perhaps even changing the world for the better, without depending on a greater power like God.
It should be noted that if the self has freedom of will as he suggests, Anti-Climacus offers a remarkably weak position that undermines itself. He assumes that the individual will necessarily fail in her attempt to direct her own life in the world, not only due to death and misfortune subverting her endeavors, but also due to the impossibility of changing her concrete condition in the way she would like to. In the case that she can only imagine that she is free to do this, it is difficult to see how she would be free at all. It certainly seems plausible that she might succeed in putting her ideas into practice and making them a reality through her free choices, reforming her character or lifestyle in remarkable ways. Even a botched effort might seem to be evidence of free acts. However, let us assume for a moment that Anti-Climacus is correct that it will be unable to transform itself in a real and definite way. He provides no reason to think it might still succeed in changing itself to reflect what this greater power wants it to be, so long as this requires shaping oneself in a manner that contradicts its original propensities and predispositions, many of which arise immediately by natural necessity. He might claim that a power like God could offer the self the leeway it needs to depart from its natural or cultural framework and transform itself in existence according to His liking, but not to its own liking. But in this case, a divine type of necessity would delimit freedom, and so the self would once again not seem free at all in relation to the power that brought it into existence. I claim that on his view, freedom is either illusory or epiphenomenal, leaving us hopelessly detached from our concrete condition and unable to interact with it at all as selves. But in this case, it would be more appropriate to abandon the idea of freedom altogether, rather than use it as a guise of fate.

Fortunately, Anti-Climacus provides a stronger reason to think that the self in defiance is in despair that admits of the possibility of human freedom. The second reason is that the autonomous self cannot ultimately take itself seriously in the norms or ideals it upholds, the projects it chooses to adopt, or the people and things it decides to form attachments to. Once the individual attains a heightened awareness of his freedom, he needs to have things in life that he cares deeply about, lest he despair by not maintaining a meaningful connection with the world, society, and himself as a human being. If there were little that he cares about, there would be nothing to bind him to circumstances in life, and he would remain self-enclosed like the reflective esthete. But since the defiant self does not recognize itself as answerable to a greater power beyond itself that has a profound claim on who it will be or become, and regards itself as being free to determine what to make of itself, it "lacks earnestness and can conjure forth only an
appearance of earnestness, even when it gives its utmost attention to its imaginary constructions" (SUD: 68). As the sovereign of his own life, there is ultimately nothing else in existence that compels him to act in the ways he does. If he understands himself as having duties or obligations, it is because he wants to have them, and not because they are imposed upon him by an external source, whether it is God or other people. Others might believe they have a claim on him, but he is free to regard this as illegitimate, and does not have to let it affect him. In adopting a self-sufficient standpoint of this type, he will remain detached from his life in the world.

Furthermore, because reflection requires detachment from one's concrete condition, and the individual in defiance has become highly reflective in attaining freedom, his earthly cares will not consume him like they do with the individual who is ignorant of being a self. Due to the isolating effects of reflection, and its tendency to cast things into doubt, this individual will continue wondering what the point of it all is, what meaning things have for him, and why he bothers doing what he does or caring about the people or things he does. Even if he resolves to participate in life in the world, in being intensely self-conscious, he is liable to assume a point of view that makes him feel alienated from the world and other people, including himself. As a spectator of his own life, he might be apt to survey himself "with that detached amazement which comes from watching an ant struggle up a heap of sand." He might attribute great significance to his ordinary engagements, but in the background of his consciousness, he harbors questions about whether his finite concerns are important, or are basically fleeting, trivial, and arbitrary in the grand scheme of things. This awareness brought forth through his infinitude will continue to haunt him, even though he might take efforts to combat it by renewing his resolution to have these concerns. This discrepancy between viewpoints that occurs due to his infinite and finite aspects puts him in a paradoxical position, and compromises his integrity as a self. It is therefore a source of despair in his life.

Just as in the case of a reflective esthete like A, the nihilistic thoughts and doubts that hound the defiant individual are a consequence of his freedom, and arise regardless of how seriously he takes himself and his projects. Such ideas are unlikely to surface in the individual so long as nature and society predominantly condition his attitudes, beliefs, and desires. In the earlier and less reflective phase of personal development, these forces automatically lend meaning and importance to objects and events in his life, and motivate his actions without him

having to decide on any of this for himself. But in shaping itself by means of its infinite component, the self must momentarily liberate itself from its local situation to assess the bigger picture and think critically about its life from an abstract vantage point. This act of reflective distancing establishes the conditions under which it can make deliberate decisions about its character and actions, and consider different possibilities that it might realize in existence. This can create internal conflict and unrest in the self by calling the importance things currently have for it into doubt, and by leading to questions about the meaning that things have for it. By repeatedly disengaging from its immediate situation through acts of reflection, and then re-engaging with it in the next moment, the self persistently undermines its concrete position throughout the procession of time. This dialectical pattern of activity occurs in anyone who is reflective, but it intensifies as one becomes more self-conscious. As a result, the self in defiance is particularly susceptible to the disturbances reflection inflicts on natural processes occurring within the psyche-body relation, which can lead to difficulties in making sense of things and deciding how to conduct oneself. Without coping with the threat of nihilism, however, we are not aware of ourselves as free persons.

As Anti-Climacus puts it, in thinking and willing as a self that contains infinitude within it, "the self exercises a loosening power as well as a binding power; at any time it can quite arbitrarily start all over again, and no matter how long one idea is pursued, the entire action is within a hypothesis" (SUD: 69). The defiant individual might indeed approach the things he cares about in life with confidence and enthusiasm, and takes pains to maintain his integrity and identity by renewing his commitment to care about them. If he allows ideals or principles to constrain him, whether they are his own or borrowed from his culture or society, he will aim to rigidly adhere to them. At bottom, however, the freedom he exercises in shaping himself by means of his "negative form" persistently unsettles him, making him question his life, his identity, and what he truly cares about (SUD: 69). This spiritual negativity would account for the "troubled and restless uncertainty about how to live" that Frankfurt recognizes as a problem for us. Frankfurt believes that rather than despair, we should be confident that we clearly understand ourselves, and are caring about the right things and living in the right way.³¹² We should not

³¹² See Reasons of Love, p. 28. With his notion of "volitional necessity," Frankfurt argues that we are necessitated in caring about the things that we do, such that we cannot help but be committed to our desires for them. Anti-Climacus, however, challenges this idea with his notion that the self, through its freedom, has a negating influence
become disoriented and entertain doubts about the meaning and importance that things have for us, at least on a broad scale.

Anti-Climacus would agree with Frankfurt that in having a will through which we engage with our lives in the world, our cares and interests are essential to the basic structure of the self.\textsuperscript{313} The self exerts a "binding power" in wanting to care about things, since the cares and interests it retains in its finitude help it establish its identity and foster coherence and continuity in it. However, as a thinking being marked by infinitude and negativity, the self has a "loosening power" as well. The capacity to disengage from its life and call things into question is just as essential to its structure, and this disrupts the unity it cultivates in caring for things. In becoming detached from our concerns, we are liable to raise doubts about what is important to us. This abstract movement of reflection undermines the attachments that we form in caring about things, and consequently, our sense of our own identity.\textsuperscript{314} Detachment is therefore the obverse of care, but it attends care as care comes into being. To the extent that the self is balanced and imposes its will in its concrete existence, it will return to its cares and interests after reflection, although it might form new ones or renounce previous ones after questioning. Any act of thinking involves detachment from the immediate contents of consciousness, but this does not mean that we cannot reflect on something while also caring about it, since these elements can be held in dynamic tension in the self. But since we are subject to imbalance as a synthesis of paradoxical components, it might be the case that we care about things without adequately reflecting on them, as in the case of the immediate esthete or those in the public mode. We might also reflect too much on things without really caring about them, as in the case of the reflective esthete.

Paradoxically, both caring and detachment occur through the exercise of freedom, and this makes the self an enigma to itself. However much it thinks it understands itself and has attained a firm standpoint from which to approach its life, "in the final analysis, what it understands by itself is a riddle; in the very moment when it seems that the self is closest to

\textsuperscript{313} Ibid., p. 17. Frankfurt writes: "Caring is indispensably foundational as an activity that connects and binds us to ourselves. It is through caring that we provide ourselves with volitional continuity, and in that way constitute and participate in our own agency. Regardless of how suitable or unsuitable the various things we care about may be, caring about something is essential to our being creatures of the kind that human beings are."

\textsuperscript{314} Our ability to put various facets of our lives into doubt or raise questions about the way thing are being handled is not altogether lamentable, and might be used for good or ill. We should not be so cocksure that we care about what we ought to and have the right priorities. Some restlessness in our lives is good, morally speaking. We need to continue to call things into question and be kept on guard to avoid falling into patterns of evil.
having the building completed, it can arbitrarily dissolve the whole thing into nothing" (SUD: 69-70). The indifference or disinterest that accompanies heightened reflection undermines the interest one takes in things, and makes the defiant individual vulnerable to nihilistic thoughts about his life. His infinite component thereby presents a continual obstacle in his effort to take himself and the things he cares about seriously, which he needs to do in order to retain harmony with his finite component, and by this means, to avoid despair. At the same time, however, these are inevitably the complications that ensue in developing as a person, who is in the process of surmounting his natural condition from within it as spirit in actuality.

Nagel makes essentially the same point as Anti-Climacus in writing on the absurdity of the human condition. He argues that human beings have to deal with "the collision between the seriousness with which we take our lives and the perpetual possibility of regarding everything about which we are serious as arbitrary, or open to doubt." The absurdity of is that, in addition to the earnest perspective we maintain as individuals situated in an earthly and finite context, "we have always available a point of view outside the particular form of our lives, from which the seriousness appears gratuitous." Nagel does not think such absurdity is cause for despair or disquietude as Anti-Climacus does, but rather for approaching our lives with irony and resignation. As we have seen, the reflective esthete adopts this strategy in response to his absurd predicament, which suggests that Nagel's recommendation cannot be much different than his. For Anti-Climacus, a carefree attitude ought to be avoided if one is to live with integrity and sincerity. He would also disagree with Nagel that we are able to attain a point of view beyond the particular form of our lives, although we do retain a perspective on the universe as particular individuals through our capacity to think about it, which can lead to this mistaken impression. The self that thinks objectively about itself and the world is the same self that lives as an embodied and emotional creature, although these two aspects of the self contradict one another and are difficult to integrate effectively.

Anti-Climacus believes that through faith, the individual can achieve stability and balance between the infinite and finite aspects of himself that cause this gap between perspectives, driving out despair and absurdity. By integrating these perspectives in inwardness, the man of faith applies his thought to his life, understanding himself as a particular individual in

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316 Ibid., p. 719.
317 Ibid., p. 724.
the matters he thinks about. He does not stand aloof from his particularity by thinking about himself or his life in an objective, disinterested way like a scientist would, with his own person as just one of the world's contents. Instead, with passion, he thinks with the purpose of understanding who he is as an individual, and what significance the world and its objects have for him in his relationship with God. While it is "the good health of faith that resolves contradictions" (SUD: 40), a complete reconciliation with existence is impossible for any human being to achieve in this life as a consequence of reflection. We are thereby prone to raise doubts about what we believe, who or what we care about, and whether we are acting in the right way.

The human being is not only unsettled by his freedom as spirit. Along with being destabilized by nagging questioning and doubt that arises from his infinitude, the nothingness that his existence rests on in being finitely situated in the natural world also threatens him with dissolution at any moment, without him being able to control this. As a result, the self in defiance "is always building only castles in the air" in fashioning a way of life for itself on its own terms in the temporal (SUD: 69). On the one hand, these "castles" might be destroyed at any moment by forces of nature, which comes into being in its own right while temporarily supporting the human being in the process of becoming spirit in actuality. On the other hand, in drawing on natural elements to build these "castles," the self might quickly pulverize them if, upon reflection, it decides to pursue alternative possibilities that entice it with a different way of life. Suspended in the nothingness of possibility, with dangers emerging both from his infinitude and finitude, this state of impermanence and uncertainty generates anxiety and despair. Anti-Climacus suggests that concerns about the annihilation of himself and everything he cares about could be alleviated if the individual resolved to ground his life in the Eternal, which is. However stable his approach to life in the temporal is, without having a timeless criterion by which to configure his life, this individual is not "eternally steadfast" like the individual who pursues a relationship with God (SUD: 69). Since the self has an eternal component within it, this is something one requires if one is to gain security in existence, and to forget the eternal by defining oneself by temporal pursuits alone is to despair.

6.2.1.1 The First Objection: The Defiant Individual Might Take Himself Seriously

Anti-Climacus raises a deeper worry when he claims that the self in defiance will not be able to take itself seriously in its autonomous project, conferring meaning and value on things in whatever way it likes while recognizing the ultimate insignificance and futility of its efforts. To defend his view, he contends that the individual would need to admit his dependence on a greater power beyond himself that exerts normative pressure on him in order to strengthen his commitments to his ideals or the people and things he cares about, and to properly justify them. This individual, he states, is especially likely to become earnest if he acknowledges that God pays close attention to him and has an eternally valid claim on him (SUD: 69). Presumably this is due not only to the majesty of God, but also to the threat of eternal punishment for failure to obey His commands, and the prospect of eternal reward for fulfilling them. To his credit, it does seem that an external authority that one deeply respects and feels obligated to would lend significance to one's undertakings, and bring one into closer engagement with what is beyond oneself. To prevent its undertakings from being mere "imaginary constructions," or mere experiments in living that one might abandon at any time, the defiant self would need to be engaged in its earthly existence to reconcile its infinite and finite aspects and bring harmony to the self. For Anti-Climacus, this is necessary for defeating despair.

However, Anti-Climacus does not explain why the individual must accept the authority of God if he intends to be earnest in his engagements. The autonomous individual understands himself as having sovereignty over his life, but he does not have to conceive of himself as the sole authority in existence, or as a god-like entity arbitrarily deciding on the terms of his existence in the way that Anti-Climacus suggests. He can acknowledge that there are authorities other than God that constrain him, and determine how he will act or understand himself. For instance, after critical reflection, he might regard certain cultural or legal norms as imposing valid restrictions on his actions and character. Kantians would say that although we are autonomous, there are rational constraints on our actions that keep our exercise of freedom from being arbitrary, and independent of respect for other rational agents. It might also be case that the defiant individual, who has reflected on injustice and suffering in himself and the world at large, regards other persons as having authority in their own right, making claims upon him that he must acknowledge. In his daily encounters with others, he might become earnest out of a sense of responsibility towards those he cares about, and by recognizing the impact that his actions
have upon people who suffer like himself. He might use his freedom to work on becoming an altruistic person that will consistently treat others with compassion or benevolence, which unfortunately, does not come naturally for so many of us. He does not have to do this out of fear that God will punish him for his misdeeds, or for not being the kind of person He wants him to be. In this case, it would be presumptuous to charge him with not being able to take himself or those he cares about seriously, or arbitrarily deciding what will have significance for him. These individuals would not be like the ironist or reflective esthete, who take pleasure in toying with their circumstances or other people. In recognizing the dignity and intrinsic worth of persons, and valuing our shared humanity, they would have good reasons for caring about what they do.

In response to this objection, Anti-Climacus would likely argue that if the defiant individual regarded anything or anyone other than God as making demands on her that she is responsible for meeting, this would still not be enough to motivate serious existential engagement. However self-disciplined and resolved she might be in carrying out her project, she would still be liable to undermine her efforts by calling their significance into doubt. But why not think that the person of faith might similarly undermine his relationship with God by doubting that He exists, and that he is meeting His expectations? The same problems would seem to arise for both individuals, meaning that in this regard, the person of faith is no more stable and secure in his position than the defiant person. The individual who believes she is in relationship with God can just as easily step back and question whether her beliefs about God are true, or whether it even matters to God that she intends to build a relationship with Him. Moreover, an individual can easily doubt God's existence, but it is hard to doubt the existence of others, including their need for compassion and justice, which we are capable of addressing in a way that has tangible consequences.319 Indeed, questions about the existence of God are likely to gnaw at those with faith, which Kierkegaard acknowledges in stating that the struggle of faith occurs when "doubt assaults faith with many wild thoughts" (UDVS: 273). Kierkegaard suggests that such doubt is not incidental to faith, but a persistent element that must be combatted to sustain it. The defiant individual, however, can view any doubts he has about the ideals, concerns, and projects that define her in the same way.

Kierkegaard believes that the proper way to overcome doubt is not through more reflection, since reflection can go on endlessly interrogating an issue once it gets started without

319 Thanks to David Sussman for raising this objection.
making headway. It is rather through resolution, or an act of will, that one can bring reflection to a halt and persevere in one's standpoint (JP I: 776). With a will to believe in the truth of Christianity, for instance, the passionate individual can power through the whirlwinds of doubt when they occur and renew his commitment to his faith. Yet in this case, the defiant individual should be able to overcome doubts about whether she ought to go on living in the same manner, with both being confident that they are handling things in the appropriate manner. She might conceivably do this without depending on other people to give her life weight and significance. Assuming that she maintains confidence in her beliefs and actions, and passionately commits to them despite doubts and insecurities that arise, it is not clear why she must be in despair, especially if she does not feel miserable or hopeless. So long as her approach works and she maintains it over time, then it would seem that her infinite and finite aspects would be largely in keeping with one another, stabilizing her and fostering unity and coherence within the self. The world would meet her pressing needs and accommodate her with the meaning she seeks, she would be pleased that her efforts are met with some success, and her life would be going relatively smoothly.

6.2.1.2 The Second Objection: The Defiant Individual Might Be Fine With His Mortality

In willing to be herself, the defiant individual meets one of the two principal conditions necessary for defeating despair on Anti-Climacus' view. So long as she is satisfied with who she is, and intends to bear any earthly burden she has, it would not seem that she is likely to be in despair as he claims. Anti-Climacus does not think she is out of the woods yet, however, since she does not meet the other condition, which is to admit her dependence on God in faith. Consequently, she wants to be someone who she is ultimately not. In taking pride in her independence and autonomy, she has an inaccurate conception of herself, and refuses her obligations to her Creator. This distortion affects her entire way of life, contributing to despair even if she remains unconscious of it or intends to repress it. A problem with all this is that she is endowed with the eternal by nature but does not admit it as a driving concern in her life, even though she takes advantage of it in retaining a stable set of ideals, commitments, and values, which lend coherence to her life. However unwavering and resilient she is in her position during her time spent on earth, and however much integrity she thinks she has, the life she has built for
herself is destined to end so long as her goals are only temporal ones that she does not understand herself as pursuing before God.

In objection to the idea that the impermanence of human life is grounds for despair, one could argue that the individual can readily accept the transient nature of his endeavors, or be content with his mortality rather than despair over this. To prevent an injustice or alleviate the suffering of another human being could be considered an event that will not endure throughout the passage of time, but this would have plenty of significance for the time being. Kierkegaard never makes it clear why the eternal has to be present in order for things to have the value that they have. Additionally, for those who conceive of their existence as a burden to them, death in the sense of non-existence would offer release, and would not be something to be feared or shunned. Anti-Climacus, however, thinks that because the self contains an aspect of the eternal within it, its bodily death is not the end for it, and it in some sense has an intuition of this. He believes we should diligently prepare ourselves for eternal life in our earthly existence by living with an eternal purpose as God intends for us, rather than evade the task of actualizing ourselves spiritually before Him by pursuing the impermanent goods of the temporal. Hence, when despair intensifies as one's inner life intensifies, and one does not surrender to God, one is tormented not by the prospect of death as the objector might suppose, but by "this inability to die" (SUD: 18). Because this individual cannot succeed in stamping out the eternal, Anti-Climacus likens the agony of despair to a "cold fire" through which he realizes that he “cannot consume himself, cannot get rid of himself, cannot reduce himself to nothing,” however much he wants to (SUD: 18-19).

Many would reject the notion that the self is immortal out of a lack of sufficient evidence for it, and so would not accept that this has to be a problem that brings the individual to the point of despair. Kierkegaard nevertheless refuses to offer exacting proof for the unbelievers. Under the pseudonym of Haufniensis, he writes: “There is only one proof of spirit, and that is the spirit’s proof within oneself. Whoever demands something else may get proofs in superabundance, but he is already characterized as spiritless” (CA: 95). Of course, he thinks that the phenomenological evidence obtained through human experience suggests that the self has an eternal component, as I have explained throughout this work. He also believes the individual has some awareness of this, even if he intends to suppress it.
His remarks on the self being tormented by its immortality are puzzling, since it would mean there is a sense in which the self in defiance despairs by not wanting to be itself, which in chapters three and four, was described as a form of weakness rather than defiance. This might lead one to question whether weakness and defiance are essentially different forms of despair at all. As I previously mentioned, for Anti-Climacus there is a close relationship between them. He claims that each of the two conscious forms of despair can be resolved into the other form (SUD: 20). The thought seems to be that there is an element of defiance in weakness, just as there is an element of weakness in defiance. If the individual does not want to be who she is, she is implicitly defying the power that brought her into existence as the individual she is. If she boldly defies this power by wanting to be someone she is not, she betrays a weakness in not wanting to be the individual she was made to be. Although he claims each of these forms can be resolved in the other upon analysis, he believes there are nonetheless differences between them, as we have seen. In his view, neither of the two forms is more basic than the other.

On closer scrutiny, it is true that despair in defiance can be resolved into despair in weakness, since in wanting to be someone it is not, the defiant self withdraws from its earthly condition and retreats into the imagination, exaggerating its infinite aspect in inclosing reserve. Because the self retains a finite aspect that is situated in the world through the relation between psyche and body, this is to not want to be who it is, although here there is the qualification that it wants to be itself in its infinitude. Anti-Climacus, however, is not justified in claiming that despair in weakness can always be resolved into despair in defiance. If one withdraws from one's earthly condition due to suffering or hardship occurring within it, it is not the case that one must thereby will to be oneself in one's infinitude, as a reflective esthete like A shows. One might decline to adopt an autonomous project and will to do away with oneself entirely, as in the case of the self that wants to die completely but recognizes it cannot due to its eternal aspect. This means that the basic form of despair must be to not want to be oneself, contrary to what Anti-Climacus claims. Theunissen agrees in his criticism of Anti-Climacus' notion of despair, stating, "while in despair to will to be oneself is inconceivable without its opposite, in despair not to will to be oneself can occur independently of its other. It constitutes the original form of despair." As different types of weakness, both conscious forms of despair are testament to suffering that

320 Theunissen, *Kierkegaard's Concept of Despair*, p. 13
befalls one in one's earthly condition, and which prompts heightened reflection upon oneself, the world and its contents, and likely God.

In chapter four, I argued that in contrast to what Anti-Climacus states, it must be the case that despair in weakness emerges spontaneously in response to a disagreeable state of existence, and not because an individual originally chooses to be in despair. The suffering of the human being only worsens if he gets the sense that he cannot bring an end to his existence, however much he would like to, due to having been established by a greater power that compels him to exist eternally. But if defiance is originally a form of weakness, then the defiant individual could not be bringing despair upon himself as Anti-Climacus claims must happen in all cases of despair, even if he might choose to end it by wanting to be himself in faith before God. Since the individual in ignorance is also in despair in his earthly predicament even before he can properly employ his will, it would seem to be the original state of the human being, and an occurrence which can only be surmounted subsequently by an act of the will. His insistence that despair is always one's own fault leads to a glaring inconsistency in his account of despair.

6.2.1.3 The Third Objection: The Defiant Individual Might Be "Eternally Steadfast"

Although the defiant self will be burdened by its temporal component, it does not seem that Anti-Climacus believes the self in despair must necessarily be bothered by its eternal component. Consequently, he undercuts his position that one despairs when he realizes that he has an aspect of the eternal in him that he cannot rid himself of. Describing a second variant of defiant action, which he refers to as resignation, he claims that there might be ascetic individuals who affirm the eternal and infinite component of the self, while curbing their desires and disavowing what happens to them in time. These individuals are contemplative by nature in their refusal to care about external conditions all that much, or to admit that they are in the throes of earthly suffering. In a state of resignation, they will to be themselves in abstraction, and to "make the eternal suffice" without accepting the tenets of Christianity, which emphasizes the inevitability of earthly suffering in its offer of salvation (SUD: 70). Finding solace in the thought that earthly suffering will vanish in eternity, and is ultimately illusory, the self in resignation will not attach itself to anything temporal, nor admit its temporal component as a crucial part of itself. As Anti-Climacus puts it, in defiance, it “will not in faith humble itself under it" (SUD: 71). This will likely be the kind of individual who believes he is complete unto himself, and that he could
remain serene even in terrible circumstances. The most extreme example of this would be the person who believes he would be unperturbed even while being tortured on the rack.\textsuperscript{321} Instead of being in touch with his concrete aspect, which is inevitably under stress in its earthly existence, he is preoccupied with thinking about himself in an effort to attain wisdom or virtue. He might believe that he takes himself seriously, but he will not really succeed in this unless he takes his earthly condition seriously.

Despair in resignation would seem to have much in common with Stoicism, which Anti-Climacus proposes as a paradigmatic example of defiance (SUD: 68). To attain happiness, the Stoics dissociate themselves from earthly passions and emotions that are excessive and disobedient to reason, since these are external powers that one undergoes or suffers rather than things that one does. To extinguish these disturbing feelings, which are kindled by objects and events in the external world, they aim to be in firm command of themselves, so that they can consistently act in accordance with the internal activity of reason.\textsuperscript{322} If they succeed at this, they become apathetic to what is outside of their control. Marcus Aurelius, one of the great Stoics of antiquity, gives succinct expression to this position when he writes: "Outward things can touch the soul not a whit; they know no way into it, they have no power to sway or move it. By itself it sways and moves itself; it has its own self-approved standards of judgment, and to them it refers every experience."\textsuperscript{323} The stoical or resigned individual would therefore appreciate the eternal aspect of the self in his own way, arguably remaining "eternally steadfast" without a relationship with God of the type demanded by Christianity (SUD: 69).

Anti-Climacus claims that the self in resignation might believe it has achieved spiritual integrity in divesting itself of its passions and withdrawing from worldly life, but who it imagines itself to be does not correspond with who it actually is (SUD: 69). Ruminating on virtue in inclosing reserve, and professing wisdom about existence, this individual has taken a stance that is not in accord with his concrete existence in time, and so he remains disintegrated as a self. By taking his existence as an embodied human being lightly, he is unable to effectively unite the two aspects of his nature in passion. Such passion would require him to bear his suffering in his finitude and concentrate on a goal that he wants to realize in existence in his

\textsuperscript{321} Cicero claims that the Stoic would hold that wise man could retain his happiness amidst the worst torments, since he does not regard pain as an evil. See De Finibus, p. 263.
\textsuperscript{322} For a general account of Stoicism, which I am borrowing from in this section, see Baltzly, "Stoicism" in The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.
\textsuperscript{323} See Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, p. 85.
infinitude. But with his disinterested attitude, he refuses to honestly face up to existential suffering, and instead wants to philosophize in an attempt to rise above it. But by fleeing into the lofty regions of his imagination, he builds his worldview upon the nothingness of abstractions rather than existence, and has a misconception of the reality of his situation (SUD: 69). Rather than depend on God for help in his earthly plight, he believes he can save himself by perfecting himself, but he deceives himself. By exaggerating his infinitude, he is in despair, even if he is unconscious of it.

The Stoics would reject the dualistic conception of the self that this objection rests on, along with the notion that they are unable to apply their thought to their life in practice. The abstractions that the Stoic bases his worldview on are not empty figments of the imagination, but have rational content, and are believed to guide him in living well. Similarly, they would disagree with the claim that they are indulging in idealizing that bears little relation to reality (SUD: 69). On their monistic view of the mind, in acting under the command of reason, the sage acts in agreement with nature, since it is governed by principles of reason. He does not act in defiance of the power that established him, but rather in conformity with it, and so achieves harmony and integrity in his existence. Not only this, but supposing he achieves serenity by controlling or eliminating his emotions and passions as a rational agent, it is unclear why his condition must be regarded as despair.

Nevertheless, it is indeed possible that the Stoic has an inaccurate conception of himself and the rationality of the natural world, and so is off-kilter as Anti-Climacus suggests. On his view, if the human being succeeded in living in agreement with nature and its vital processes, he would not become wise or virtuous. Spiritual activity would cease, and he would regress to an unreflective state like that of the immediate esthete, or what Frankfurt refers to as the wanton. This individual is not self-possessed or rationally guided, but is enslaved by earthly passions and appetites that move him to act without his oversight. He is indeed free of psychological conflict as the sage intends to be, but at the cost of being submerged in the temporal like an animal. When reflection has advanced to the extent that it has with the Stoic or the defiant individual, nature is difficult or even impossible to live in total agreement with, since in becoming active as spirit, one has thwarted one's natural spontaneity and contested external powers that move one to act apart from one's choosing. As thought, imagination, and volition intensify, one becomes
capable of gaining control over one's life, including the inclinations that arise from one's lower nature, which do not originally obey the intellect or the will.

The Stoic would not believe that this theory, which draws a strict separation between internal acts of the self and external acts of nature, accurately represents our moral psychology. Through self-discipline, and by adopting the right habits, the sage would have transformed himself in his natural condition such that rational action becomes spontaneous for him. In other words, he knowingly does the right thing in any given situation by natural inclination, or through first-order desires which he has trained to align with reason. On Anti-Climacus' view, however, this view fails to recognize the discrepancy between the natural vitality of animals (or the mere human being) and the spiritual vitality of persons. Reason entails reflection, which is an activity of the self that involves a different form of spontaneity entirely. The process of reflection disrupts the immanent flux of nature, which affects the self through the psyche-body relation, by negating it so that its contents are apprehended formally in consciousness. However much control one has over one's inclinations, so long as one exists in nature, any act of thinking or willing involves psychological conflict of the sort that the sage intends to do away with, even if such conflict can be minimized, and the two processes be brought into general agreement. This conflict is due to the paradoxical nature of the self, which clutches the psyche-body relation in caring for people and things in this world, even as it holds it apart from itself in detachment. This is a source of unrest and often dissatisfaction in human life, but it also means that the self is free from the shackles of natural necessity in an important respect.

I believe that broadly construed, the paradoxical conception of the self that Kierkegaard offers throughout his works is plausible, even if important modifications need to be made to correct it. In this project, I assume that his dualistic account of the human being is correct in broad outline, and the individual needs to reconcile the eternal and temporal components of his nature to maintain stability and balance in his life. On his account, the Stoic sage would not accomplish this since he does not endure his concrete existence with passion, which Kierkegaard thinks is necessary for the task. He would, however, have succeeded in alienating himself from himself and the surrounding world, and consummating inclosing reserve as a "pure thinker," which would seem to be an unlikely way of defeating despair. In renouncing emotional attachments to anything external, including objects and other people, the Stoic might claim that

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324 See section 1.4.4.
he could not be alienated from them. Not only would he have divested himself of such feelings, but upon having severed attachments to anything outside of himself, there is also no longer anything he could be alienated from. If we accept that he is ineluctably situated in the world as a human being, however, we must admit that he is only deceiving himself. Nevertheless, while he might be repressing despair and feelings of alienation from conscious awareness, it is difficult to say he must be in despair if he insists he is happy in his solitude, just as it is in the case of the ignorant individual. If he is, it is likely only in the technical sense used by Anti-Climacus, which has come well apart from its ordinary usage in a dubious way.

After all that has been said, it would seem that Anti-Climacus' criterion allows for the possibility that there is a defiant individual who, like the resigned individual, accepts the eternal component in the self without being fazed by it, but who commits himself to his earthly projects, relationships, and engagements with confidence, while living in accord with ideals or principles. Rather than keeping himself closed off from life in the world, out of passion, he resolves to open himself to it and shoulder any burdens he has. It is extremely difficult on his account to conclude that this individual is in despair in his technical sense, since it seems he would have attained balance and integrity in willing to be himself. To claim that he is in despair simply because he lacks faith would seem like an ad hoc maneuver within the context of the rest of his thought, which attributes despair to a lack of balance and integrity that arises from the misuse of the will. The only way he could be misusing his will is by not accepting Christian ideas about God or how to live a good life, but it would seem that he would have achieved this of his own powers without needing to adopt the Christian faith. In the last chapter, I claimed that Kierkegaard depicts such an individual in Either/Or through the figure of Judge William, who undertakes an ethical transformation of his life while paying lip service to Christianity. There are certainly complications in this way of life, but Kierkegaard fails to show why it has to be despair in any sense other than the technical one Anti-Climacus provides. In the next section, I briefly explore a stronger form of defiance that Anti-Climacus believes the individual might assume in grappling with his existence, which does not fare well as a solution to despair in either the customary or technical sense.
6.3 The Second Form of Rebellion: The Self That Is Acted Upon in Defiance

Anti-Climacus suggests that the self that acts in defiance might lose itself in abstractions as a result of becoming acutely conscious of its earthly troubles, but eventually it might reach the point that it cannot circumvent its suffering through its idealizing any longer. If despair in defiance progresses, the individual will no longer bother making a pretense of being able to overcome suffering of his own accord. When this occurs, defiance would assume a passive form, as the defiant self finds itself overwhelmed by the greater forces in reality that encumber it. In this phase of defiance, "the self in despair is acted upon . . . encountering some difficulty or other while provisionally orienting itself to its concrete self, something the Christian would call a cross, a basic defect, whatever it may be" (SUD: 70). This individual is even more self-conscious than the self that acts in defiance, but instead of abstracting himself from his earthly suffering in the way that the reflective esthete does, he angrily shoulders it, willing to be himself while using it "as an occasion to be offended at all existence" (SUD: 71). Rebelling against the powers beyond his control that dictate his fate, whether they be of the gods or of the world, he wants to bear his affliction out of spite, and to retain his dignity and what little freedom he has by refusing to buckle under their pressures and demands. Although this individual has become more concrete by admitting his finite aspect as an essential part of himself, he remains in inclosing reserve; out of pride and dogged passion, such an individual would prefer to be alone with himself “with all the agonies of hell” than have faith that God, for whom anything is possible, would answer him by relieving him of his misery (SUD: 71). To maintain this hope would require accepting one’s impotence and submitting to Him, but the defiant individual is obstinate, and will not humiliate himself before anyone in this way. He would rather remain conscious of his suffering of it so that he can hold it as evidence against the goodness of existence, which he regards as the product of a “second-rate author” (SUD: 73-74).

The self that is acted upon in defiance closely resembles the absurd hero Camus describes in The Myth of Sisyphus. On Camus’ telling of the Homeric myth, to punish him for his love for things of this earth, the gods assigned Sisyphus the task of rolling a heavy stone to the top of a mountain. Upon reaching the top, it would fall down, and he would have to roll it up again, straining endlessly against its weight. Sisyphus is fully aware that his labor is pointless, and can adopt a detached point of view toward his life at any moment to recall this fact. However, he will not perform his task in resignation or with an attitude of irony as Nagel advises. He finds value
and meaning in persevering in his efforts, and this makes him absurd on both Camus and Nagel's criteria. For Camus, his tenacity in a task that the gods thought would break him is an act of rebellion. He writes:

Sisyphus, proletarian of the gods, powerless and rebellious, knows the whole extent of his wretched condition: it is what he thinks of during his descent. The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory. There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn.325

Although he suffers immensely under this burden, Camus thinks we should regard Sisyphus as happy in his rebellion against the gods and his cursed fate, and not as someone in despair. "The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart," and there will always be those rare moments in which Sisyphus can look out from the top of the mountain and glory in his accomplishment, which has great personal significance for him.326 While Sisyphus occupies the realm of myth, absurd heroes might be found in everyday life. These individuals might be beleaguered due to the loss of a beloved, health problems, a miserable job, and so on, while wanting to persist in their struggles, without counting on relief or harboring any illusions about the wider significance of their actions. It is questionable, however, whether the earnestness of the absurd hero can be sustained for a whole life without it culminating in an obvious form of despair. Camus thinks it can, and recommends this to anyone who intends on living a good life. "The theme of permanent revolution is thus carried into individual experience. Living is keeping the absurd alive. Keeping it alive is, above all, contemplating it."327 The individual should not forfeit his inner vitality by ignoring the absurdity of his existence, or by refusing to rebel against the greater forces that crush him.

In fairness to Camus, it is certainly possible that one might respond to existential difficulties with tenacity and passion, but his account arguably suffers from a lack of foresight. This basic attitude toward life might work for some time, but it would seem difficult to sustain passionate rebellion out of sheer force of will for a long period, especially if this is thought to be an eternity as in the case of Sisyphus. One would have to come to terms with one's miserable condition eventually, which would likely mean becoming desensitized to one's suffering in a

state of resignation. The numbness that gradually ensues from extended bouts of suffering is likely to lead to the sleep of consciousness that Camus wants to resist through his continual awareness of life's absurdity. This would produce a form of detachment that undermines passionate involvement with existence in a way that is characteristic of despair. Without a belief in God, salvation, or a greater purpose or ideal beyond the act of rebellion, his position is ultimately hollow and untenable. This individual would eventually be struck by the utter meaninglessness of his suffering and the futility of his toil, even if he continues go on living in spite of it. He cannot give his life meaning simply by wanting it to have meaning for him, since the human will alone is simply not powerful enough to create meaning out of thin air. While he might believe that he is happy rebelling initially, with his troubling knowledge and continual suffering, he is only repressing despair. We should therefore agree with Anti-Climacus that the self that is acted upon in defiance is in despair, and would be better off approaching life with less resentment, bitterness, and hostility. This is not to say he does not have good reasons for approaching it in this way, or for making rebellion the purpose of his existence. If he decides to rebel against the gods or the forces of nature that overwhelm him, it would be wise to do so in a more subtle and idealistic fashion, like those who adopt the first form of defiance.

6.4 Conclusion

Anti-Climacus concludes that the autonomous self is in despair, and is at fault for relying on its own resources for direction in life rather than depending on God for this. This self-willed individual cannot overcome his self-enclosed condition without faith that he will be redeemed from it through Christ's sacrifice. His arguments for this have a distinctly Christian flavor, but are not supposed beg the question. The basic worry is that the defiant individual will not be able to take its projects or aims seriously, since it fashions these for itself without recognizing a higher authority that would obligate it to act as it does. Criticizing Kant's conception of autonomy, Kierkegaard writes:

Kant held that man was his own law (autonomy), i.e. bound himself under the law he gave himself. In a deeper sense, that means to say: lawlessness or experimentation. It is no harder than the thwacks which Sancho Panza applied to his own bottom. I can no more be really stricter in A than I am or than I wish myself to be, in B. There must be some compulsion, if it is to be a serious matter. If I am not bound by
anything higher than myself, and if I am to bind myself, where am I to acquire the severity as A by which as B, I am to be bound, so long as A and B are the same? 

The defiant self might act according to principles that he has decided to adopt, and have his reasons for doing so, but this decision is ultimately arbitrary, since there is nothing compelling him to adopt those principles rather than others. Because he is free, he knows he can choose to change his attitude and behaviors at any time, without depending on anything external for justification, and this power unsettles him. His life might come to feel like an experiment that he conducts in which nothing is really at stake, and this would prevent him from connecting with his situation on earth in a heartfelt way.

Moreover, his awareness of being free involves heightened reflection on his earthly condition, and this contributes to a state of detachment that can cause him to doubt whether the people or things that he cares about are worth caring about. Suspecting that his concerns and interests are transient, groundless, and insignificant in the grand scheme of things, he is prone to internal conflicts that undermine his confidence and keep him from being passionate in his engagements. If he becomes too disquieted by this discrepancy in his attitudes, he might decide to approach external affairs with Stoical indifference and retreat inward. By aligning himself with his infinite aspect, and divesting himself of his emotions and passions, which often produce suffering and psychological conflict, he would try to find a point of rest in himself. But since he exists as a human being on earth, Anti-Climacus believes that this would be a sign that he is imbalanced as a self, and in despair. In faith, he would eliminate despair by passionately devoting himself to Christianity, where an event in time determines his eternal salvation.

The Christian is similar to Sisyphus in persevering through his wretched existence instead of abstracting himself dispassionately. But rather than rebel against God or resent Him, he blames himself for the sins that brought him to this state, and expects God will relieve him of the burden in eternity, which is of ultimate importance.

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328 See The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard, 1041 (Dru translation). As quoted in Rudd, Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical, p. 135.

I have argued, however, that the defiant individual can achieve personal integrity on his own, without devoting his life to God by renouncing the world as Kierkegaard claims. It might be true that the self needs an ideal or criterion that would support its identity over time, and function as an organizing principle over the course of its life, but this does not mean that God is the sole candidate for this. Neither does the severity through which the autonomous individual rules himself have to originate from himself as Kierkegaard claims. He gives no reason to think that the person cannot acquire it from his interactions with other people in society when he recognizes them as making pressing demands on him that he is obligated to fulfill. Because he is free, he might think that he can ignore claims they would have on him, or view these as illegitimate or insignificant. On the other hand, if he has empathy or concern for others like people often do, he would freely accept that other persons are authorities in their own right, and understand that he has tremendous responsibilities to them. Sociopaths, immoralists, and the staunch ironist might not think this way, but fortunately these standpoints are not psychologically viable for most people. Hence, the defiant person Anti-Climacus describes can engage with other people earnestly, without needing God or any other external power to compel him to care about them, love them, or view them as significant.

In fact, if a person would do this only if God demanded it of him, while threatening him with severe punishment for disobedience, his character would not seem much different from the sociopath or immoralist who acts out of sheer self-interest. This attitude sits uneasily with the altruistic form of love for one's neighbor preached in the Gospels, but Kierkegaard claims that Christianity prescribes egotism when it comes to securing one's own salvation. He writes:

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\text{Does not Christianity make me into an enormous egotist, or does it not abnormally develop my self-awareness in that by terrifying a man with the most terrible horror it brings him to be concerned solely and only for his own salvation, completely oblivious to the possible frailty and imperfection of everybody else?...To this one must answer: “The truth” cannot act in any other way. (JP II: 2053)}\]

As long as the Christian is saved from eternal damnation, it does not matter to him that some of his neighbors, or even those dearest to him, might not be. In this case, the motives of the defiant person who cares for his fellow human beings autonomously, and who would protest vehemently against such horrific treatment of them, would be much purer than those of the Christian. Not only this, but his love of neighbor would have an integrity that the Christian's lacks, since the
Christian would practice a conditional form of love that would approve of the beloved being consigned to hell if God willed it. The Christian's callous tolerance of infinite punishment is far from what one would expect of true love.

Additionally, the defiant individual might cull from norms and ideals in his culture when deciding how to live and what kind of person to be, or make a stable commitment to refined versions of them, without partaking in the caprice of the ironist. If he accepts these as authoritative, he would not be indulging in fantasy, or arbitrarily inventing his own meaning and values as Anti-Climacus suggests. This person might have a profound knowledge of his freedom while being anchored in worldly engagement, which would mean that his infinite and finite aspects are united. If he is passionate about his ideals and projects, it would seem there would be no doubt he would be living with integrity, even if he does not believe in God and does not accept the truth of Christianity. If the worry is that these ideals or principles do not adequately prepare him for eternity or are not objectively valid, he might consider them to be timeless truths of reason, or Platonic forms, such as the form of the Good, that compel him to unswerving commitment. Anti-Climacus would object that he lacks integrity because he is not strengthening his relationship with God, who he ultimately relates to as the power that established him, but this is question begging, and will not convince anyone who does not already accept the truth of Christianity. This person might assume that he has been brought into existence as a free agent through language acquisition, his familial or cultural upbringing, and the education he has received within society, and might conceive of himself as indebted to other people for his freedom instead. He might also believe that these sources have eternal merit insofar as they are governed by reason or the Good, rather than by an inscrutable God who might command violent acts like he did with Abraham, or subject persons to infinite punishment for unbelief. The integrity that this person would achieve would seem to be a quality of psychologically or spiritually healthy persons who are not in despair, whether it is in the ordinary sense or in Anti-Climacus' technical sense.

I also do not believe that reflection needs to have the devastating and exaggerated effects that Anti-Climacus claims it would have absent of faith, even if it does foster internal division in

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330 Rudd makes a strong case that a form of Platonic realism can be found in Kierkegaard's work, if one casts aside the Christian aspects of his thought. See Self, Value, and Narrative, pp. 34-50
the self that characterizes despair in Anti-Climacus' sense.\textsuperscript{331} It is true that as thinking beings, we are able to view our lives from a detached standpoint, and doubt whether we have good reasons to care about the people or things we do. We might also have questions about the significance of our lives, or whether the ideals or commitments we have are worth maintaining. This can pose a problem for secular individuals, but it is equally a problem for those with faith. In this respect, reflection is a negative power that can disrupt our lives, and especially our naive happiness, but this is by no means always a bad thing. It is what separates us from the brutes, which have no conception of morality in acting on impulse rather than for reasons. In this way, it creates the conditions for an orderly society. As free beings, we can indeed let reflection bring us to the brink of nihilism, endlessly asking about the reasons for our existence or actions. However, we can also decide to terminate it when it is no longer fruitful, and choose to put it to the service of a higher good by using it to improve the character of ourselves and society.

It goes without saying that doubt and critical questioning can be productive for the moral and intellectual progress of civilization, and for human discourse in general. These thoughts might disrupt the pleasure that we get from everyday activities and make us uneasy, but where everyday action consists in oppression, coercion, exploitation, egotism, and all sorts of injustices that seem to come naturally to us, but which we are often oblivious to or do not care about, it might lead to crucial transformations that benefit other persons and ourselves. In recoiling from the violence and injustice we discover in the world and in ourselves, and trying to mitigate them with heartfelt conviction, the negativity of reflection undermines itself, and we return to our concrete engagements with a better understanding of what we ought to be doing. Additionally, we cannot realistically call into doubt the significance of certain people or things, such as our loved ones, and arguably morality insofar as we want to continue to live in society. To be impartial toward good and evil is to already be on the precipice of falling into evil. Reflection is a double-edged sword that is an indispensible tool for human agency, but which can cripple us if we do not counteract it with existential action through the exertion of will, or more vividly, love and concern. To this extent, one can agree with Anti-Climacus or any of Kierkegaard's other pseudonyms.\textsuperscript{332}

\textsuperscript{331} I therefore reject that the individual who lives ethically must remain in despair due to guilt and moral anxiety. See section 5.4.3 for Kierkegaard's reasons for thinking that ethical individuals are in despair.

\textsuperscript{332} Thanks to David Sussman for a helpful discussion of the main points of this chapter.
Conclusion

Despair in Kierkegaard's work is essentially a problem of human freedom in its emergence from the natural world, where freedom contributes to disintegration and imbalance in human existence. The expansion of freedom can be witnessed in the fragmentation and division that occurs in modern liberal society, as rapid advances in science and technology have weakened traditional bonds and narratives that furnished us with a definite place in the world. These conventional frameworks had regulated norms and beliefs in tight-knit communities that we were actively involved in, and gave us direction and meaning that we did not have to seek on our own. While this constrained our will and limited our possibilities and understanding of our situation, it also made us feel that we belonged to a greater whole, and that this whole was an important part of our identity as individuals. Where we previously inhabited a shared universe of mutual concerns in our prescribed roles, we are increasingly becoming disengaged from them, and retreating to our private universes with the assistance of personalized technology. We spend much of our day in front of screens, gazing at virtual environments that are products of human imagination, while dedicating less attention to our physical environment. What was once the stuff of fantasy now features in everyday reality, and as a result, it has become increasingly difficult to find our footing, or to make sense of the world and our place in it.

The contact of different cultures in our globalized age has also produced a plurality of belief systems that brings us to doubt the validity of our own interpretation of the world. We used to look to family, religion, or the local community for guidance, but it is increasingly left up to us as individuals to discover our purpose and identity, and determine what roles and attitudes we will adopt from the innumerable options available. If we occupy a position that we feel forced into, such as a tedious job, we are likely to do so ironically, without truly identifying with it. Kierkegaard is less interested in social developments, and more concerned about the development of the person in these insecure and alienating times, which seem to have borne the atomized society of reflective individuals he predicted. His goal is to determine how best to

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333 Rudd provides an excellent summary of the view that the ethical framework of modern society is crumbling with the rise of critical thought, which undermines traditional values and beliefs. See his chapter on disengagement in Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical, pp. 1-26.

334 The reflective character of modern society was already entrenched in Kierkegaard's time, and he anticipated it would remain that way until individuals discover religion with renewed passion. In Two Ages, he writes: “The present age is essentially a sensible, reflecting age, devoid of passion, flaring up in superficial, short-lived
integrate the infinite and finite aspects of our nature, or our freedom and limitations, given that this discrepancy can produce so much personal and social conflict.

In his pseudonymous writings, Kierkegaard claims the development of the person begins in the esthetic stage of life, when the human being is integrated with nature and focused on external objects. The central aim of the individual living esthetically is enjoyment, which often involves sensuous pleasures that she experiences as a psyche-body unity. So long as the individual is absorbed in worldly affairs with a minimal degree of reflection, and is well adjusted to society, there is synchronic continuity in her life, but not a great deal of diachronic continuity. Anti-Climacus claims she is not in despair in the strict sense, since she is ignorant of being a self, and her spiritual capacities have not been actualized to a significant degree. Because it is her essence to be spirit, however, he believes that she is in despair at an unconscious level. She becomes conscious of being in despair once the primitive unity that holds between her and the world begins to break down through the intensification of reflection. This is likely to occur through a particular earthly suffering that she recoils from, such as a loss, trauma, or hardship that leaves her confused, and questioning the significance of things that she previously took for granted. Since to be spirit is to engage in reflection, and to use one's imagination and will in a way that is not simply in service to lower-order desire, inclination, or social dictates, this reaction facilitates the actualization of her spiritual capacities. When she turns inward to reflect on her life, the first signs of self-enclosure become evident, as she confronts a wider world that begins to seem hostile. If reflection intensifies, and the suffering that afflicts her becomes overwhelming, she will despair over the world in general, and not just over some particular thing in it. Not wanting to be herself, she withdraws from the concrete conditions of her existence and retreats into the imagination, where she experiments with her life in a capricious manner by taking an interest in a wide range of things, and choosing what will have significance for her at any given moment. The ironist, the poet, and the romanticist are figures that encapsulate this form of despair, which consists in a highly active spiritual life that is detached from ordinary engagements in the world, without being stable or ethically motivated.

enthusiasm and prudently relaxing in indolence” (TA: 68). Without much to unite them historically, and with the weakening of traditional bonds in local communities, individuals conceive of their relation to society in thin, abstract categories like "the generation" (TA: 84). These categories might seem to unify them, but for Kierkegaard, this is a deception that conceals the fact that they have become detached from the network of concrete relations that comprises the particular form of their lives.
The pseudonyms offer two alternative ways of combatting the forms of despair which occur in the esthetic stage that do not require one to attribute religious meaning to one's life. In the ethical stage of life, the person acknowledges that she has become alienated from the world through reflection. She aims to reconcile herself with her concrete condition by living in accordance with rational principles that are universally valid. In deciding to take responsibility for herself, she repents for the mistakes that led up to despair, and commits to duties that are performed in daily life, such as work, marriage, and friendship. By expressing her freedom through ethical action undertaken in passion, she believes that she has actualized her spiritual essence, and transformed herself into the universal individual. Assuming that she has achieved her telos, she considers herself to have gained personal integrity and won happiness, which she had been seeking while in despair. The success she claims in her battle with despair is problematic, however, since she must deal with guilt for her errors and shortcomings that cannot be eliminated. She will also be disquieted by the corruption that she finds in her heart, which she must struggle to overcome, and cannot ultimately remove through her own efforts. As a result, internal conflict is a persistent feature in her existence, which for Anti-Climacus, is despair.

The ethical stage of life the Judge describes is a type of defiance according to Anti-Climacus' typology of despair. In defiance, the person wants to be herself, but who she wants to be does not correspond with the person she essentially is, which has been determined by the greater power that brought her into existence. The defiant person, who is intensely self-conscious, exercises her autonomy by living in accord with ideals and norms that she has chosen upon reflection. However, since she acknowledges no higher authority that constrains her actions and tells her how to live, and does not believe that she has an essence that she is tasked with realizing in it, there is nothing to compel her to take herself or her projects seriously. The choices that she makes and the tasks she sets for herself are arbitrary, and she can easily call everything she has built her life on into doubt, or question the significance of it. Because of this, she is basically experimenting with her life on her own, and will remain detached from her concrete existence in a state of self-enclosure.

I claimed that this is a weak argument, and that defiance is not necessarily a form of despair, just as ignorance is not. The person in defiance takes control of his own life in heightened reflection, but this does not mean he has to be dispassionate or withdrawn from existence. He can be compelled to engage with life in the world out of a desire to bring his
projects to fruition, or out of concern for other people, such as his friends and loved ones, or those who make demands on him as independent authorities. He might also live in accord with ideals or principles that are drawn from his culture, or that originate in reason. In this case, they would not be arbitrary, and he would have good reason to take them seriously. It is true that he might call his commitments into doubt, or question their importance, but the religious individual who believes that she is subject to a higher power can do this as well. Because persons in defiance can be stable individuals who have integrity and a decent character, it is wrong to assume this is a form of despair. They might have to struggle with inclinations, attitudes, feelings, or desires that are contrary to their ideals, and diligently work at reforming their conduct so that it is better aligned with them. However, this does not have to be a debilitating process that leaves them consumed with guilt, but can give them a goal to aim for, even if it exceeds what they are able to achieve on their own. Additionally, unreflective individuals who are ignorant of their freedom as selves do not have any of the traits typically associated with despair, such as hopelessness or self-doubt. If they are in despair, it is in the technical sense denoted by Anti-Climacus, but in that case, it would have no obvious relationship to the customary notion. It would have been more apt to use a different term for such individuals instead of using a common term improperly.

For Anti-Climacus, the problems of these forms of life are supposed to motivate a conversion to the religious way of life, or more specifically, Christianity. To have faith, on his view, is to rest transparently in God in willing to be oneself after reflection (SUD: 131). By relating himself to God in faith, the person believes that he will be healed of his internal conflicts and contradictions, and purified from the wickedness in his heart, which he had brought upon himself by misusing his will. Through the grace of God, he would be forgiven for his sins, and would achieve self-actualization by coming into existence as eternal. With divine assistance, he would become what he essentially is as spirit, rather than being blocked from achieving this due to his imperfections as a human being in time. Kierkegaard does not intend to provide a positive argument for the truth of Christianity for the unconvinced, but rather to persuade them to become Christians by showing that those ways of life outside of Christianity are despair on philosophical grounds.335 Hence, we should have faith that it is true for practical purposes, even though we

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335 Kosch argues that Kierkegaard borrowed from Schelling with this strategy. “This account of the negative relation of philosophy to Christian belief mirrors Schelling’s account of the relation of ‘negative’ to ‘positive’ philosophy.”
cannot know this. If Christianity is false, then there is no remedy for our sickness, and we are without hope of spiritual fulfillment. We would be destined to remain fallen creatures in wretched contradiction with ourselves as a synthesis of the eternal and temporal.

Where other life-views come up short in providing liberation from human suffering that stems from being encumbered by the world, Climacus claims that Christianity is particularly well suited to serve this existential need that persons have upon attaining the highest pitch of self-consciousness. Although he does not think a proof for Christianity can be given, he argues that it has something to say in its favor, since it turns out to be "a perfect fit" for the person who has arrived at the final stages of his development with a longing for spiritual freedom. "Subjectivity culminates in passion, Christianity is paradox; paradox and passion fit each other perfectly, and paradox perfectly fits a person situated in the extremity of existence" (CUP: 230). The "absolute paradox" of Christianity is that a transcendent God, who is in essence actually eternal, comes into existence in time, revealing Himself to us in human form in the person of Christ (CUP: 217). To save us from our fallen condition, Christ offers to usher us into an eternal happiness, forever secured against the ravages of time. Unlike God, we are essentially eternal but not actually eternal, and are finally unable to become eternal of our own powers, even though our development tends toward achieving this. Consequently, it is as if we were designed to come to recognize the truth of Christianity.

As we have seen with the Judge, rather than depend on outside help from Christ for reconciling his eternal and temporal components, the individual living ethically might attempt to achieve correspondence with the eternal through his own efforts by performing his duties in daily existence. Due to the collision between his ideals and the reality of his situation, however, he eventually recognizes that he will unable to realize his telos. The ethical way of life is therefore likely to lead to continued suffering and moral discontent, and does not effectively resolve the paradox of living spiritually in time. Not everyone will conceive of his or her telos ethically, and some who seek their ultimate purpose in life will venture into the religious way of life to resolve their internal conflicts. They might aim to approach the divine through intellectual means by fleeing into abstractions, or engaging in mystical contemplation, speculation, meditation, or

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Negative philosophy paves the way for a philosophy of revelation by presenting a riddle: in the absence of revealed religion, the ethical standpoint is despair, and existence is futile. But negative philosophy cannot provide the answer to this riddle itself. Revelation is an answer to the riddle, but it presents itself, if at all, as an underivable fact.” See Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling, and Kierkegaard, p. 182fn.
rational inquiry. They might also do so volitionally through ascetic practices, including renunciation of earthly desires.

Climacus claims, however, that our finitude impedes our access to the divine, and we cannot abandon our earthly condition to unite with it. Regardless of how passionate the individual is about expressing his relation to the absolute, or God, he will eventually realize that while he is situated in the world, "he cannot make the finite commensurate with it" (CUP: 484). His failure to fulfill his telos of his own powers through an immanent union with God will lead to great suffering, since he will not attain what he so passionately desires, and has closed himself off from the world while still remaining in it as a human being. Climacus compares this inwardly detached individual to a fish living out of water to describe the kind of alienation he will experience after getting struck down in his lofty attempt to approach God (CUP: 483). But if he exhausts himself working out his salvation on his own, and becomes a Christian in humble response to his defeat, he has faith that he will be liberated from the finite after death, and will enjoy an eternal happiness in union with God. The contradiction that mars his nature will then be resolved by an act of grace that originates from an external agency. As Haufniensis puts it, the Christian believes that in eternity, "all contradiction is cancelled," and "the temporal is permeated by and preserved in the eternal" (CA: 154).

By identifying despair in Kierkegaard's thought with spiritual disintegration, which requires forgiveness and grace to remedy, I hope to have shown that despair is a product of human agency as it emerges in existence. Agency requires that the person separate himself from psychical-physical processes and his worldly environment to think for himself and make his own choices. This separation occurs through reflection, in which the person detaches himself from his concrete situation to relate himself to himself. In his infinitude, he takes steps toward overcoming his limitations, wrestling himself from finite constraints by imagining alternative possibilities for action that he can choose to actualize. Without this capacity for abstraction, his actions and character would be determined solely by external causes, such as vital processes occurring in nature. He would then be unfree like the animals, and would not be conscious of himself as an individual set apart from the totality of nature. There is a sense in which his confrontation with nature is liberating, but he knows that it will soon overwhelm him with its power while reminding him of how little power he actually has. With an awareness of his
impending demise as a free but mortal being, his life is tragic in a way that the life of an animal is not.

One might think despair is simply a brute fact about our nature that we must cope with as finite agents, but Anti-Climacus insists that this is not the case. In Part Two of *The Sickness Unto Death*, he argues that despair is sin when the person understands their actions as taking place before God (SUD: 77). On his view: "The category of sin is the category of individuality" (SUD: 119). The idea throughout the text is that we are not originally in despair or a state of sin as Augustine claims, but are at fault for bringing this upon ourselves by disobeying God's will.336 We become spirit in desiring freedom and independence, but this ends up causing painful separation in our lives, rather than promoting harmony with existence and making us happy. The desire for agency apart from God is therefore the source of sin, which Kierkegaard seems to conceive as a fall from nature and into infinitude, rather than a fall into nature or the sensuous, in an additional departure from Augustine. In his biblical exegesis, he argues that the Gospels point toward other living things, such as the lilies in the field and the birds of the air, as models of obedience rather than fallen beings that are in bondage to sin.337 He states, "the bird and the lily continually will as God wills and continually do as God wills," and because of this, the bird "enjoys all its freedom without care" (CD: 61). Moreover, the bird "exists only to God’s honor, sings to his praise, does not demand at all to be anything itself. So it is with everything in nature; that is its perfection" (UDVS: 205). However, in a dialectical turn, Kierkegaard states that it "is also its imperfection, because there is therefore no freedom. The lily standing out there in the open field and the free bird of the air are nevertheless bound in necessity and have no choice” (UDVS: 205). The suggestion is that human freedom is a perfection, but one which comes at a great cost. As Anti-Climacus puts it, the possibility of despair "is man's superiority over the animal," which indicates the "infinite erectness or sublimity" of spirit, but on the other hand, "to be in despair is not only the worst misfortune and misery—no, it is ruination" in occurring before God (SUD: 15).

One might infer from such passages that we fell into sin and disturbed God's original creation by obtaining a kind of divine freedom that other living things do not have, and which God prohibited us from having. Yet strangely, Anti-Climacus claims that according to

336 See the introduction for a summary of St. Augustine's notion of original sin.
337 See Matthew 6:25-33.
Christianity, it is our *telos* to become free in a way that animals are not by actualizing our spiritual capacities, namely reflection, imagination, and volition, and coming into conflict with the world. It might sound like he believes God *wants* us to become sinners, and to bring despair upon ourselves so that we eventually realize our desperate need for Him in faith. However tempting this reading is, he is not claiming that human freedom necessarily results in sin or despair, or that to be an agent is to be a sinner. If we use our freedom to do what we want to do instead of what God wants us to do, we sin, but if we use it to do what God wants, we have faith, which is the opposite of sin as St. Paul states (SUD: 82). God wants us to be spirit, but on His terms rather than our own. As free agents, we are supposed to separate ourselves from psychical-physical processes and worldly things so that they do not move us to act without our reflective endorsement, but we are not supposed to separate ourselves from God. To do *that* is to sin, and consequently, to be culpable for being in despair.

This appears to be a solution to the worry that God intends for us to sin, but it has untenable implications that show it is unsound. To avoid making the fall and becoming a sinner, it would seem that we would have to either remain like animals, or be perfect like God is perfect from the very beginning by having faith, without ever losing our innocence. For the Christian, however, neither horn of this dilemma seems viable. Because it is our *telos* to become spirit, we would be at fault for living like animals if we could somehow remain like them throughout our development, so that is no way to avoid sin. On the other hand, spiritual perfection would be a tall order for any human being other than Christ, who has an eternal union with God, and who lived without sin. Since Christ is God, we can assume he continually willed as God willed and did what God willed like the lily and bird, while suffering in ways that the bird does not due to the conflict of existing in the world as spirit. But it would be blasphemous for a Christian to think of this as a real possibility for human beings other than Christ, who is unlike us in having an exclusive claim to perfect divinity. On this point, Anti-Climacus claims that there is "an

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338 See Romans 14:23
339 Haufniensis argues that innocence is a state of being ignorant of oneself as spirit (CA: 41). This would mean that in coming to know ourselves as spirit, we would be guilty of a misdeed, and indeed, Haufniensis argues that Adam committed such an act and gained this knowledge when he disobeyed God's orders by eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. But according to Anti-Climacus, God demands that we know ourselves as spirit (SUD: 49fn). Assuming that he too holds that innocence is ignorance, it follows that God does not want us to be innocent, and so the fall seems to be the will of God on his view as well. Anti-Climacus seems to put forward this position when he claims that "in the strictest sense the pagan did not sin" because he was ignorant of being spirit, and did not understand himself as existing before God (SUD: 81). While the ignorant pagan can be said to be innocent in relation to God, he is still in despair as a result of disintegrating as a self. See Chapter 2.
infinite qualitative difference" between the human being and Christ, and to believe otherwise would be pantheism (SUD: 126). Since both horns of the dilemma are implausible, his claim that we choose to bring despair upon ourselves, and so are responsible for our own fall, is incoherent on his own account. His premises commit him to the conclusion that separation from God is the fate of human beings other than Christ, rather than a free choice we make. In other words, God established us as sinners in allotting us freedom of thought and will, and intends for us to pass through despair as independent persons before acquiring faith at a later point in our development. Only at that point could we be said to be doing His will.

In previous chapters, I gave different reasons for thinking that on Anti-Climacus' premises, it is inconceivable that despair originates in a free act if it is understood in his technical sense. Reflection does not start itself, but is elicited by external causes in the temporal, which includes the natural world and society. On top of this, spiritually ignorant individuals who are not reflective are in despair due to being entangled in the nothingness of temporal flux, without having integrity as selves. Because God wants us to suffer in despair, and created us to live like this, it is universal to the human condition. Since He is omnipotent, he could change our miserable fortune in an instant if He wanted to, but He evidently does not, and would prefer that the darkness play out before he miraculously intervenes to offer grace. As von Loewenich puts it in his exposition of Luther's theology, which bears a remarkable similarity to Kierkegaard's, "God does his alien work when he leads us into suffering. But thereby he aims at his proper work, even when we do not recognize it." This conclusion calls into question the justice and benevolence of God, and is likely unpalatable to many Christians, but it is a logical consequence of his account.

Regardless of whether despair is inevitable or a choice we make, as a Christian, Anti-Climacus believes we do not have to remain in despair, but can overcome it through faith. In The Sickness Unto Death, he reserves his discussion for despair, and does not elaborate on what it would mean to have faith. However, a rich account of the Christian way of life can be pieced together from content found elsewhere in Kierkegaard's corpus, especially in his upbuilding and

340 Curiously, Kierkegaard contradicts Anti-Climacus' position in his Journals. There he claims that we did not cause the separation between God and ourselves, but that God did this when creating us so that we would be free and independent beings in relation to Him. See section 1.2.1. His inability to make up his mind about whether our spiritual freedom makes us sinners acting in defiance of God, or whether this kind of responsibility is exactly what God demands from us, is a lingering source of confusion in his writings.

341 See von Loewenich, Luther's Theology of the Cross, p. 118. For a discussion of the similarities between Luther and Kierkegaard's theology, see Hinkson, Kierkegaard's Theology: Cross and Grace, esp. pp. 18-95.
Christian discourses, *Works of Love*, and Anti-Climacus’ *Practice in Christianity*. Unfortunately, his writings on this topic are not always unequivocal, and it can be difficult to find consistency throughout these works. Those who study them will soon realize that major interpretive puzzles arise from the wealth of religious ideas that Kierkegaard has left us with. As a result, it is difficult to determine how he thinks those with faith should live, and how we should understand ourselves in our relation to God if we are deeply passionate about this relationship, and have a tremendous need for grace to relieve our suffering. But perhaps this ambiguity was what he intended, since it leaves room for his readers to think for themselves about what God wants from them. Kierkegaard suggests as much in the preface to several of his upbuilding discourses, when he insists that he does not have authority to preach, and will not claim to be a teacher.342

Perhaps the most important question anyone could ask about the life of faith is what God wills that we should do as agents, given that this is the source of sin and despair. One tempting interpretation of Kierkegaard's notion of faith that has been advanced in recent times calls for the total annihilation of selfhood.343 If we no longer conceive of ourselves as separate persons in relation to God or the world, and are no longer struggling against our lower nature, then this would seem to solve the problem of despair entirely by liberating us from ourselves. Agency will not be preserved after death, anyway, so the thought is that those with faith would get a head start on this by losing their agency in time, and thereby relieving themselves of the suffering of self-consciousness in the present. The human being in this condition could go on living, but as a wanton rather than a person in Frankfurt's sense. This means that he would have lower-order desires but no higher-order volitions, and so would not care about which of these lower-order desires move him to act.344 He would neither commit to sustaining any of these desires, nor determine which of them he would identify with in cases where they conflict.345 Like the bird the Gospel speaks of, he would be free of all cares in obedience to God. The wanton does not

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342 See *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, pp. 5, 53, 107, 179, 231 295.
343 In exploring the similarities between Kierkegaard's understanding of Christianity and Buddhist thought, Mulder argues that in the religious portion of his authorship, Kierkegaard affirms a mystical union with God so direct that it would not allow for any kind of independent selfhood or robust sense of individuality. See "Faith and Nothingness in Kierkegaard: A Mystical Reading of the God-Relationship," p. 200. Kangas also interprets Kierkegaard as advancing a mystical view of this sort by locating his thought in the Eckhartian tradition of Christian mysticism. Kangas explains that recurring motifs in Kierkegaard's work, such as "to become nothing" and to "sink into nothingness," were first articulated by Eckhart to express "the self’s letting go its conception of itself as originally capable of securing its being." See Kangas, *Kierkegaard’s Instant*, p. 9-10.
344 See Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*, p. 16.
345 Ibid., p. 18
necessarily have to live like an animal, but might retain the capacity of thought and reason. Frankfurt explains that a wanton could deliberate on ways to achieve his desired ends, or think rationally about states of affairs in the world, but he would not consider whether his desires are desirable. "He ignores the question of what his will is to be. Not only does he pursue whatever course of action he is most strongly inclined to pursue, but he does not care which of his inclinations is the strongest." Based on outward appearances, he might seem like an ordinary human being, but since he is not consciously divided against himself, he would not have to deal with despair, or the state of self-enclosure that it involves.

This is a radical reconception of the human being that should startle many, but Kierkegaard makes claims throughout his religious writings that would suggest that it characterizes those with faith. In Christian Discourses, he argues that the problem with human beings who do not live religiously is that they are puffed up with self-will, and do not recognize their debt to God, who has wondrously created them from nothing. Attacking the pagans who live in ignorance of God as he revealed Himself in Christ, he writes:

> The life of every human being is God’s possession; the human being is his bond servant. But one cannot kill God; on the other hand, as is said, one can certainly kill the thought of him ... When a person has succeeded in killing the thought of God and every feeling and mood that like his emissaries bring him to mind, then that person lives on as if he were his own master, himself the architect of his fortune, himself the one who must take care of everything but also the one who is entitled to everything—that is, he cheats God of what is due him... (CD: 66-67)

Kierkegaard states that God creates persons as "something" in relation to him, but it is too often the case that the person "selfishly wants to be this something" that God made him by trying to take control over his earthly situation instead of admitting his dependence on God (CD: 129). This would be true of those living esthetically, who pursue worldly goods like wealth, power, and eminence with eager concern. It would also be true of those living ethically, who strive to perfect themselves so that they live in accord with the ideals or principles that they have chosen autonomously. Such individuals want to govern themselves instead of being governed by God, and thereby separate themselves from Him, which creates the conditions for despair.

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346 Ibid., p. 17
As we have seen, Kierkegaard believes some individuals might exhaust themselves with these efforts as they develop as persons, and realize they are in despair after experiencing earthly hardship or suffering. When conflict in the world arises, and they start to appreciate their spiritual nature, they are likely to recognize how powerless they are to secure their own happiness or prevent suffering. Without being able to help themselves, they might be ready to look to God for support during their time of tribulation, and to abandon their previous mode of living, in which they had turned away from God in self-reliance. Kierkegaard writes:

If, however, a person himself gives up this something, the independence, the freedom to go his own way that love gave him … if God perhaps helps him in this regard by hard sufferings … then he is weak … but God is strong. He, the weak one, has totally given up this something into which love made him, has wholeheartedly consented to God’s taking away from him all that could be taken … There is only one who can hinder God, him who indeed is eternally strongest, in becoming the strongest—this one is the person himself … There is only one obstacle for God, a person’s selfishness, which comes between him and God like the earth’s shadow when it causes the eclipse of the moon. (CD: 129)

Kierkegaard believes that in His love for us, God creates human beings as free and independent, but this means we are able to flee from His presence and seek satisfaction apart from Him, without Him being able to do anything about it. In revolt against God, we selfishly want to assume his role and become authorities over our own lives while gaining status in the world, or obtaining earthly pleasures, including those of sensuality. Although certain individuals will gain worldly riches and success by following this path, and might appear to be happy, strong individuals, the Christian who has despaired is aware of the deeper poverty and dissatisfaction of this way of living, which they conceive as sin. In deciding to give it up, and to seek their riches within, they surrender their freedom and independence to God unconditionally in worship (CUD: 64).

Kierkegaard says things that would suggest that this act culminates in the forfeiture of agency, or becoming a wanton that acts on direct behalf of God. On his view, the individual living religiously stops believing he has any of his power of his own, or that he himself is capable of anything. Instead of caring about being something in the world like the pagans do (CD: 44), he accepts that he is "nothing before God" (WOL: 336). Kierkegaard explains that this understanding is achieved through "self-renunciation," in which the individual renounces the
world and its goods, selfish desires, and any autonomous project that they have, and submits to the mockery and ridicule of others who would despise him for this (WOL: 188). He might not give up his possessions in a literal sense, but would change the way he relates to them by no longer letting them control him, or allowing them to dictate how he understands himself and his obligations to God. He might be wealthy, honorable, professionally successful, and appear like a normal person to others, but he would be essentially indifferent to conditions in the world, and ready to deal with gains, loss, or changes in fortune without this affecting him spiritually (EUD: 165). In describing the Christian who is engaged in self-renunciation, Kierkegaard writes, "without wishing to waste any time or any power on elevating himself, on being somebody, in self-sacrifice he is willing to perish, that is, he is completely and wholly transformed into being simply an active power in the hands of God" (WOL: 260). He also describes this as "being an instrument in the hand of Governance" (WOL: 94). With that said, it would seem that there is no room left for the will of the person on Kierkegaard's account of Christianity. He states that in surrendering himself unconditionally, the Christian "has no self-will whatever" (CUD: 64). In interpreting these passages, one might think that he is suggesting that the person would be liberated from himself by surrendering his agency to God. By living on the most intimate terms with God, he would have fulfilled his telos and eliminated despair.

Kierkegaard suggests that self-renunciation would involve exertion of the will initially, during the transition to the religious way of life, but once the individual becomes practiced in it and has disciplined himself accordingly, he would no longer have to rely on his own efforts to sustain it. He would have prepared himself for God to swoop in and take possession of him to use him as He wills. Kierkegaard writes, "spiritually understood it holds true that precisely when a person has strained his spiritual powers as such, then and only then can he become an instrument. From this moment on, if he honestly and believingly perseveres, he will gain the best powers, but they are not his own; he possesses them in self-renunciation” (WOL: 333). Kierkegaard states that this process results in "the annihilation of a person," which is "his truth" (EUD: 309). On his view, it is not God who acts upon the person to annihilate him. Because He has created human beings as free, He refuses to intervene in our lives without our consent, and before we have prepared ourselves to receive His blessing by developing our capacities as selves. When a person voluntarily engages in self-renunciation, "he himself is indeed the instrument of the annihilation" (EUD: 309). With his annihilation, the individual becomes God's instrument,
and advances His will in existence without impeding it through his own stubborn and selfish willing. Individuals who have not undergone the process of self-annihilation conceive of themselves as the source of their actions, powers, and capacities, but after this, Kierkegaard explains that they will have finally accepted their impotence in relation to an omnipotent God that created them from nothing. By shrinking from worldliness and “sinking down into your own nothingness” (EUD: 307), you become weak, but God becomes strong in you. When the individual has emptied himself of self-will, he achieves the mystical union with God that he longs for as spirit, and admits his utter dependence on God.

In suggesting that despair can only be overcome through the annihilation of the self, and declaring this as an essential part of the Christian faith, Kierkegaard appears to betray the existentialist principles that are widely considered to characterize his thought. He is commonly understood to champion the value and dignity of the individual, along with the freedom she has to think for herself, make her own decisions, and take responsibility for her life. But what kind of freedom and dignity can she have if she makes herself nothing before God, renounces her earthly cares and possessions, denies herself completely, and wholly submits to being His instrument? Is Kierkegaard offering a quietest conception of faith, in which the person must surrender her agency to God so that she is possessed by an external agency? Or is he proposing a voluntarist conception in which the person retains her agency while executing God's will? And if those with faith are supposed to remain persons after all, why would Kierkegaard use such bold language that invites one to interpret him as saying personhood should be eliminated, and is some kind of hindrance to God's master plan?

If the quietest interpretation of Kierkegaard’s project is correct, it would suggest that individuality ought to be renounced in the religious stage of life, along with everything else in the world, which consists of finite beings that only distract the human being from God, who is the source of all being. After carrying out his annihilation, the self would no longer possess a will, and would cease to delineate itself from things external to it to identify itself as a separate entity. In existentialist fashion, Kierkegaard affirms the importance of going one's own way and developing oneself as a single individual in his pseudonymous works, but one might read him as ultimately calling for an abandonment of this project, which is despair, in order to properly relate

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347 In a survey of existentialist thought, Solomon writes: "It is generally acknowledged that if existentialism is a "movement" at all, Søren Kierkegaard is its prime mover" (Existentialism, p. 3).

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to God in faith. Perhaps the journey toward self-actualization demands that the individual realize his spiritual capacities in existence to the greatest extent possible before surrendering his hard won individuality to God, so that He has possession of these higher capacities, and uses the human being as His instrument. This would be a sophisticated wanton who would retain thought, imagination, and desires, while being evacuated of personal agency. He would come full circle to the carefree state of immediacy he enjoyed as a child, but with intellectual capacities that the child, in its innocence, does not yet have. Kierkegaard seems to suggest this when he asserts, “faith is immediacy or spontaneity after reflection” (JP II: 1123). Similarly, he writes: “Immediacy or spontaneity is poetically the very thing we desire to return to (we want our childhood again, etc.) but from a Christian point of view, immediacy is lost and it ought not be yearned for again but should be attained again” (JP II: 1942). The suggestion is that it is impossible to regain the outlook on life that the child has, but we can experience the wonder and delight of the child anew in faith, which would incorporate reflection in exuberant passion. In this condition, we would no longer be in despair.

In support of this interpretation, it should be noted that Kierkegaard was careful to emphasize that the views expressed through the pseudonyms were not always his own, and that he intended to distance himself from them by disavowing authorship. He also did not hesitate to admit that he used them as bait to lure the individual into the truth, which he thought was encapsulated in Christianity. He even conceived of himself as a deceiver in this regard. "What, then, does it mean "to deceive"? It means that one does not begin directly with what one wishes to communicate but begins by taking the other's delusion at face value" (POV: 54). The strategy of his authorship, he explains, was to meet his readers where they were currently at, whether it was in the esthetic or ethical stage, and then gradually lead them into religion by getting them to recognize their need for God. One might think that in conveying this message indirectly, he uses the pseudonyms to encourage the self to build itself up, only to have it break itself down and transfer its powers to God in faith. Individualism would therefore be a means to an end, or a ladder to be thrown away once one has climbed it and reached the goal of union with God.

348 For instance, in 'A First and Last Explanation,’ where he discusses his intentions as an author, Kierkegaard writes, “...in the pseudonymous books there is not a single word by me. I have no opinion about them except as a third party, no knowledge of their meaning except as a reader, not the remotest private relation to them” (CUP: 625).
349 I am borrowing this metaphor from Wittgenstein, who used it to describe the activity of those who would comprehend his thought. "My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes
Perhaps this is the grand movement that Kierkegaard attempted to orchestrate through his tortuous authorship, with the aim of facilitating a divine seduction that ends in transcending one's humanity, or becoming inhuman. As one of God's henchmen, perhaps he wanted to bring the reader to a weak position that God could exploit, even though He is supposed to be omnipotent and should have no trouble doing this on His own. Without regard for morality, he would deceive them and lead them into error to get them to finally discover the truth for themselves, a truth which he believes could not be directly communicated but must be lived first-hand. Such a God resembles the sensuous genius that possesses Don Giovanni, rather than a righteous leader who wants us to use our higher capacities to combat what is ignoble in us.\footnote{See Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, p. 189}

I believe there are resources in Kierkegaard's writings to resist a quietest interpretation of his notion of faith, and some commentators have convincingly argued that this is not actually his view.\footnote{See section 2.2.1.} Nevertheless, it is perhaps the most natural reading after examining his notion of despair, which he believes is the upshot of human freedom when it is not in service to God. I would like to end this work, however, with an admonition for those who are enticed by his arguments, as someone who is concerned about the moral implications of Kierkegaard's work. While he thinks he is reawakening the age to what it means to be a human being, there is in fact a grave inhumanity that lurks within his writings. Kierkegaard believes that Christianity requires unconditional surrender to the will of God, and regardless of how you interpret him on the notion of faith, it is clear that this might involve violence, whether it is an act of self-negation or something else. de Silentio argues that faith requires a suspension of ethical concerns, and Kierkegaard says nothing in his authorship that would challenge this view. As we have seen with Abraham, unconditional surrender might mean sacrificing another human being, or even a loved one, as a person loses his inhibitions to become an instrument of God. We have also seen this position play out in modern times in horrendous acts of terrorism, in which innocents are slaughtered by religious devotees who believe they are performing God's will. de Silentio...
explains that Christianity, too, professes a suspension of the ethical for the sake of obedience to God (FT: 72). In Luke 14:26, Christ says: "If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and bothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." de Silentio understands this literally, and even says it is pride to not be willing to do this for God (FT: 73). Christians who tolerate the punishment of eternal damnation for decent human beings who are not Christian hardly seem more justified in refusing to protest this tenet of their faith.\textsuperscript{352} If these actions or inactions are ways to be initiated into the mystery of God, then out of concern for themselves and other human beings, those inclined to religious faith should consider whether "the terror" of the religious way of life that Kierkegaard describes is worth becoming acquainted with (EUD: 344).

\textsuperscript{352} In his discussion of the problem of evil, David Lewis argues that the evils the Christian God perpetrates, such as the infliction of infinite punishment on those who have committed finite wrongdoings, vastly outweigh the evils that he fails to prevent on earth. Consequently, he condemns Christians for worshipping a tyrant. Lewis challenges those who admire people who believe in such a God, writing, "since they worship the perpetrator, endorsing his judgments about the propriety of eternal torment for some...the perpetrator's evil extends to them. They admire evil and are tainted by it. In admiring them, we too admire evil. Does the evil spread by contagion to us?" See "Divine Evil," p. 239.
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