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KIERKEGAARD AND THE LONGING FOR GOD



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KIERKEGAARD AND THE LONGING FOR GOD

By

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

McMaster University

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ABSTRACT

A large part of modern Western philosophy defines selfhood as the self's ability to master itself and psychological wellbeing as the actualization of self-integration. However, as this thesis argues, Kierkegaard's understanding of longing for God challenges this understanding of human identity, especially as it is articulated by Kant and the German Idealists. Through an examination of Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* and his religious discourses, the thesis argues that Kierkegaard's theology of longing both undermines the modern psychology's understanding of autonomous selfhood and preserves a qualified understanding of autonomy. The thesis argues that Kierkegaard's theology has much in common with Augustine's understanding of longing in *The Confessions*. For Kierkegaard, the longing for God is not just a heteronomous desire for self-annihilation in God. The longing in question is relational and intellectual; it is a response to God's illuminative self-revelation and self-communicative love. But as relational, the life lived in longing for God is not wholly autonomous either. In prayer the soul experiences its own neediness and imperfections as it begins to experience God's perfection. Broadly conceived, the thesis explores Kierkegaard's understanding of this *neither . . . nor . . .*, that is, his understanding of a religious life lived neither fully autonomously nor fully heteronomously. The thesis argues further that much contemporary scholarship cannot take Kierkegaard's relational understanding of the God-relationship seriously and therefore misinterprets his understanding of human identity.



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INTRODUCTION

The longing for God is a desire that draws the self out of itself, out of body, out of mind, out of step with self and world. The experience of longing dispossesses and threatens the self's very identity. Those religiously-minded individuals who actually live their *lives* in longing for God appear sick, dead to the world, indeed, as if plagued by a death-wish. However, as I argue in this thesis, for the Danish theologian and philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, the longing for God is not a sickness onto death but a way of life in God. From the perspective of modern or Western psychology such an understanding of longing is particularly problematic. A large part of Western philosophy is devoted precisely to the question of self-mastery. For instance, from a Kantian perspective, as I show in chapter one, autonomous selfhood is defined by the self's ability to collect itself, to ward off the motions of the emotions, the *öincliningsö of the inclinations ó anything that might lead the self out of itself and leave it dependent on uncontrollable external influences. And for Kant's Idealistic successors (like Schelling), as I argue, selfhood is essentially defined by self-mastery. The self *becomes* a self, *is* a self, only in the struggle against itself.*

However, as I argue in chapter two, Kierkegaard's understanding of the longing for God is fundamentally at odds with this anthropological and psychological framework, especially as it is articulated by Kant and the German Idealists. It is true that Kierkegaard often works with a certain understanding of psychological identity in mind. The characters he creates (his pseudonyms and the persons in his illustrative stories) are thoroughly Western and modern. Even if they are not philosophers themselves, they are

individuals plagued by a loss of identity and defined by the very struggle to self-integrate. However, through an examination of Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* and his religious discourses, I argue that Kierkegaard's theology of longing both undermines the modern psychology understanding of autonomous selfhood and preserves a qualified understanding of individuality and autonomy. I argue that Kierkegaard's theology has much in common with Augustine's understanding of longing in *The Confessions*. For Kierkegaard, the longing for God is not just a heteronomous desire for self-annihilation in God. The longing in question is relational and intellectual; it is a response to God's illuminative self-revelation and self-communicative love. But as relational, the life lived in longing for God is not wholly autonomous either. For Kierkegaard, God is the life of the soul; the soul is only alive insofar as it lives in God. A life lived in prayer is a life lived in longing *for* life. In prayer the soul experiences its own neediness and imperfection as it longs for God's perfection. Broadly conceived, the thesis explores Kierkegaard's understanding of this *neither . . . nor . . .*, that is, his understanding of a religious life lived neither autonomously nor heteronomously.

In chapters three and four, I deal more specifically with Kierkegaard's Christian theological understanding of longing in his discourses. As we shall see, Kierkegaard's discourses themselves are instances of longing for God. The discourses are not merely critiques of modern anthropology or psychology; they are also symbolic interpretations of religious life. As interpretive, Kierkegaard's discourses themselves require a reading attentive to symbolic meaning and narrative continuity. The aim in these chapters is to trace, through a close reading of Kierkegaard's *Four Upbuilding Discourses* and

Discourses from the Communion on Fridays, a narrative of longing comparable to Augustine's in *The Confessions*. Kierkegaard's critique of self-mastery is particularly well-defined here. Like Augustine, he shows how the struggle for self-mastery culminates in spiritual exhaustion and ultimately in self-annihilation. At first, the argument appears to be merely negative and dialectical. Kierkegaard essentially argues that a person needs to have a self in order to lose it in God. However, beyond this negative and dialectical understanding of selfhood (and here the comparison with Augustine gains traction), Kierkegaard traces another movement: a longing for life after mortification. This is a relational and dialogical understanding of the self, informed by Kierkegaard's theology of the *Logos*. The understanding here is that God can share his Word because God *is* Word; that is, God is *essentially* communicative and not an impersonal force or emanation. Through prayer a person can *begin* to live in God's self-communicative love. But this is a perpetual beginning, a perpetual education in God, an endless elongation of the self. For this reason, the life of prayer appears to be a kind of self-hatred. And yet for the one who submits to longing, as Kierkegaard shows, this life is joyful beyond measure; it is a life desired for its *own* sake. Here longing becomes a way of life, a desire that cannot (and does not want to) exhaust itself. As Kierkegaard entitles one of his upbuilding discourses, "To Need God is a Person's Highest Blessing."

There is a certain analogy here between longing in human love-relationships and the longing for God, although the analogy will quickly reveal important differences. In good love-relationships the lovers ennoble each other; they grace each other with their presence. For this reason they learn to need each other; but the need is salutary because

the lovers have begun to trust in the goodness of the relationship. The more intimate they become in communication, the more their need for each other grows. This need is a blessing; they rejoice over their neediness because their need is for some good. Moreover, they long to discover their mutual need without ceasing, to see each other with new eyes again and again. This longing to see better constantly separates and joins the lovers. The lovers draw apart (though not necessarily physically) in order to ache. In their mutual heartache, they begin to anticipate their renewed intimacy. They allow their hearts to ache so that they might discover their beloved other again -- as if for the first time. This movement of longing does not humiliate because the lovers truly do need each other; there is truth in their need.

However, when it comes to a person's relationship with God this understanding of longing appears to have little relevance. We are after all talking about a longing to live in God's perfection. Here the separation between the lover and God is great indeed; and so is the heartache. The longing is for God's goodness; but God is immeasurably good, beyond comprehension. And yet human beings have been blessed (or cursed) with a longing for God's perfection. Here the movement from discovery of need to the anticipation of fulfillment is so great that the lover may well fall into despair. Longing becomes a torment because there seems to be no way to live in the promise of God's perfection. The desire is *full* with pain. There is no joy in need because there appears to be no promise of fulfillment or intimacy. The heart is therefore full and must find an outlet or expression for this fullness; it must discharge the excess pain. This fullness is a

restless inclination, something pushing the person forward without direction or promise of intimacy.

Here we can see why the theme of longing, which currently remains underexplored in Kierkegaard scholarship,¹ is important to the study of Kierkegaard's theology. As we shall see, Kierkegaard argues that the longing for God is often felt merely as a restless mood or inclination. The natural response to this inarticulate restlessness is to suppress the feeling in order to gain self-composure. However, for Kierkegaard, human restlessness has an important story to tell about human estrangement from God and about God's grace. The longing in question is not just a blind feeling. Longing understands what pride refuses to understand: that the need for God is a person's highest blessing. The vague, needy feeling is really a most articulate response to God's

¹ I have not found any book-length treatments of Kierkegaard's understanding of longing within a Christian theological context. There are a few articles that comment on Kierkegaard's discussion of longing in the Communion discourses discussed in chapter four of my thesis. I am aware of Niels Jørgen Cappelørn's "Longing for Reconciliation with God: A Fundamental Theme in Friday Communion Discourses," Fourth Part of *Christian Discourses* in *Kierkegaard Studies: Yearbook 2007*, eds., Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser and K. Brian Söderquist (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007): 318-336; David R. Law's "Kierkegaard's Understanding of the Eucharist in Christian Discourses, Part Four" in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Christian Discourses*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University, 2007): 273-298; and Lee C. Barrett's "Christ's Efficacious Love and Human Responsibility: The Lutheran Dialectic of Discourses at the Communion on Fridays" in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Christian Discourses*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University, 2007): 251-272. Law and Barrett's articles include a brief discussion of longing. I reference their articles in chapter four (see notes 103, 100 and 110). Cappelørn deals mainly with the first discourse of the Friday communion discourses. His argument is opposed to my own in some respects. In part, he argues that longing is an "instinct for God" (333). For reasons that will become clear in my thesis I am remain suspicious of such language (see notes 103 and 104). In addition, to these articles there are, of course, books discuss Kierkegaard's understanding of love for God. However, I am unaware any book that focuses specifically on longing as an aspect of loving God (see note 4). For reasons I mention in this introduction, I believe this specific focus is warranted. Simon D. Podmore's *Kierkegaard and the Self Before God: Anatomy of the Abyss* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011) does appear to treat the theme of longing in Kierkegaard's Christian theology at some length. I discovered this book, published in 2011, just before completing and submitting my own thesis to my university. The book appears to cover similar territory as my thesis. However, I have not had a chance to compare my reading of Kierkegaard with Podmore's.

self-communication. To remain inarticulate about longing is to close oneself off from God, Kierkegaard argues. However, as I show in chapter one, for modern scholars (especially after Kant's critique of metaphysics) it seems nearly impossible to speak credibly of religious experiences such as longing. Scholars, I argue, who read Kierkegaard through Kantian-inspired lenses cannot take Kierkegaard's theological language seriously and therefore cannot interpret it on its own theological terms. From within a Kantian anthropological framework grounded in practical reason the very idea of gaining clarity about one's own restlessness is superfluous. The autonomous human subject cannot possibly be in need in this sense; it already possesses cognitively what it needs most, the highest principles of reason. In a Kantian-Copernican cosmology, in a universe structured cognitively by epistemic and moral principles implanted in human minds, experiences that decentre the human subject cannot but violate human dignity. For this reason, God cannot be an active, living spiritual reality in the universe; God is merely an unthreatening postulate of reason (an idea contained in human cognition). At best, longing is a directionless movement that cannot articulate anything spiritually or ethically essential. At worst, restlessness is merely a threat to autonomous identity.

As I discuss in chapter one, Kant's philosophical successors try to breathe life back into God. Philosophy tries to understand what it might mean for life to emanate from God. Here longing is taken to be a movement in God's infinite striving for perfection. As Friedrich Schlegel explains the meaning of longing for the infinite, "Our I has the tendency to approach the infinite, and it is only because of the fact that the I, so to speak, flows toward the infinite, in order to approach it, that we are able to think the

infinite.² The German Romantics and Idealists see this flowing as a divine immanent force moving through human beings. However, in itself, this movement is not a real striving; it is still amoral, blind, and unconscious. As I show in chapter one, philosophy therefore still has to explain self-consciousness in God and account for the moral autonomy and dignity that Kant conferred on the subject. Philosophy is still largely defined by Kant's terms in this sense, as I argue. From this point of view, a conscious subject experiences life as a fullness of energy that requires productive expression. However, moral autonomy also requires the inhibition of those very productive powers. Spiritual capacity is defined by the capacity to suppress and control vitality. For the autonomous self, the loss of self-awareness in unconscious impulse is disgusting; it is a loss of self-possession, a loss of autonomous, self-conscious dignity. And yet, productive-unconscious life is vital to being; it is the vitality of being. Human beings must live productively and yet must inhibit life in order to live *well*. The moral self is therefore its own worst taskmaster; the very dignity of autonomous personality is characterized by the self's capacity to condemn itself. The self is ultimately responsible for itself; it is lord and master and it must be scrupulously attentive to whatever is lower in the self. In this way it sets its sights low. A person's spiritual achievement, from this point of view, is solely inhibitive, as I argue in chapter one.

For Kierkegaard, this understanding of selfhood, as both the expression and inhibition of vitality, cannot but give way to spiritual exhaustion, as we shall see. The

² Introduction to the Transcendental Philosophy (1800) in *Theory and Practice: A Critical Anthology of Early German Romantic Writing*, eds., trans., Jochen Schulte-Sasse et al., 240-267 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 247.

self here is essentially at war with itself and no true identity at all. However, as we shall also see, Kierkegaard's theistic understanding of cosmic purpose understands life in God differently. For Kierkegaard, unconscious-productive forces are not responsible for animating the universe. Cosmic reality, for Kierkegaard, is essentially communicative. God's productive and creative activity is not unconscious; it does not require both expression and inhibition. God is not divided within himself (between productive drive and inhibition). God, who is the life of the soul, gives forth the gift of being, illuminates and perfects being; but every giving is a self-aware giving, an enjoyment and love of the good, not a mindless production (an emanation). The miracle of sanctifying grace, for Kierkegaard, is that God gives forth of himself and allows human beings to share in some measure in this creative vision.³ Kierkegaard's theology is an interpretation of religious encounters that evoke longing and decentre the human ego; however, these encounters dispossess, not because they are *less* than human, not because they are irrational and violently undermine human identity, but because they are communicative. Throughout his religious discourses Kierkegaard is concerned with the experience of living in God's self-communicative love. This is the fundamental existential problem that Kierkegaard addresses. To catch a glimpse of God is not like seeing an object, for Kierkegaard. We know God insofar as we are known by God. The problem for Kierkegaard is that God refuses to see the self as it wants to see itself. The self wants to master itself. But God sees the self according to God's unchanging vision of the good, the good the self cannot

³ In this thesis when I speak of grace I am referring to 'sanctifying grace.' I do not deal here with Kierkegaard's understanding of 'justification.' I am concerned with what it means (for Kierkegaard) to be made holy by God. Also, I do not examine the relationship between sanctification and justification in Kierkegaard.

see in itself. To participate in God is painful; it is an education in God's way of sanctifying being and loving forth the good. As educative, the self cannot ever possess this self-knowing. It is a knowing through God's knowing, God's way of knowing being. For Kierkegaard, when God communicates he gives himself, gives the promise of unconditional love. God's self-giving evokes a longing for the whole, for God's self. This longing takes the soul on a journey into God. Here the self cannot seem to gain composure. The journey into God is purgative; God attends to the wrong things, loves forth love in the unlovable, in the self condemned by others and by itself. God's unrelenting vision of the good, *above* all variation and change, will not permit human beings to judge what only God can judge. For Kierkegaard, a life lived in prayer is therefore lived in the unceasing movement of longing, in the unceasing anticipation of renewed vision, in the eternal discovery of the good in unforeseen places. To see God is not to see an object, but to participate in the wholeness of God's knowing. It is a knowing that is always and everywhere experienced as sanctifying grace, as a knowing foreign to the self, at odds with the self's introverted self-obsessions. For Kierkegaard, God cannot help the self master itself. However, God *can* grace human beings, that is, can give *immeasurably more* than human beings demand.⁴

⁴I generally speak of love in the context of God's love for human beings or a love-relationship established by God. I reserve longing for a human response to God's love. For Kierkegaard, longing is a promise of intimacy or increased intimacy, a promise that only God can fulfill perfectly. God establishes a love-relationship that both evokes longing and fulfills the promise of longing. By grace, human beings participate in the fulfillment of the promise; that is, longing moves towards intimacy. The one who longs for God participates in a love-relationship. In this sense, the person is a lover of God. However, this distinction (between promise and fulfillment) is only correct if the following qualification is kept in mind: I also argue that, for Kierkegaard, longing never ceases. The lover of God will always long for God throughout all eternity. Longing is not an imperfection but an essential part of the love-relationship. As I argue in this introduction, for sinful beings longing is perceived as an imperfection because they are impatient. Impatience taints longing and transforms it into unbearable suffering.

For Kierkegaard, this understanding of the transcendent *ō*moreö is all important. As Kierkegaard writes, God öis himself the first inventor of language and the only one who holds the blessing in his hands; he is unchanged, even though he would not be able to satisfy the demands of the times!⁵ For Kierkegaard, the language that gives witness to God, from the pulpit or in writing, can only be symbolic.⁶ That is, human language must realize its own poverty, how unlike God's language of love it is. Human language can point to God and hold God up to view. However, God's language does not point; God's language is a self-communication, a self-giving love. Human beings can point towards this love-language in words. Ecclesial, academic and social situations often require a certain economy of expression, something to facilitate discussion or reflection. This pointing-language therefore has its place. However, it is also possible to forget that this language is symbolic, that it points beyond itself to a higher language. It is possible for language to become less and less meaningful, to fall sway to pride, to the thought that pointing-language is something in itself. Divorced from God's communicative activity, language becomes a plaything, a puzzle; thinking becomes a way of fitting the puzzle pieces together into an impersonal whole. Here words seem to have meaning only relative other words. In pride, language becomes self-referential and non-symbolic. Human language fails to draw our attention to a higher language beyond itself. However,

⁵ *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 395.

⁶ My understanding of symbolism, openness to reality, and religious experience is partly indebted to Eric Voegelin. See *öImmortality: Experience and Symbol,ö* and *öEquivalences of Experience and Symbolization in History,ö* in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin: Published Essays, 1966-1985*, vol. 12, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1989). See *Science, Politics and Gnosticism: Two Essays* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1990) on the question of reality and the love of wisdom.

just as language can become less and less meaningful, it is also possible for language to become more meaningful. There are also languages that attempt to communicate love by speaking lovingly. Loving communication does not just point; it attends to a person in particular; it is self-giving. For Kierkegaard, it is even possible to speak lovingly to a congregation from the pulpit, to attend to a *particular* gathering of people, to speak *to* them and not *at* them. It is perhaps even possible to write and read lovingly. However, even this self-giving communication is a miracle of grace, for Kierkegaard; it is born first in prayerful attentiveness to God's self-communication. Here human communication merely imitates God's self-communication. And so, loving communication is also symbolic; it points beyond itself to the author of grace, the "inventor of language," even as it participates by way of imitation in God's love. In human communication, even the word of love cannot give forth God. Only God, eternally himself, can truly give of himself. But human participation is possible, for Kierkegaard, because God is ever-faithful and does not humiliate by merely speaking in tongues. God allows for participation and initiates the soul into the language of love, the language above all languages.

For Kierkegaard, theological language is a response to communicative religious experiences that no word or sentences can capture. Kierkegaard is consciously aware of the difference between this symbolic language and God's language of love. However, as symbolic, Kierkegaard's religious language (especially in his discourses) is therefore not merely ironic either. Beyond his negative language, Kierkegaard tries to speak lovingly, in the right kind of spirit, with attentive vision to human needs and concerns and

ultimately to God. This reading of Kierkegaard will therefore also contribute to scholarship by suggesting how one might take Kierkegaard's theological-symbolic language seriously. Kierkegaard's theology cannot, of course, pretend to know the whole of God. There is no way to prejudge God's authoritative communication. The communication reveals a goodness by which all lesser goods are measured. The human being is not radically autonomous in this sense. The human being does not create reality. But Kierkegaard knows these human limitations *because* God promises himself, his whole. The promise of wholeness (unconditional love) evokes, not pretension, but a longing in the soul for the whole. The promise is not a lifeless idea implanted in the head, possessed cognitively, but a communicative interaction. The person who hears the promise well and interprets it well, begins to ache. The ache is an anticipation of fulfillment. The soul moves forward with anticipation. This journey of longing is an education; it is not blind. The miracle is that in God human beings retain a measure of independence and dignity. The freedom of interpretation of God's authorial intention is an irreducible reality that human beings cannot fully comprehend or explain. There is no basis for it. The miracle is original and reveals itself. And yet it reveals itself communicatively. For Kierkegaard, the freedom of interpretation is made possible because God communicates with self-awareness, with purpose. As purposeful (and not blindly emanative) the communication invites an interpretive response, a longing to discover purpose. Here the heart is made needy and joyful in anticipation of the promised whole, a whole that cannot reveal itself immediately (with overwhelming force) but only communicatively. To hear the promise communicatively (as a promise of God's self-

giving love) is to be joyful in need; and to heed the invitation is to ache joyfully without ceasing. Every moment of divine self-revelation only gives way to more longing.

However, anthropocentric readings of Kierkegaard cannot take this religious-interpretive aspect of Kierkegaard's theology seriously. Take George Pattison's understanding of Kierkegaard's religious language.⁷ On the one hand, Pattison wants to examine Kierkegaard's understanding of a life lived before a higher power. He does not want to reduce Kierkegaard's theology to an ultra-reductive anthropology, and does allow for certain existential experiences that appear as grace on the horizon of human understanding, that is, as *given* by a higher power. However, these experiences only become rationally credible insofar as we can interpret them anthropocentrically. Pattison ultimately interprets Kierkegaard's theological language in a manner that depersonalizes God and grounds his theology in anthropocentric concerns. He says, for example, that Kierkegaard's meditations on God's gifts are *really* ways of talking about the beauty of life, not about a personal, self-communicative Gift-giver:

That every good and perfect gift comes from above means that, despite it all, despite the tricks played by contingency and the steady erosion of relationships and vital power at the hands of time and circumstance despite death waiting in the background of every breath we take, life is worth it, worth going on with, and that even in the face of mass killing and all the evil of the human heart, life is beautiful, though we can never adequately explain why. The meaning of the figurative expression in relation to God, then, is that, in Schleiermacherian terms, God is the *whence* of a belief in life's goodness sufficient to empower our personal and moral striving: a power, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness.⁸

⁷ In *Kierkegaard's Upbuilding Discourses: Philosophy, Theology, Literature* (London: Routledge, 2002).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 130-131.

What makes life beautiful, it would seem, is that we are still able to strive morally in the face of evil. How does God figure into this? God is ða powerö that empowers our ðmoral strivingö. God is a mysterious source of (not just our capacity to strive but) our willing, the actualization of our potential. But what does it mean to call God a power? What is this power that enables our ðpersonal and moral strivingö? What lies at the ground of this willing? Nietzsche also says that there is a source (a will to power) that causes human beings to strive moralistically or ascetically.⁹ How can we differentiate between Nietzsche's understanding of this mysterious source of power and Kierkegaard's understanding of God? Whether we call the ðsourceö of *our* striving ðGodö or a ðwill-to-powerö cannot possibly matter if our aim is to articulate the nature of *our* moral striving and not the *source* of our striving. But if we remain agonistic here this means that we cannot take Kierkegaard's theological language seriously. Why does Kierkegaard insist on a Christian-theistic language? When faced with the question Pattison appeals, not to Kierkegaard himself, but to a poem by Hölderlin about thanksgiving. He interprets the poem like this: ðThe question is not whether the person who interprets their life religiously is justified in the light of any general ontology or system of knowledge, but whether the joy they find in being able to renew both their faith in the good and their practical commitment to realising it in the face of sin can be satisfied with anything less than thanksgiving.ö¹⁰ However, this still fails to explain why Kierkegaard speaks the language of theism. Thankfulness is a relational experience; we are thankful to something or someone. However, if we are dealing with an anthropocentric event, we

⁹ See note 55.

¹⁰ Ibid., 138.

must ignore the relationality of thanksgiving (*that* for which we are thankful); what is important is *our* experience of joy over *our* moral facility, a joy that needs to satisfy itself in *us* in thanksgiving. Pattison thinks we can translate Kierkegaard's theological language into an agnostic-philosophical language without losing much of real significance. To Pattison's credit this language is not pseudo-scientific, not something with the appearance of ethical neutrality. But it is a language that evades some very important questions to which Kierkegaard's theistic language deliberately draws our attention, as I hope to show.

Another way to avoid the embarrassment of taking Kierkegaard religious language too seriously would be to reduce Kierkegaard's theology to dogmatics. That is, by enclosing Kierkegaard within a "hermeneutical circle," within a set of beliefs or practices that remains largely incomprehensible to people outside the circle. This enclosing puts Kierkegaard in his place; we can read him without being threatened by embarrassing truth claims. Indeed, we ask, was Kierkegaard not sophisticated enough to know his own limits (set by Kant's critique of metaphysics)? The image of the circle here suggests that theology is an internally coherent system of signs and signifiers unrelated to external reality. This approach appears credible (at least to people on the inside) because there is a certain amount of internal consistency here: the pieces of the puzzle fit together. However, the question remains if this approach is credible to people outside the circle. Commenting on John Milbank, George Pattison writes, "It may well seem self-evident from within a particular religious community that we should invoke just these criteria for justifying or repudiating just these specific doctrinal or counter-doctrinal assertions. . . ."

Nevertheless, the results must always seem questionable, when not frankly absurd, to those who stand outside the charmed circle. Theology, in Milbank's sense, is not merely the private language of a club, but is happy to be so.¹¹ I do not have the capacity or space to fully comment on the dogmatic approach to Kierkegaard. But I will briefly comment on some authors who interpret Kierkegaard from a particular Christian theological point of view in order to see how one might begin to address the question of private language clubs in Kierkegaard scholarship. In *Kierkegaard and the Treachery of Love*,¹² Amy Laura Hall highlights the offensive nature of Kierkegaard's interpretation of Christian love. Her language is thoroughly rooted in traditional Christian theology (in a particular Christian understanding of sin, guilt and redemption). And yet she attempts to bring Kierkegaard's apparently non-Christian writings into a *dialogue* with his Christian ethics (exemplified by *Works of Love*). This dialogue is between a secular understanding of life and a Christian understanding of God's redemptive love. Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* is a critique of human self-delusion. However, the purpose of Kierkegaard's critique of human love is not only theological, but also specifically soteriological. Kierkegaard's aim here is to bring the reader to Christ.¹³ We are saved from false love to the extent that we remain in perpetual relation to the one who truly fulfills the law of love, the same one by whose work we become beholden to God.¹⁴ However, this soteriological side of Kierkegaard's authorship is precisely not contained within a hermeneutically-enclosed circle. Indeed, it is made possible precisely because

¹¹Ibid., 119.

¹²Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

¹³Ibid., 173

¹⁴Ibid., 6.

Christianity is not imprisoned within its own religiously-specific boundaries.

Kierkegaard's theology is universally relevant. How could Christ save if God's Word could not speak precisely to human beings who have forgotten God, if God's law of love did not offend human pride, indeed, cross the boundaries that protect the prideful heart in its self-delusions? As Hall puts it, Kierkegaard tries to bring Jesus, who fulfills the law of love, ðinto the previously comfortable Danish parlor. Kierkegaard's is a ðcontemporizing of Jesus's work and parables, forcing the reader to reckon with the law's import for our personal lives.ö¹⁵ Throughout his writing Kierkegaard speaks *specifically* to a secular audience (including those who disguise their secularity as Christianity, a problem all Christians share). This is because true religion, for Kierkegaard, is not an enclosed system of thought but a way of living and orientating oneself in God's communicative love. For Kierkegaard, it is therefore impossible to cordon off Christianity within a set of doctrines and practices incomprehensible to outsiders. As it happens, God communicates universally, attends lovingly to even the person deemed unredeemable by human standards. God transcends any Christianity learned by rote, any systematic understanding of religion that might exclude ðoutsiders.ö As Michael Plekon puts it, ðIn the end, the authority that Kierkegaard invokes and obeys, is not a rule, not an institution, not a holy book, not a destructive, vindictive judge, but the One who is Infinite Love.ö This means that ðKierkegaard's theological understanding reveals a fullness even in the nihilistic, anarchic polemicsö on the church.¹⁶ Plekon, an author specifically attuned to the

¹⁵ Ibid., 15. See also pages 41-45

¹⁶ ðSøren Kierkegaard at the End: Authority in the Attack on the Church,ö in *Anthropology and Authority: Essays on Søren Kierkegaard*, eds. Poul Houe, Gordon D. Marino, and Sven Hakon Rossel (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), 99-106. I am indebted to Plekon for drawing my attention to the Communion discourses

doctrinal implications of Kierkegaard's theology, argues here that Kierkegaard's polemical aims are under the authority of "Infinite Love." Kierkegaard wants to open up secular and nominal believers to God. Indeed, Kierkegaard does this because he has no choice. He is under a higher authority that actively prohibits all attempts at parochial exclusion. God's love is universal. As we shall see, the subject of the communion discourses is Christ's "real presence." This is the Lutheran formulation of the Eucharistic mystery. But for Kierkegaard, the understanding of "real presence" is not just a doctrine containable in a book of prayer. Neither is it merely a private event in the heart of the believer. It speaks to a dialogical event, God's communicative presence. The service is not blindly devotional (like a speaking in tongues), something incomprehensible to "outsiders." The service is a way of orienting oneself prayerfully in the miracle of God's grace. There is no special language here that can possess God and exclude the uninitiated person. The meaning of the service reveals itself communicatively in prayer with God, not in blind obedience to ceremonial rules, which would in *themselves* (that is, devoid of transcendent meaning) be deemed arbitrary by outsiders (and rightly so). A further example: In his writings Kierkegaard is ultimately concerned with the Chalcedonian definition of Christ. However, as David Gouwens argues, this doctrine "is important for him not in itself, or out of regard for tradition, but because it sums up what he perceives to be the Christian narrative of salvation, the "sacred history" of the divine love incarnate in a particular human being in order to redeem fallen humanity. . . . The focus of

and the importance of doctrinal and liturgical questions in Kierkegaard. See Plekon's "Kierkegaard the Theologian: The roots of His Theology in *Works of Love*" in *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community*, eds. George B. Connel and C. Stephen Evans (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, 1992), 2-17.

Christology is therefore on the story of Jesus Christ as unique and unsubstitutable savior who embodies divine love.¹⁷ But this also means that Kierkegaard is not simply concerned with subjective religious experiences of Christ, as such. Salvation in Christ is not simply a subjectively-felt altered state of consciousness. Faith is a "response" to a "divine event" that "becomes applicable to human experience, altering the *situation* of the person whom Christ confronts."¹⁸ This means that the "language of revelation" is "the transcendent source of Christian faith" and that "dogmatic language is independent of psychological concepts and experience."¹⁹ Therefore, unlike some liberal Protestant theologians, Kierkegaard is concerned with objective reality. However, Gouwens explains, unlike "theological objectivism," as exemplified by Karl Barth, Kierkegaard is concerned with the human response to objective reality. Kierkegaard "sees Christian faith as a story of passions and loves: the divine passion embodied in a human life seeks 'equality with the learner,' a passion that prompts response in either love or offense."²⁰ However, the human passions in question are not just subjective but responsive to "divine passion." As Arnold Come puts it, for Kierkegaard, the "encounter" with "divine authority (the authority of God or the eternal) is qualitatively different from our encounter with every other kind of authority. Therefore, the concept formation (theology) which derives from, or takes place in relationship to, this authority has a different status and function than all other concept formation (philosophy, science, technology)."²¹ For

¹⁷ *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). 142-143.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 146, 147. Emphasis original.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 72

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 150.

²¹ *Kierkegaard as Theologian: Recovering Myself* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 21. The following comments are based on chapter one of Come's book, which introduces his general approach

Kierkegaard, according to Come, there is a certain kind of theological language (presented first and most importantly in the Bible) that is essentially a response to divine authority. This language mediates religious experiences, but the mediation is not just equivocal to other languages. Moreover, the experiences of God which give rise to a particular theological language are not just affective (that is, they do not just stir up an emotion that a person could *get* elsewhere in a different context). Quoting from Kierkegaard's *Papirer*, Come argues that for Kierkegaard "Christian emotion is of a specific qualitative sort, and therefore in order to be able to express oneself Christianly, there is required (beyond emotion's universal language of the heart) skill and schooling in the Christian definition-of-concepts."²² But again, note that this qualitatively different language is ultimately informed by an "encounter" with "divine authority." The language in question is not a parochial retreat into dogmatics but a *response* to a dialogical event.

To these theologically-oriented studies of Kierkegaard, I add a reading of Kierkegaard attentive to a specific theological theme, the longing for God. This reading will show how Kierkegaard's religious writings (as exemplified in his discourses) are concerned with a non-Copernican understanding of religious experience, with a theology that orients itself to God's self-communication. Kierkegaard's language is therefore neither anthropocentric nor theologically self-enclosed. For Kierkegaard, literary, prayerful, liturgical and discursive forms of communication are ultimately responsive to a divine language that no human language can possess. To read Kierkegaard is to interpret

to Kierkegaard. Come here is largely interpreting Kierkegaard's *The Book on Adler* here. I do not deal with this work of Kierkegaard in the thesis. The whole book deserves a careful interpretive reading. I do not have the capacity or space to do this here, however. My reading of Kierkegaard's understanding of God's self-revelation is derived from a reading of selected upbuilding and Christian discourses.

²² Ibid., 28

an author who is trying to interpret God's Word, who is striving to orient himself and the reader in God's dispossessive, communicative love, precisely in that which disturbs the self-possessed ego, precisely in that which escapes systematic formulation in linguistic, cultural or religious hermeneutical circles of belief or practice.

Before I turn to my discussion in chapter one, let me note a clarification regarding the topic of this thesis. In chapter one I critique, what I call, "anthropological" interpretations of Kierkegaard. This critique is not meant to suggest that Kierkegaard is unconcerned with anthropology. One limitation of this thesis is that I cannot deal fully with Kierkegaard's human psychology or his understanding of socially defined needs, as developed in *Works of Love*, for instance. However, as I argue in my conclusion, Kierkegaard certainly does think that we have natural needs and cravings. In this thesis I cannot deal fully with the relationship between these needs and the longing for God. However, I will note here that Kierkegaard's creational theology will not permit a misanthropic, inhuman resignation from life or a desire for the annihilation of being in God. For Kierkegaard, human beings have needs that are created and ordained by God.²³ That creation is God's gift is never at issue for Kierkegaard (a point I make in the thesis itself). God's gifts, as gifts, are a manner of divine self-communication. These gifts live in and through God's creative, sustaining and sanctifying love. However, for Kierkegaard, God's self, the whole beyond the gift, can never reveal itself immediately. We cannot know the mystery of God's love fully through nature, even though nature is good (as Kierkegaard repeatedly affirms and as I note in the thesis). That God allows

²³See Gouwens's (*op.cit.*) discussion of Kierkegaard and anthropology in chapter two of *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker*.

human beings to see *beyond* the gift, to learn the promise of God's eternal love and live in the fulfilment of that promise, is a miracle of God's self-revelation. For Kierkegaard, the loving intention behind every gift, above and beyond every moment of gift-giving, abides unchanged by the demands of the times. As we shall see, Kierkegaard says that God gives himself in giving his gifts. However, in *itself* (as a matter of fact) no thing in the world can reveal itself *as* gift, as given with loving intention and purpose. A gift-giver can give anonymously; a person can receive something without considering the intention behind the giving; no particular gift *necessarily* reveals the gift-giver. Therefore, we know God, for Kierkegaard, only because God chooses to give himself and communicate himself; this is the gift above and beyond all gifts.

For Kierkegaard, to say that God gives himself does not mean that God imposes himself and erases human identity. God's wholeness does not absorb the soul and violate every measure of freedom in a person. For Kierkegaard, God gives himself in the sense that God loves with his whole being, loves with a wholeness of vision, with an undivided attentiveness. By grace, human beings can receive and participate in the gift of God's self-communication. However, for Kierkegaard, this also means that there are no natural desires or needs that could truly bring a person to God. Indeed, God's self-communication causes the most profound need in the soul, the longing for God. The fulfillment of this need is therefore not an expression of latent tendencies in creation, as if the God-relationship were always already written into human nature.²⁴ Any reductive

²⁴Do human beings have a potential for longing that remains dormant until activated by God? I do not use this kind of language because I do not wish to mislead. Kierkegaard certainly thinks human beings have a nature and have natural needs. But the needs that I deal with in thesis are not natural; they are learned. They develop as a person's relationship with God develops. We might say that human beings have a

approach here would ignore the dialogical nature of the human response to divine love.

For Kierkegaard, there is therefore no cosmic force (flowing through humans) that can bring sinful human beings back to God. But this is not because human beings have lost contact with such a force. As I argue in chapter two, it is because the connection between human beings and God is essentially communicative. The communicative connection has been breached and only communication can restore it. For Kierkegaard, only the person who hears and responds to God's promise of unconditional love can begin to participate in God.

capacity to respond to God. However, this capacity is empty and is not even in need (blessedly in need) until God's loves the need into being. On the question of freedom and the human response to God's love see Gouwens (*op.cit.*), 192-201.

Chapter 1

THE "MISFORTUNE" OF BEING: THE KIERKEGAARDIAN SELF AND THE PROBLEM OF MORAL IDENTITY

1.

Critics have long argued that Kierkegaard's theology is defined by secrecy and inwardness. The Kierkegaardian individual, these critics argue, stands alone, singularly responsible before an uncommunicative God.²⁵ A person's longing for God culminates in an irrational leap into an otherworldly, illogical abyss. It is a passion largely indistinguishable from a death-wish. What could possibly motivate the leap if God remains wholly unknowable? Surely only temporal conditions could do it; surely only the person exhausted by life longs for a lifeless Beyond, longs for self-annihilation. Here God becomes the solution, the consuming fire that cleanses the person of earthly impurity. Kierkegaard's God is of the dead, not of the living, it would seem. However, other interpreters try to defend Kierkegaard against these charges of irrationalism by arguing that the leap of faith is actually motivated by practical reason. In their anthology, *Foundation of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community*, George Connell and Stephen Evens note that, whereas "Kierkegaard has routinely been categorized as the quintessential proponent of irrationality and individualism," recent scholarship has set out

²⁵ For example, Emmanuel Levinas and Alastair MacIntyre. See Levinas's *Existence and Ethics* in *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, eds., Johnathan Ree and Jane Chamberlain (Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 1998). For Kierkegaard, according to Levinas, the external world "could never match up to human inwardness" so that "the subject had a secret, forever inexpressible, and it was this secret that defined its subjectivity" (27). See the excerpt from *After Virtue* and a new essay by MacIntyre in *Kierkegaard after MacIntyre: Essays on Freedom, Narrative and Virtue*, eds. John J. Davenport and Anthony Rudd (Chicago: Open Court, 2001).

to challenge these labels "as misleadingly partial and undialectical."²⁶ Some of these readings argue that Kierkegaard's existentialism is grounded in an anthropology that presupposes ethical commitments. This "anthropological" approach makes sense if we assume that Kierkegaard's apparent irrationalism is inextricably linked with his negative theology. That is, if Kierkegaard has nothing substantive to say about God (since God is otherworldly and uncommunicative), perhaps his most interesting insights are anthropological, not theological. At its core, according to these readings, Kierkegaard's project is a "practical philosophical anthropology" that calls us to realize an essential human existential need for ego integrity, the need to "maintain the integrity of the 'personal I' and to unify all that empirically constitutes the individual's 'world' in accord with practical reason."²⁷ Belief in God helps a person achieve self-mastery, unify the disparate elements of life and overcome existential fragmentation. Fragmentation motivates the longing for wholeness. A person's longing for God is therefore practical after all. It is not a death-wish but a way of negotiating the existential problems of earthly life.

In my thesis I hope to challenge both readings of Kierkegaard's understanding of longing through an examination of the *Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*²⁸ and the *Four Upbuilding Discourses (1844)*.²⁹ Along with Kierkegaard's critics, I argue that the

²⁶ Introduction to *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community*, eds. George B. Connel and C. Stephen Evans (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, 1992), vii.

²⁷ Peter J. Mehl. "Kierkegaard and the Relativist Challenge to Practical Philosophy," in *Kierkegaard after MacIntyre; Essays on Freedom, Narrative and Virtue*, eds. John J. Davenport and Anthony Rudd (Chicago: Open Court, 2001), 10, 16, 18.

²⁸ From *Christian Discourses*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

²⁹ From *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

longing for God is fundamentally dispossessive. Unlike his critics, I argue that the longing in question is a response to God's self-communication. The longing for God is both purgative (a way³⁰ into God) and illuminative (a way of life in God's communicative love). As a way of life, the longing in question is precisely a desire *for* dispossession in God, a desire to *live longingly* in God, a longing that longs for more longing.

I wish to make this argument, in part, because I believe that there are inherent problems with both the anthropological defence of Kierkegaard and the irrationalist critique that motivates the apology in the first place. I wish to examine in more detail these problems before I proceed to my own argument (as outlined in the preface to this thesis). According to the anthropological argument, Kierkegaard shows that "it is *rational* for me to choose an ethical over a purely aesthetic life," since "aestheticism undermines the cohesion of my life, destroys its narrative structure, and this leaves me prey to boredom and despair." Likewise, it is rational for me to choose a religious life over a purely aesthetic/ethical life, since religion is "harsher" and "more demanding" than a "blandly conventional morality" and can thereby "satisfy" my "need for a strong sense of narrative unity."³¹ So while this interpretation is essentially anthropological, it does not preclude talk of God. However, $\bar{\omega}$ God $\bar{\omega}$ here does not function as a transcendent reality beyond human measure; human nature is the measure of God: God is

³⁰ By $\bar{\omega}$ way of life $\bar{\omega}$ I mean both $\bar{\omega}$ manner of life $\bar{\omega}$ and $\bar{\omega}$ way $\bar{\omega}$ in the sense of a journey. As we will see below, the life of longing is lived with certain promises in mind (the promise of God's unfailing love); but it is also a life lived relationally, without expectations, in openness towards God. The Danish word for longing is *Længsel*.

³¹ Anthony Rudd. "Reason in Ethics: MacIntyre and Kierkegaard," in *Kierkegaard after MacIntyre; Essays on Freedom, Narrative and Virtue*, eds. John J. Davenport and Anthony Rudd, 131-150 (Chicago: Open Court, 2001), 143, 147, 145.

the *condition* for the possibility of ego integrity. Here we might argue with Hubert Dreyfus that, for Kierkegaard, commitment "*defines* one's reality." Religious commitment, in particular, makes the world meaningful if it allows a person to devote herself with infinite passion to finite life, if it enables her to "satisfy the need to make the finite absolutely significant." Kierkegaard thinks Christ serves this function; but it does not matter whether the object of commitment is Christ or any other saviour in time, since the goal here is identity formation in itself. We can therefore conclude: "*Whatever* constituted the self as the individual self by giving it its identity, thereby making it 'a new being' and healing it of despair--that 'something' would be its Savior."³² The goal is identity formation itself and *whatever* serves this function is valid from the perspective of practical reason. In this sense, according to Edward Mooney, Kierkegaard dispenses with the need for objectivity altogether, since his religious psychology identifies that "primitive religious impulse worth preserving that bypasses any need to frame creedal doctrines or make substantive claims to knowledge." By focusing on the needs and impulses of identity formation and our craving for meaning, Kierkegaard initiates us into "ceremonies of personhood" that "signal even sacramental worth."³³ Fundamentally, the religious in Kierkegaard becomes a story about *personhood*. Integration is the good above all, the cosmic centre around which life revolves. Here we might conclude with Gordon Marino that "Kierkegaard pictures the earnest life as though there were nothing to it but . . . commitment." For Kierkegaard, "there is much for the moral teacher to do, but

³² Hubert L. Dreyfus. "Kierkegaard on the Self," in *Ethics, Love, and Faith in Kierkegaard*, ed. Edward F. Mooney, 11-23 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 19,18, 23. Emphasis added in both quotes.

³³ Edward F. Mooney. *On Søren Kierkegaard: Dialogue, Polemics, Lost Intimacy, and Time* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 55. In the first quote from Mooney is paraphrasing Richard Rorty. However, he finds this account of Rorty's *theology* applicable to Kierkegaard.

nothing to teach; there is no object of commitment, no knowledge to be conveyed."

Intention and purity of the heart determine moral worth, but "the rest is external" and of little importance.³⁴ In this sense, as Peter Mehl argues, Kierkegaard's theology is really anthropology. The real motivation behind Kierkegaard's theological language is the despair over finitude. "It is the experience of despair that drives Kierkegaard to his conviction that there must be a God. Spiritual despair cannot be the final word, there must be a divine source for my yearning, for only a transcendent standard can ground my aspirations as spirit." Despair gives rise to a longing for "complete transparency," "the absolute source of who we are and what we do," "a God's-eye view" of the universe. Since this "urge" is not easily discarded, the only alternative is to posit God as just the source of this longing. In this sense Kierkegaard's theology really says a lot more about human beings than it does about God. The really "crucial" thing here is "the passion, the infinite longing, the urge to complete transcendence, an urge which we cannot achieve, but which remains, and the remainder must be God." In this sense, we might even say that "the striving for God is God."³⁵

According to this interpretation, Kierkegaard dispenses with the need for objectivity and grounds his theology in subjective, practical-rational truth claims. However, this is problematic, since a large part of Kierkegaard's writing is devotional in nature. It is one thing to posit God rationally as a condition for the possibility of autonomous personality, but Kierkegaard actually asks us to give ourselves over to God,

³⁴Gordon Marino. "The Place of reason in Kierkegaard's Ethics," in *Kierkegaard after MacIntyre; Essays on Freedom, Narrative and Virtue*, eds. John J. Davenport and Anthony Rudd, 113-130 (Chicago: Open Court, 2001), 121, 122.

³⁵ *Thinking Through Kierkegaard: Existential Identity in a Pluralistic World* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 108, 71, 72.

to live in a relationship with God. What does this devotional side of religious experience look like from the perspective of the anthropological interpretation? We are concerned here with a person's relationship to external reality, not merely a necessary condition for ego integrity. But from within the anthropological framework of analysis, grounded as it is in practical reason, we know nothing of God. The actual content of religious devotion, the stories we tell of God, the hymns we sing in praise of his name, have one goal in mind: to integrate a person. In this sense, religion is self-generated. As Alastair Hannay argues, for Kierkegaard, "human beings are 'infinitely' concerned for their own eternal blessedness; in other words, the existence of some cosmological state of affairs" (the anthropological argument). At the same time, "there can be no objective basis for believing that the said cosmological state of affairs obtains" (the existential problem). The Kierkegaardian theological/existential project is therefore an account of what it is like to commit to a cosmology for which there is no evidence. For Kierkegaard, such an account is possible since lack of objectivity is no reason to disbelieve that such a cosmology exists. Without objective evidence the only thing that can spur belief on is "self-certainty," the "performative product of the agent's own independent decision."³⁶ Only willed commitment permits faith in an "objective, external world" even though we have already discovered this world to be "an alien environment for an interest in personal fulfillment."³⁷ Unbelief is therefore a failure of the will to overcome uncertainty, a failure to will belief into existence. Or as Louis Mackey argues, the purpose of Kierkegaard's theology is to "drive the reader away from the world, to a confrontation with God." It is

³⁶ *Kierkegaard* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 12, 13.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 46.

about the struggle with God enacted by individuals who are "really isolated from other beings, receiving from them neither support, insistence, opposition, nor allurements." This is a struggle without "matter, content, locus, opportunity, or exigence for action" for these must be generated in the individual's "own freedom."³⁸ This existential/theological problem (commitment to something with no objective evidence) is the existentialist flip-side of a modernist Copernican psychology that limits the bounds of reasoning to transcendental truth claims.

We can now see how the above mentioned critics and defenders of Kierkegaard complement each other. First, we start with the critique of Kierkegaard's individualism, with a universe devoid of knowable cosmic meaning, composed of human beings "really isolated from other beings, receiving from them neither support, insistence, opposition, nor allurements." But then (secondly) Kierkegaard's apparent anthropology enters the stage. As a substitute for a real cosmology: a Copernican subjective universe, a cosmology affirmed by the will, a vision of order imposed on an *otherwise* meaningless universe. There are certain analogies here with Max Weber's critique of Protestantism in *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*.³⁹ Weber shows, in effect, how the Calvinist rationalization of life was a substitute cosmology imposed on an already demystified universe. The demystification of the universe was a "great historic process" (105) but it was the Calvinists who attempted with utmost consistency to transcend the

³⁸ Louis Mackey. *Points of View: Readings of Kierkegaard* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1986), 152, 153. See M.G. Piety's critique of Mackey in "The Place of the World in Kierkegaard's Ethics," in *Kierkegaard: the Self in Society*, eds. George Pattison and Steven Shakespeare (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 24-42.

³⁹ *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, ed. Anthony Giddens (New York: Routledge, 1992). The following page references in the text will refer to this edition.

inner loneliness (104) and inner isolation (108) of their alienation from external reality. The life of the saint was directed solely toward a transcendental end, salvation. But precisely for that reason it was thoroughly rationalized in this world and dominated entirely by the aim to add to the glory of God on earth. . . . Only a life guided by constant thought could achieve conquest over the state of nature. Descartes's *cogito ergo sum* was taken over by the contemporary Puritans with this ethical reinterpretation (118). For Weber, the task of the Calvinist saint was to rationalize an otherwise meaningless life, not orient himself in a cosmos inherently meaningful. Nature had been demystified and for this reason the saint had to "add to the glory of God on earth." This *addition* was generated cognitively and imposed on sensuous life. It was "the destruction of spontaneous, impulsive enjoyment," and ultimately the "methodical control over the whole man" (119). Now, of course, I do not want to argue that the above mentioned interpreters think Kierkegaard is a Puritan. But there is an important theme that they share with Weber. The above readings reduce Kierkegaard's theology to a kind of works-oriented religiosity. We are told that Kierkegaard's fundamental concern (underlying even his theology) is *not* a life directed upwards in prayer with God (since, God is otherworldly and uncommunicative) but a life directed downwards towards sensuous life or selfish inclinations. A person proves himself spiritually by integrating his life into a whole. The person is responsible for the cosmic coherence of the universe, a universe which would otherwise be "an alien environment for an interest in personal fulfillment." True, God is ultimately responsible for the order of things, but we know nothing of this order; we cannot love it or contemplate it and it has no bearing on daily life. The

Kierkegaardian self, the self related to itself (its own inclinations), strives to be lord and master; but with no higher good for which to long, with eyes focused purely on lower inclinations, this self cannot but seek its very *identity* in relation to the lower. Self-mastery becomes *the* good in itself. The true cosmic centre is this struggle with the self. True, Kierkegaard ultimately says that a person will annihilate himself in this moralistic struggle. However, as noted, it is still possible to argue that the leap into God is just one more way of integrating life into a coherent whole. The important thing to note here is that even this leap is “self-generated,” willed into existence. Again, the cosmic-centre is the ego, even when that ego wills its own downfall and *self*-generates a cosmos.

It is precisely this framework of analysis that I want to forgo in my reading of Kierkegaard. For Kierkegaard (whom I will compare with Augustine in this regard), the striving for self-mastery, devoid of longing for a transcendent good lovable and enjoyable for its own sake, culminates in spiritual exhaustion.⁴⁰ In my reading of Kierkegaard’s understanding of longing I hope to show how he is fundamentally out of step with the above outlined understanding of spiritual identity. For Kierkegaard, a person’s longing for God is indeed “directed solely toward a transcendental end, salvation,” to put it in Weber’s terms. Nevertheless, this otherworldly longing, this dying to self, is really a longing for life in God. God here is not just a name for the human capacity to regulate and conquer inclination, a cognitive principle defined by its struggle against “impulsive

⁴⁰ Here the whole question of personal identity and self-consciousness in German idealism becomes vital, an issue that I deal with briefly below. As we shall see, especially in chapter three, the question is important in interpreting Kierkegaard’s own understanding of spiritual identity. I also realize that the issue of personhood is relevant to Kierkegaard’s *Sickness Unto Death*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983]. I do not deal with this work in the thesis. As with all Kierkegaard’s works, *Sickness* requires close textual interpretation. I do not have the space to deal with the entire work and I do not feel the need to supplement this thesis with decontextualized references from it.

enjoyment.ö Life in God is not a question of proving God real by öthoroughlyö rationalizing öthis world,ö adding öto the glory of God on earth.ö For Kierkegaard, as I shall argue, the longing for God is way of life in God, a life informed by God's self-communication.

2.

In order to further define the issue at stake here, I would like to highlight Ronald Green's book *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt*.⁴¹ Like the authors examined above, Green tries to defend Kierkegaard from charges of irrationalism; and like these authors he tries to interpret Kierkegaard as a modernist. Green points to an early passage from *Papers* in which Kierkegaard seems to see "the possibility of fashioning some kind of epistemological response to Kant's skepticism about the possibility of knowledge of ultimate reality, perhaps by identifying, after the fashion of Schleiermacher, some special religious consciousness through which we might enter into relationship with God" (76). But this never happens, as Green points out; and with time, "faith becomes for him a leap beyond knowledge, a leap into the absurd with its point of departure in ethical-religious experience." However, Green concludes that Kierkegaard's apparent irrationalism was heavily influenced by Kantian epistemology. While Kierkegaard's understanding of faith "seems in marked defiance of reason, a celebration of irrationality that is very different from the tentative and qualified steps beyond worldly experience permitted by Kant's 'moral faith'", Kierkegaard "is working within a Kantian structure of thought" (135). This

⁴¹(New York: State University of New York, 1992). The following page reference in the text will refer to this book.

is because his understanding of religion, his Christology, for instance, "links what Kant has told us we cannot ordinarily think of as belonging together: God and time, the eternal and the temporal, necessity and existence." Kierkegaard's very understanding of why Christ is the "absurd" presupposes Kantian epistemology (136). If the Kantian categories are indeed authoritative and exhaustive for Kierkegaard, as Green argues, then any experience outside their dichotomous boundaries is necessarily irrational. Now Green could have left the argument there; but he goes one step further and argues that Kierkegaardian faith might be rational in a Kantian sense after all. This seems like a difficult argument to make. Kierkegaard's account of the God-relationship places the existing individual right in the middle of the unresolved dialectical tension between the temporal and eternal. While for Kant, the antinomies resolve themselves in possibility (God is a "possible but unknowable intelligible domain beyond our experience" [69]), Kierkegaard apparently wants to make this unknowable God *actual* in the human heart. If only the "God in time can effect" change in a sinful soul, then that soul must in some way come into contact with this revelatory event. That is, the event must be pedagogical, experiential, and relational. The soul must learn something *in* and *through* the experience of revelation itself (if the incarnational aspect of the event it is not to remain superfluous). The temporal event itself (the content of revelation) has to educate, not the atemporal, logical form. Kierkegaard requires that God's grace actually reveal itself incarnationally in history, in a person's devotional relationship with God. Kierkegaard's Christ is not a "rational archetype" (174) as he is for Kant. "Christianity's teacher is no midwife who draws out our a priori knowledge" but the "judge and saviour who in a 'decisive' moment

in time redeems the learner from his captivity to sin and error (176). Because "we do not eternally possess knowledge of the good, we can arrive at it only temporally through the decisive initiative of another, the God who enters" into time (177). But this is deeply problematic from a Kantian perspective. There is simply nothing morally significant that a person could learn from such an experience. There is no practical-rational argument in favour of this *actuality*, precisely because it is an event in history and not a cognitive principle. This is how Green initially presents the problematic. However, in itself, this account is in danger of turning Kierkegaard into an irrationalist (from the Kantian perspective). How does Green defend Kierkegaard's Kantianism? Green begins to argue that the historicity of Christ might not be that important after all for Kierkegaard. He offers two arguments for this assertion. The first is based on an argument from Josiah Thomas, who says that in "Kierkegaard's later writings the historical Jesus fades into the background leaving the reader of these works alone with the single fact of his historicity" (177). The other argument is that Kierkegaard shows "extreme disinterest in the historical Jesus in his diatribe against scientific biblical scholarship and in his belief that 'contemporaneity' with Christ offers the believer no spiritual advantage" (177). It will remain to be seen if these two arguments are interpretively adequate; but for now let me focus on the logic of this argument. In order to reconcile Kierkegaard with Kant's rationalism, Green argues that Kierkegaard establishes his incarnational theology on practical-rational grounds. While Kierkegaard's view of human capacity is even more pessimistic than Kant's and while he therefore places more emphasis on the primacy of Christ's salvific activity over human moral striving, Kierkegaard's arguments may also be

logically grounded. Kierkegaard seems to argue that our experience of human depravity combined with the demands of moral reason permit us to argue in favour of divine grace (137). This is an argument grounded (anthropologically) in the experience of conflicting wills and the power of moral law to override selfish inclinations. Human beings are *worse off* in Kierkegaard's view (compared with Kant) and so he establishes (on practical rational grounds) that "only the 'God in time' can effect the kind of moral redemption human beings require." It is therefore "not clear that Kant's epistemology rules this belief out, and it may even require it" (if Kierkegaard's apparent anthropology is correct) (137). That is, "for both thinkers faith arises and takes form within the context of what are essentially similar structures of thought" (136). In this sense, the formal properties of both arguments are the same. Both thinkers hold that practical reason allows us to postulate reality beyond experience (138). Quoting Gordon Michalson, Green goes on to argue that Kierkegaard might in this regard be "more 'rational'" than Kant, since he shows that a sinful will cannot will itself out of sin. "For where Kant attempts to offset a willed error with another act of will and ends up on the borders of incoherence, Kierkegaard openly shows that the only way to offset a willed error is through a reconciling act coming from the 'outside,' producing the 'new creature' that even Kant admits each of us must become" (175). Whereas Kant "chooses to bypass the question of whether God's grace or our works initiate the process of redemption, since this question . . . belongs to the realm of intelligible causality," (178). Kierkegaard says that human incapacity necessarily requires divine intervention. However, if God's self-revelation is a mere rational necessity, where does this leave Kierkegaard's incarnational theology? Green

goes on to argue that while (for Kierkegaard) God reveals himself in history, "he is not more encountered in history than is Kant's archetype." The saviour's "qualities, including his historical reality and initiative in grace, are conceptually validated within the realm of our subjective moral experience" (177), not through a living relationship with the spirit of Christ. We might say that "Kierkegaard's Christ is Kant's eternal moral archetype logically transformed into a decisive historical redeemer" (178). This very logical transformation "requires Kierkegaard to attribute this validation to God's initiative, not to the agency of our unaided moral reason" (177-178). On the one hand, Green's Kierkegaard argues that Christ's historicity is decisive. Because the eternal good is not in us, we must "arrive at it," learn it in time through the teacher, in our devotional relationship to Christ. Revelation is heteronomous, contingent, and alogical. On the other hand, revelation is not actually "encountered in history." Revelation is merely "conceptually validated" by practical reason. Christ is "logically transformed" into a concrete event in time and place. *Logically*, human moral incapacity requires a saviour -- a saviour that we do not actually have to encounter. In sum, autonomous reason requires a heteronomous relationship. Practical necessity requires a contingent event. Logic requires a non-logical, historical occurrence. In order to follow Green's argument, we are therefore required to hold two contradictory ideas in mind simultaneously: (1) that God's revelation in time has no decisive moral significance for autonomous rational persons; and (2) that the *logical idea* of revelation is morally significant. For practical purposes a person *needs* Christ to be historical, as if the very idea, the myth itself, could satisfy moral incapacity. With two knowing eyes, split in half, a person is asked to live the myth

as if it were true, live with the (suppressed) knowledge that the eternal idea *about* historical revelation could never actually realize itself in history, since if a person actually did not "eternally possess knowledge of the good," and if she actually had to "arrive at it only temporally through the decisive initiative" of the revealed Word, spoken, uttered, enacted in time, she would have to abandon her moral autonomy.

The only way to reconcile this contradiction would be to adopt a kind of historicist or Hegelian conception of the incarnation. At an immature stage in history, we might say, it was necessary that God become manifest in a particular human being, for in this very event the identity of God and humanity would reveal itself. While this truth could only conceptualize itself at a later more mature and more speculative age, this apparently contingent event was necessary *an sich*, as a potentiality, as a stage (and only a stage) in the rational, necessary progression of history. The God-man, as well as every particular event in history, would be but a seed in the ground, waiting for history to unfold, for the divine to realize itself.⁴² If this is the only way of reconciling the contradictions outlined above, then we have done the impossible: we have turned Kierkegaard into a Hegelian. How else might we make sense of Green's argument that logic transforms "Kant's eternal moral archetype . . . into a decisive historical redeemer"? Only as a moment in a dialectical drama could this "historical redeemer" be logically necessary.

In order to see why Green is forced to flirt with logic in this manner, let us remind ourselves of Kant's understanding of religious experience. For Kant, God cannot reveal himself in time to morally autonomous human beings. Even if he tried to do so any

⁴² This is Charles Taylor's interpretation of Hegel's Christology in *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 210.

instance of revelation (for us) would remain as indeterminate as the next and we could not help but succumb to heteronomy. Take for example Kant's account of the experience of loving God. "But love to God as inclination (pathological love) is impossible," he says, since God "is not an object of the senses." "To love God means, in this sense, to do what He commands *gladly*; to love one's neighbour means to practice all duties toward him *gladly*."⁴³ This means that, as Robert Adams puts it, "In a pure Kantian religion . . . any worship will be planned solely with a view to the inculcation and exercise of moral virtue. This is one of Kant's major disagreements with prevalent religious practices. . . ." Religion does not involve the praise and contemplation of "divine goodness," a form of life that "may be seen, in its own right, as an important way of relating positively to the divine goodness, and thus as a supplement to moral endeavour, though certainly not an acceptable substitute for it."⁴⁴ For Kant, praise and contemplation are not even valid as a supplement to the moral striving. There simply is no way to relate "positively to divine goodness." For Kant, reason does not just limit what we ought to think about God but also what we ought to practice in our daily life. Even if we could allow for something more "enthusiastic" or "mystical" in practice, such experiences would lie wholly outside the bounds of reason. Such experiences of God would be as pathological as any other desire. This is because all experiences of love are determined by sense, for Kant. They are passive feelings affected by external causes. For the purposes of morality, there are no such things as higher and lower loves. Outside of Kant's own moral theory (which leaves room for something he calls "moral feeling") only a utilitarian account of human

⁴³ *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 71. References in the following paragraphs will refer to this text unless otherwise noted.

⁴⁴ Introduction to *ibid.*, xxx.

emotions remains consistent. Since all desired objects affect "one and the same vital force" in us, the distinctions between objects of desire remains quantitative: "Higher" means *more* vital force; "lower" means *less* vital force. For Kant, utilitarianism is correct as an account of how sense determines the will (22). The problem is that "ignorant people who like to dabble in metaphysics" try to distinguish between refined spiritual inclinations from lower forms of inclination. But we can only distinguish between higher and lower experiences subjectively as moments of pleasure determined by sense, not in terms of objective reality. In practical terms only the moral law, Kant argues, points towards a different causal relationship. The moral law implies human free-will and for practical reasons we cannot but presume an intellectual realm of autonomous interaction between law and will. On the one hand, the law is an external spiritual reality, an imposition on the human ego. But the law as law cannot communicate anything about reality, anything about a person's relationship to the cosmos or God. A person's comprehension of her spiritual freedom, her relationship to the universe as a whole, is limited by sense. Practical reason must think the possibility but not the actuality of a "noumenal realm" (a realm of free interaction between mind and reality). A person cannot know how this realm determines the will. In terms of ethics, human cognition is limited by sense and so only the needs of practical reason allow a person to advance beyond these limits, not her experience of the noumenal realm itself. Kant's account of moral experience therefore also includes an account of *effects*. "For, how a law can be of itself and immediately a determining ground of the will" is a problem beyond the powers of human reason. "What we shall have to show a priori is, therefore, not the ground from

which the moral law in itself supplies an incentive but rather what it effects (or, to put it better, must effect) in the mind insofar as it is an incentive" (62-63). After having established the necessity of moral freedom on rational-practical grounds, Kant is now limited to talk about the human mind as affected object. It is true that "there is indeed no feeling for this law but inasmuch as it moves resistance out of the way, in the judgment of reason this removal of a hindrance is esteemed equivalent to a positive furthering of its causality" (65). The first experience of effects in the mind is pain. A person experiences these effects as an "infringement upon" her inclinations and impulses. It is a "negative effect on feeling," which "can be called pain." But the moral law only commands respect once a person comes to see that the law pains every egoistic and parochial desire, every natural inclination to esteem self, every drive to further subjective goals and purposes. While practical reason sees the necessity of this power, in experience a person gains respect for the law through its unchanging "opposition to its subjective antagonist, namely the inclinations in us." In waging this war against personal desires "and inasmuch as it even strikes down self-conceit, that is humiliates it," the law becomes an "object of the greatest respect," and therefore also induces a positive feeling. There is "no feeling for this law" *itself* but a person cannot help but respect what the law *does*, "inasmuch as it moves resistance out of the way." The moral law does not in itself provide "an incentive but rather what it effects (or, to put it better, must effect) in the mind insofar as it is an incentive" (63-65). The moment of pain in the law's war against egoism is therefore accompanied by respect. A person respects the law for its accomplishments. But the law itself is merely formal. How can "a mere intellectual idea" have so much power? This a

person cannot know, Kant says (68). But this mystery is troubling. In itself, the moral law is as formal, inhuman, bloodless, and spiritless as any logical calculation. The *only* difference is that moral law, for some unknown reason, commands the will. The moral law is not connected to a positive vision of goodness or beauty. "It is very beautiful to do good to human beings from love for them and from sympathetic benevolence, or to be just from love of order; but this is not yet the genuine" morality, even though "we presume with proud conceit, like volunteers" not to think about duty but merely "our own pleasure." We must not forget that we are all "under a discipline of reason" and therefore must not "forget our subjection to it" and get distracted by "egotistical illusion" (70). (Here we might want to ask why "love of order" or benevolence are *very* beautiful. Why is this kind of love more beautiful than other loves? Because they more effectively increase the amount of ÷vital forceö in a person?). Elsewhere Kant argues that suicide is morally wrong because if universalized it "would not be an enduring natural order." Therefore, to commit suicide would be a contradiction *in logic* (39). Why does this logical contradiction cause a person pain; how does this violation determine his will? This a person cannot answer. A person cannot love the law since it is a merely negative principle, an interruption of life, not a way of life in itself: it commands respect because it inflicts a bad conscience, stops a person in his tracks whenever he wants to assert himself egoistically. But a person does not know why this violation of universalism itself causes a bad conscience. Morally, the only relevant question is logical, not the love of life itself or the ÷enduring natural orderö itself (good for its own sake). A person could never orient himself in such an order, conform his soul to it, or love and worship of its Creator.

To love universal order in this latter sense is analogous to the experience of narrative unity. When a person listens to or reads a story he is (as he is reading) trying to orient himself in it. From the birth of the first word until the last word, when the story passes away, a person is trying to orient himself in the story. A person enjoys the narrative by living the narrative. Enjoyment here is not a subjective feeling disconnected from the intellect. A person has to live the narrative, walk the textual landscape in order to enjoy it. He strives to see the whole and every part of the narrative for what it is, not feel its subjective effects. This understanding of spiritual vision will become important for my interpretation of Kierkegaard, as we shall see below. But for now let me note that for Kant the experience of universal order is entirely unlike this experience of narrative unity. A person cannot participate in the very enduring order that commands his obedience because this order is not a way of life; it is an interruption of life. When a person comes to the question: Why is suicide wrong? he must appeal to a formal principle. Suicide is wrong because it is illogical. Morally, a person can only cower in respect before the law; but he cannot affirm a particular way of life lived in conformity with the good. When Kant says that loving God means liking "to do His commandments" (266) he goes on to qualify this further. He points out that a law cannot ever command us to like something, to have a certain kind of emotion, but that it can only command us to strive to "like to do His commandments." This striving is for an "ideal of holiness" in which the will is perfectly conformed to the law. While human beings cannot fully comply with this "ideal of holiness", they are nevertheless required to strive (endlessly) to resemble this "archetype" (71). Here Kant has managed to qualify the

gospel command to love God twice over. First, he argues that love for God means liking to do the law. Second, he argues that liking the law actually means striving to like the law. But why should a person strive to like the law? Surely this kind of feeling is (at best) a mere by-product of a person's experience of the law's power over inclinations. As noted above, for Kant there is "no feeling for this law" but a person cannot help but respect what the law does, "inasmuch as it moves resistance out of the way." Here it would seem that the whole idea of "striving to like" is superfluous, since feeling does not provide "an incentive" but merely "effects" something "in the mind." And this is presumably why Kant has to qualify the gospel command again. "Through increased facility in satisfying it [the law]," he says, "the most reverential dread changes into liking and respect into love. . ." (72). Here we can see that respect turns into love because of a person's "increased facility." A person's love for God/law is really a love of the law's ability to overpower inclinations in a person. A person loves what God or the law does *for him*. But here the notion of love and respect seem to collapse into each other. How can "increased facility" turn "respect into love?" Because it overpowers inclination. But is this not precisely why the person gained respect for the law in the first place: because it "moves resistance out of the way"? Both love and respect are a consequence of the law's power over inclination.

Since it is impossible to *increase* in love for God, impossible to know God (since God is utterly transcendent) there remains simply the experience of an increase in fortitude, strength, power, reverential dread. The subjective experience constitutes the entire scope of practical-religious experience. In daily life, love of God is quantitatively

measured. Somewhere up above in the noumenal realm a person is free; but *in time* a person is engaged with what shows itself: his *own* "increased facility." As a temporal creature, he is struggling to master himself. This struggle is spurred on by bad conscience. The only thing that separates the person (if he has read Kant) from the average heteronomous person is that he has come to see bad conscience as evidence for the moral law and for his moral freedom. But the only way for a person to know if he is progressing morally is through his "increase" in "facility." On a daily basis, the moral person must be concerned with his own increased or decreased facility in the art of self-mastery, not with the moral order that commands his obedience. Only through works can he possibly see any evidence for his own salvation. On the one hand, the person has an identity (he has a good or bad heart). On the other hand, the only evidence for a good or bad heart is behavioural. Elsewhere, Kant explains that morality requires a

change of the supreme inner ground of the adoption of all the human being's maxims in accordance with the ethical law, so far as this new ground (the new heart) is itself now unchangeable. Assurance of this cannot of course be attained by the human being naturally, neither via immediate consciousness nor via the evidence of the life he has hitherto led, for the depths of his own heart (the subjective first ground of his maxims) are to him inscrutable. Yet he must be able to *hope* that, by the exertion of *his own* power, he will attain to the road that leads in that direction, as indicated to him by a fundamentally improved disposition.⁴⁵

Because a person cannot encounter the noumenal self, the only thing within the realm of experience is the pain of moral transgression and the "exertion" of his "own power."⁴⁶ By "fundamentally improved disposition" Kant cannot but mean increase in strength. This is

⁴⁵ *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, trans. Allen Wood and George Di Giovanni (Cambridge, 1998), 71. Emphasis added.

⁴⁶ On the question of self-knowledge and Kant I am partly indebted to John Milbank's *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 14-17.

the only evidence available to a person, since in the "depths" of his heart (his true moral or immortal nature) remains "inscrutable." There is no way to even make progress in self-knowledge, since noumenal reality remains utterly unknowable. A person does not know his true self *in the least*. The only thing that can occupy his soul morally on a daily basis is self-assertion and the fear of transgression.

Here we can see certain analogies⁴⁷ between Weber's critique of Protestantism and this discussion of Kant (and by implication Kierkegaard, if the latter is indeed a Kantian). We start with an uncommunicative God and a universe devoid of spiritual meaning. Then we impose a subjective substitute cosmos. Theoretically, this spiritual order seems to retain its transcendent integrity. But in everyday practice the only *evidence* for spiritual progress in a person's life is behavioural: the success or failure of the will. The spiritual reduces to a struggle *against* inclination. There is no way for a person to love God or a divinely ordained order good for its own sake. The substitute cosmos is defined not by love but by moral struggle. A person fits into this order to the degree that he triumphs over inclination. What are we to make of this Kantian soul engaged in a power struggle against moral incapacity, this battlefield of warring forces: the soul *affected* by the pain of moral transgression and the pleasure of "increased facility" yet unable to know if it is keeping the law out of a good heart, since its true ground for obedience lies beyond experience? What are we to make of this soul that can one minute give evidence for human spiritual freedom and the next minute do nothing but submit to the letter of the law and the fear of transgression? Is this is a good and healthy soul? Praiseworthy? Or a

⁴⁷ I am not trying to argue that Kant is a Puritan. I am trying to highlight the modern-Cartesian framework of analysis that Weber applies to Protestantism. This framework is applicable to Kant as well.

soul plagued by guilt, by the law that Paul says kills the spirit and cannot but lead to death? Yes, Kant goes beyond Paul and saves moral reason from modern scepticism; he shows that a person is free on some level (beyond comprehension). Unlike the regular, uneducated person, this person can (after having read Kant) now think the rational necessity of her own *spirit* and the possibility of God. She can carry these thoughts around in her back pocket like prizes of reason; these thoughts save her from innumerable contradictions *in logic*. And yet the very thing that shapes a person's soul on a daily basis, the person's everyday moral experience is a bad conscience and will-power.

3.

I want to argue that Kierkegaard breaks fundamentally with the Kantian understanding of moral identity discussed above. Moreover, Kierkegaard is out of step with not only Kant but his idealist successors. While Fichte, Schelling, Schiller, Hegel and others attempt to join together the cosmic unity that Kant breaks apart by opposing law with inclination, they nevertheless share Kant's way of formulating the problem. Kierkegaard, I will argue, dispenses with the Kantian framework in a fundamental way. Kant's successors, like Kant, argue that human personality is forged in the self's struggle with itself. However, unlike Kant they show in detail how this struggle is necessary for spiritual freedom. On the one hand, they argue that God cannot simply be a positive, blindly productive emanation, nature itself (as in the thoughts of Spinoza). There would be no freedom in God or human beings. On the other hand, they argue that God remains dialectically tied to history or nature, to productive life. Human spirituality lies in the

very struggle to attain self-consciousness. The very identity of human personality (as well as the universe as a whole, the macrocosm) is defined by this struggle. This has profound consequences for our understanding of human identity and cosmic purpose. And, as we shall see, Kierkegaard defines his theology against this understanding.

Take, for example, Schelling's understanding of God and love in *Ages of the World*.⁴⁸ Schelling says that a purely loving God would have no reason to create. Love is pure feeling, "emanation" (96). If God is to be self-conscious and not simply blind emanation, he must have division within himself. "Love, however, is the nought of oneness; it does not seek what is its own, and therefore also by itself cannot have being. Hence a being of all beings is by itself without support and supported by nothing; it is in itself the antithesis of personality. Thus another power making for personality must first give it a ground" (96). In itself love is a willing without will, an unconscious expression of self-expansive energy. It is true that we are permitted to think the possibility of love in this sense, as Schelling indeed does. But here we have to posit a primordial divinity, a godhead that gives forth apathetically, without self-awareness, "like the will which wills nothing" (122). It is as nothing and yet is everything. "It is nothing inasmuch as it neither desires to become active itself nor longs for any actuality. It is everything because

⁴⁸ Trans. Frederic de Wolfe Bolman, Jr. (Morningside Heights, NY: Columbia University Press, 1942). References in the following paragraphs will refer to this text, unless otherwise noted. My understanding of *Ages* is partly indebted to Judith Norman. "The Logic of Longing: Schelling's Philosophy of Will," in *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 10, no. 1. Accessed via *Informaworld*, McMaster University Library. 14 October 2010, April 8 2011. <<http://www.informaworld.com.libaccess.lib.mcmaster.ca/smpp/content~db=all~content=a713762121~frm=titlelink?words=judithnorman&hash=2499890801>>. My critique of German idealism and Schelling is also indebted to Friedrich Jacobi's *David Hume on Faith (Preface, 1815)* and George di Giovanni's essays in *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel "Allwill,"* trans. George di Giovanni (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994). I am also indebted to Charles Taylor's *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), in particular his discussion of German idealism in Part 1.

all power certainly comes from it as from eternal freedom alone, because it has all things under it, rules everything, and is ruled by nothingö (122). The godhead is free in some sense, and yet not truly free because it does not even know its own freedom. It is productive but it desires nothing. In order for God to be self-conscious (and truly free), he needs a öprimordial state of contradiction, that wild fire, that life of passion and desireö (142). öFor how should what is in itself one, complete, and perfect, be tempted, charmed, and lured to step out of this peace?ö (105). God needs opposition within himself. The eternal cosmos that we naively attribute to the first chapter of Genesis is illogical; it does not explain how God was ölured to step outö of his own essence. As traditionally interpreted, the Genesis story starts with a God who essentially sees goodness and creates for the sake of goodness. But Schelling wants to explain how God came to see at all, how the primal, unconscious egg broke apart. Schelling assumes the following dichotomous formulation: either divinity is öone, complete, and perfectö or it had to be ötemptedö or öluredö out of itself. And so he posits a substitute cosmos for the one we naively attribute to Genesis. This substitute cosmos is grounded in struggle, defined by its imperfections, by the very struggle itself *for* vision, for self-consciousness. He posits another power in opposition to the öoutflowing, outspreading, self-giving essenceö (97) (the very kind of power we naively attribute to God's entire essence, the perfectly, undivided whole itself, love itself). This power is the öeternal power of selfhood, of return unto self, of being-in-itselfö (97). Before God becomes self-conscious, this struggle for selfhood is relentless. The struggle for self-consciousness is a perpetual violence against the unconscious, öoutflowingö essence, against all uninhibited

urges and drives. Selfhood wills itself; it struggles to maintain its identity against unconscious vitality, the dynamism at the heart of all life. This retraction into selfhood gives birth to a subject-object polarity with freedom from unconscious drivers on one side and objectified being on the other. And yet the very struggle for selfhood owes everything to the outflowing drives, just as the uninhibited outflowing drives owe their objective independence to the struggle for selfhood. We have two independent essences at war with each other; and yet they owe their independence to the very struggle itself. This is their unity in opposition (112ff). There is therefore a potential for spiritual unity here, a unity inherent in nature; but it remains unrealized in its primordial state. With no higher principle to help nature, life is constituted by perpetual violence, a struggle for identity against undifferentiated, uninhibited drives. The struggle for self-consciousness cannot realize itself fully. And so the struggle is mere *irresistible impulse*, *unconscious movement* (120), *eternal impulse and zeal to be, without real being* (119). Human beings too would fall into this chaos if they were not controlled by higher spiritual principles. *When left to itself, this nature of man, the eternal nature, is a life of vexation and dread, a fire incessantly consuming and producing itself anew* (153). However, next to the chaos, Schelling posits an ideal realm, the godhead discussed above. The godhead is apathetic; it wills without willing. A longing for this indifference exists in nature potentially but nature needs a vision of it in order to give up the war against itself (164-165). Being has to catch a glimpse of the ideal beyond the chaos itself. Schelling says that all being *aims at that; everything longs for it. All movement has only eternal immobility as a goal. . . .* (122-123). *Every creature, and especially man, really*

only strives to return to the position of willing nothing.ö Even the man who ögives himself up to all desires. . . longs only for the condition where he has nothing more to will,ö although the more he strives for it öthe farther it draws away from himö (123). Being can only truly become ennobled if it voluntarily subjects itself to this ideal. At the same time, this longing awakens the godhead from its slumber. Here we must posit a moment when the apathetic whole becomes a beneficent power in opposition to chaos. God here is not just an apathetic ideal but an öeternal beneficence.ö God becomes self-conscious in opposition to the chaos, to what now becomes his nature. The godhead remains öbound to nature, but remains in eternal freedom in comparison with it, although it cannot separate itself from nature. For the spirit of eternity, as the eternally healing, reconciling potency, as eternal beneficence itself, can only become perceptible to itself in this relationö (153). The eternal spirit sets itself in opposition to nature and yet remains tied to it dialectically. öIn the sound body there is a feeling of health only in that the unity presiding over the body continually suppresses the false life, which is always prepared to step forth, suppresses the movement deviating from harmony and opposing it. Similarly there would be no life or joy of life in God, if the powers now subordinated did not have the continual possibility of arousing the contradiction against the unity, and were not also incessantly quieted and reconciled again by the feeling of that beneficent unity by which the powers are suppressedö (154-155). God is neither blind emanation nor the apathetic ideal, but a öbeneficent unity,ö the eternal wholeness that öcontinually suppressesö unconscious life. Without the disharmony of desire, the wild limitless striving to be, there would be öno life or joy of life in God.ö The joy of the whole is the joy of

subordination, suppression of desire. Apathy is no longer the ideal, in a sense. True, apathy is a transcendent ideal beyond being. The longing for apathy saves being from chaos, allows limitless struggle to will its own annihilation. And yet the longing is also for an ideal lost in the past. There is *no* life or joy of life in willing without will. In reality, the apathetic ideal merely turns being against itself, gives birth to will, the will that strives to master itself and make something out of itself, the will that inhibits unlimited desire. The real spiritual task, the real identity is the *striving* of God for self-mastery. In reality, *the eternal rapture* of God is nothing but *an alleviation of seeking* (of passion), an eternal joy of finding and of being found, of conquering and of being conquered (154). The joy of God is in finding desire and suppressing it, letting it flourish and denying its unlimited legitimacy. The ideal of apathy merely helps give birth to this capacity, the joy of *self-making*, the joy of willing. But apathy itself appears like utter annihilation, an unimaginable lifeless life, a life without *rapture*, without *finding* and *conquering*. The self whose very identity is struggle, the self set against itself, cannot help but think of godly apathy as lifelessness, as an undesirable, desireless purity.

There is an unavoidable melancholy lurking in the depths here. For Schelling, unconscious life retains a terrifying independence (even in God), forever threatening the stability of the whole. *When the abysses of the human heart open up in evil, and those terrible thoughts come forth which should be eternally buried in night and darkness, only then do we know what lies in man with reference to possibility, and how his nature in*

itself or left itself is really constitutedö (156).⁴⁹ Indeed, if we think of öall that is terrible in nature and the spirit world, and all the rest which a benevolent hand seems to hide from us, then we cannot doubt that the godhead sits enthroned over a world of horrors, and, with reference to what is in him and is hidden by him, God could be called the awful, the terrible, not in a figurative but in a literal senseö (156). But for Schelling, the very identity of self-conscious personality, öthe eternal raptureö of personhood, is the öfindingö and öconqueringö of öall that is terrible.ö⁵⁰ Spiritual life is defined functionally as the alleviation of pain; even God is defined by the öworld of horrorö over which he presides.⁵¹ On the one hand, we have a spiritual identity opposed to unconscious, uninhibited drives. On the other hand, we can see that those very drives give vitality to personhood. Without this vitality, personhood would not be; life would be an eternal slumber. And yet these drives are also terrifying, a complete violation of personality. In one sense, self-conscious personality appears as a violation of freely productive, uninhibited drives, vitality itself; in another sense, those very drives appear as a violation of self-conscious, autonomous freedom. Elsewhere, Schelling introduces the

⁴⁹ On the significance and problems with Schelling's understanding of the unconscious I am indebted to Michael Vater. Introduction to *System of Transcendental Idealism*, by F.W.J. Schelling (1800), trans. Michael Vater (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), xi-xxxvi.

⁵⁰ For Hegel too there is much in history that is terrible. The only way to justify God, the only way to produce a rational theodicy is to show that the öaltarö of history has not slaughtered its victims without reason (see *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trans. Hugh Nisbett [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975], 69). For the thinker to think history authoritatively, history has to become the history of thought. The thinker at the highest stage of enlightenment, comes to see that Reason is world and world is Reason, thought is being and being thought. In the end, the solution is to sacrifice all particularity to an impersonal logic. Unlike Schelling, Hegel is able to sacrifice *every* victim on the altar to logic because God is ultimately revealed *as* logic. For Hegel, this is how we give meaning even to the öthe abysses of the human heartö which lie öeternally buried in night and darknessö? (*Ages of the World, op.cit.*, 156). For Schelling, the identity of the whole is precisely the struggle to integrate all that lies buried in darkness.

⁵¹ Therefore, from Augustine's and Kierkegaard's perspective, there cannot be any real joy in Schelling's God. Even God would be defined by a disgust with and a fear of this öhorror.ö This point will become clearer as we examine Augustine and Kierkegaard's theology.

following analogy. A person is only really charming when he is so authentically, when he does not know his own charm, whereas a person who knows of his charm, who puts it on, immediately stops being charming, and if he conducts himself *as* being charming will instead become the opposite. It is the same with uninhibited drives. As soon as drive knows itself it becomes inauthentic and inhibited. Self-consciousness always puts on a face, it makes itself into something. But the subject cannot grasp itself *as* what it is, for in becoming self-conscious, it becomes another. This is the basic contradiction, we can say the misfortune, in all being -- that in gaining itself, gaining an *identity*, being becomes foreign to itself.⁵² A person wants and does not want to be uninhibited. To lose oneself completely in unconscious life is disgusting. The true joy in life is precisely in conquering unconscious drives, perhaps even using them creatively, giving them some kind of controlled outlet.⁵³ And yet without this constant possibility of losing oneself, with this *base ideal* forever before a person, life would have no meaning. There would be nothing to feel, no vitality at all -- nothing to conquer. There is a sense in which disgust lies at the heart of this identity. A person has to be willing to flirt with the horror of the uninhibited; and yet a person's identity lies precisely in a disgustedness with it; indeed, a feeling of superiority over it. The *spiritual* element of artistic production (over and above the unconscious drives) lies in conquering and mastering the very power that gives birth to art in the first place. Here art, it seems, becomes a means to a spiritual end: self-mastery. The drive that gives rise to art is unconscious and mute, a terror in itself. It has nothing to say to the artist. The artist cannot communicate with the

⁵² *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, trans. Andrew Bowie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 115. Emphasis original.

⁵³ On art see Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800). *Op. cit.*, 219ff. Emphasis original.

very source of his art. Drive is merely a necessary condition for the final product. Art is not a language, a way of speaking to or with a particular community, a way of orienting oneself in relation to God's Word or a particular tradition. The final product is the artist's ability to master drive with grace. Granted, there is virtue here. The power in question is elegant, cultured, measured.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, underneath all the propriety lurks a heart of darkness. The further the artist falls into this darkness, the more he gives himself up to this abyss, the darker his art becomes. The artist has to flirt with this darkness; it is the very source of his inspiration. He must forever be grateful that the joy of self-mastery is conditioned by the threat of uninhibited drives. And yet the more intense the pleasure, the more it violates personhood. The violence of the orgy is in itself an abyss. Even though art transcends morality,⁵⁵ the artist must frown at intense pleasure. He must

⁵⁴ See also here, Friedrich Schiller. *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. Reginald Snell (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1974).

⁵⁵ On the one hand, Schelling declares that art transcends both barbarism and moralism (*System [op.cit.]*, 277). On the other hand, Schelling calls the unconscious source of art "a dark unknown force." It is this force that gives content to an otherwise formal principle of freedom. This darkness is "that power" which "is called destiny, which through our free action realizes, without our knowledge and even against our will, goals that we did not envisage, so likewise that incomprehensible agency which supplies objectivity to the conscious, without the cooperation of freedom. . . ." (222). Emphasis original. But what is barbarism but a sinking into this darkness, giving oneself over to its unconscious power? The artist cannot ever fully unite himself with the source of his inspiration. But what is it like to live on the edge of this precipice, continually toying with darkness and struggling to master it at the same time? Surely a life on the edge ends in utter exhaustion or annihilation. Nietzsche's understanding of asceticism is relevant here as well. Nietzsche argues that asceticism allowed men to will something, to gain power over themselves, through violence directed against themselves, in self-torture. This violence allowed men to gain control of life: man "was no longer like a leaf in the breeze, the plaything of the absurd, of 'non-sense'; from now on he could will something, -- no matter what, why and how he did it at first, the will itself was saved" (*Genealogy of Morality [op.cit.]* 128). The problem, however, was that asceticism was not honest enough to recognize itself: that it had given meaning to human life in its celebration of power and strength. This lack of honesty was poisonous because it could not express its own joy in willing. By denying the value of its own excellence, it could not but hate life and long for another life to come. This hatred, this poison, this sickness in the human soul, which characterizes the modern emasculated spirit, is the legacy of asceticism (127-128). Nietzsche sees well the darkness at the heart of this vision. Uninhibited desire, instinctual, is "that mysterious ground of being of which we are the phenomena," Nietzsche puts it in *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann [New York: Vintage Books], 40. Man, all his art, his very being is an expression of the overflowing of these dark impulses. For the Greeks energy found its "release" in art

celebrate culture. At the heart of this identity is fear -- on the one hand: the fear of falling apart, coming undone, losing all identity; on the other hand: the fear of alienation from nature, the very life-giving source of art.

Here we can again apply the Weberian framework of analysis. As noted above, the God of Genesis sees goodness and creates out of his love of goodness. For someone like Augustine⁵⁶ (and Kierkegaard, as we shall see below), this means that a person can only know the universe if she shares in some way in God's vision. Vision is clouded by sin but in God a person can begin to see well. However, the kind of religiosity that Weber describes is defined, not by contemplative vision, but by a cognitively-generated assertion of control over nature. (óDescartes's *cogito ergo sum* was taken over by the contemporary Puritans with this ethical reinterpretation.ö) This Cartesian understanding

(ibid., 40), whether it be the raw sexuality of Dionysian, masochistic, orgiastic desire, or the contemplative sunlit gaze of Apollonian beauty (the figural expression of sensual terror or ecstasy). Art was not a language as such, but the very expression of "nature's excess" (46). By naming the dark undercurrents of the human body as *ground*, Nietzsche overturns the Platonically inspired language of height, beauty and goodness beyond human resourcefulness. The instinctual in Nietzsche is an overabundant, overflowing power at the very heart of man (present in even the ascetic's denial of worldly power itself). It is a self-contained cycle of pent up energy and orgasmic release, a power that searches for a place to relieve itself. We see this cycle enacted, for instance, at the beginning of book two in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, when Zarathustra returns to his cave having released his excess wisdom. Here he waits to build up power again, "like a sower who has scattered his seed." Time passes in waiting while his wisdom grows until it causes him "pain with its fullness" (trans. Walter Kaufmann [New York: Penguin, 1954], 83). Wisdom here is a force of life expressing itself in the body. He cannot help but building up and releasing it. In his cave he waits for another to provide him the *occasion* to "release" his instinctual power; he waits for the open body that will allow itself to become recreated in the giver's strength and power. "But one must learn to be a sponge if one wants to be loved by hearts that overflow," Zarathustra says (62). In *Genealogy* Nietzsche calls the instincts a "quantum of force," a "quantum of drive." Instinct is "force" and "drive" and "nothing but," Nietzsche argues (*op. cit.*, 28). It is an original power that comes before choosing, before every regard for consequences. It is "only the seduction of language which construes and misconstrues all action as condition upon agency, a 'subject', can make it appear otherwise" (28). Moralizing hesitancy, all attempts to make action conditional upon subjectivity, the freely choosing subject, the agent behind the act, fail in their attempt to master the instinctual. An instinct "grows spontaneously" and seeks "out its opposite only so that it can say 'yes' to itself even more thankfully and exultantly." These opposites are "created after the event" and pale in comparison to the "positive basic concept, saturated with life and passion" (22).

⁵⁶ See my discussion in chapter two.

of identity has implications beyond any particular understanding of Puritanism. Schelling, of course, breaks in some way with Cartesian dualism. But Schelling's understanding of personal identity is defined by the struggle to integrate the very divisions between mind and body that Descartes introduces into philosophy. In this sense, the main spiritual activity for Schelling is not the enjoyment of God or God's created order (informed by God's creative vision) but rather the struggle *for* spiritual integration. There is no given whole to enjoy *for its own sake*. Without a higher good to love, spirituality becomes a matter of *defending* the ego against dis-integration. For Schelling, spiritual vision is a way of inhibiting being; it is the seeing that sees because it objectifies being, because it masters uninhibited impulse; it is not a contemplative activity good for its own sake. Because there is no eternally given order, an order loved into being by God for the sake of goodness, the substitute spiritual task is works-oriented and economic: the aim is to keep God's household in order.⁵⁷ The macrocosm (God) and the microcosm (human beings) are defined by this need. The highest in a person is defined by its relationship to the lowest in a person. True, nature is spiritual (Schelling is not a dualist); but it is spiritual to the degree that it allows for self-mastery. The actualization of the spiritual potential inherent in nature is the very joy of self-mastery. Nature gives itself over to be conquered for the joy of being conquered. The joy of the whole identity is precisely self-mastery itself; indeed, "there would be no life or joy of life in God, if the powers now subordinated did not have the continual possibility of arousing the

⁵⁷ "We have often enough been informed that the ideal stands above the real, the physical is subordinated to the spiritual, and the like, just as we have never lacked such instruction. . . . But if one straightway begins by positing what should be subordinated as already actually subordinated, what has he then to achieve? He is done right at the outset. Everything has already taken place, and there is no further progress" (*Ages, op. cit.*, 115).

contradiction against the unity, and were not also incessantly quieted and reconciled again by the feeling of that beneficent unity by which the powers are suppressedö (154-155). To know this circularity (spirit defined by its capacity to conquer and nature defined by its longing to be conquered) is to find joy in God. A spiritual person finds joy in the cosmic struggle for self-mastery *itself* by participating in the struggle microcosmically. The cosmic struggle plays itself out in the artist or the morally complete person who flirts with and struggles to conquer unconscious drives. A person is driven impulsively and must learn how to use and master unconscious drives: this is his highest spiritual achievement. Life is full of pleasure and expressive energy; but the only spiritual ingredient in life is the mastery of that energy. The bliss of artistic production is the alleviation of pain, the pain of desire.⁵⁸ The spiritual is defined by its ennobling function and nature is defined by its longing for ennoblement. But the spiritual beneficence and the longing in question have one goal: the joy of finding and conquering. Self-mastery is the substitute ideal for the universe of Genesis chapter one, created through divine vision and loved into being for the sake of goodness.

4.

Schelling wants to preserve God's self-conscious freedom (i.e. God's *dialectical* freedom as opposed to a blindly-expansive, unconscious freedom without limits). But for Kierkegaard, as we shall see, this understanding of self-consciousness (in itself) is marred by an unavoidable defect. In order for this self-conscious relationship to establish itself, a

⁵⁸ Artists ðare involuntarily driven to create their works, and . . . in producing them they merely satisfy an irresistible urge of their own nature. . . ö (ibid.).

person (and this would be the case for God too) has to find and conquer something *in* himself. The only way to establish this relationship is divide the self into a higher and lower essence (we cannot have two equal minds in relationship; this would be a split personality and no real identity). So the finding in question cannot be dialogical; it has to be a relationship between a higher spiritual essence and something lower in a person, something unconscious. For Kierkegaard, as we will see, this mis-relationship is fundamentally unstable. From Kierkegaard's perspective, a cosmos grounded in the struggle for self-mastery would ultimately be *joyless*. Would not even God be grounded in fear, the fear of the "world of horrors" over which he presides? How indeed could perfect love drive out all fear (1 John 4:18), if God were defined by this horror, if God could gain himself and know himself only in the struggle to conquer the horror, if God were actually inseparable from death and life, angels and demons (Romans (8:38)?

The above mentioned Kantian interpreters want to save the Kierkegaardian self from spiralling out of control, from annihilating itself in God. Here the gravitation pull of the ego, the Copernican center of the universe, holds everything in check. If Kierkegaard's understanding of personal identity is defined by the conscious mastery of unconscious drives, then he would be in line with Kant's idealistic successors and Kant himself.⁵⁹ Kierkegaard's writings would be a theological anthropology, a grappling with the unsystematizable aspects of life, the illogical, irrational forces that give life to existence yet require mastery. However, as I argue in the next chapter, Kierkegaard's self is precisely a non-integrated, mis-relationship. This is not just because the soul cannot

⁵⁹God is transcendent, above the self, for Kant. But everyday life for the Kantian moralist is measured and defined by self-mastery, not by the uncommunicative God or the noumenal realm we are permitted to posit yet cannot experience.



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master itself; it is because God is actively dispossessing it, disturbing its self-integrated identity. For Kierkegaard, the longing for God is a response to God's communicative love. The longing here is precisely a desire to live in God and die to the self. The desire is to dis-integrate the ego, to become another self *in* God. Kierkegaard's narrative here is of the soul's transformation and illumination in God.

Chapter 2

THE WOUNDS OF LONGING: DIS-INTEGRATION IN KIERKEGAARD AND AUGUSTINE

In order to prepare for a different interpretation of Kierkegaard, I will give an account of Augustine's understanding of longing in *The Confessions*. I introduce Augustine into this thesis because my reading of Augustine has opened me up to new ways of understanding Kierkegaard (just as Kierkegaard has informed my reading of Augustine). To ignore this "fusion of horizons" would be disingenuous. I know of no other way to move from the Kantian interpretive framework into my own. My experience of reading Kierkegaard is simply so informed by Augustine that I cannot ignore it. However, I would note that my reading of Kierkegaard is *not* "Augustinian." That is, Augustine himself was not a systematic thinker in the modern sense. His writings are themselves instances of longing and loving interpretations of religious experience. They are symbolic expressions of real encounters with reality, not the finished product of a logical system.⁶⁰ There is therefore no official Augustinian framework that I could *apply* to Kierkegaard. I have to interpret Augustine too, read him in right spirit and not according to the letter of the law. For this reason I am *not* simply trying to show that Kierkegaard is *doctrinally* out of step with his modern contemporaries and has more in common with the early Church Fathers. I think a "fusion of horizons" is possible in the first place between Kierkegaard and Augustine because I am dealing with two thinkers who are lovers of wisdom but do not claim to be wise themselves. As Augustine puts it

⁶⁰ For my understanding of symbolism see pages 10-13.

in *The Confessions*, multiple interpretations of the Word of God are possible because Truth transcends all of those interpretations. Nevertheless, he says, no honest interpretation is merely arbitrary. A good interpretation is truthful in its humility, in its openness to reality.

This is why we must tremble before your judgements, O Lord, for your Truth is not mine, nor his, nor hers, but belongs to all of us whom you call to share it in communion with him, at the same time giving us the terrible warning not to arrogate truth to ourselves as private property, lest we find ourselves deprived of it. For anyone who appropriates what you provide for all to enjoy, and claims as his own what belongs to all, is cast out from the this commonwealth, cast out to what is truly his own, which is to say from the truth to a lie: for anyone who lies is speaking from what is his own."⁶¹

We all belong to this "commonwealth" because truth does not belong to anyone, Augustine says.⁶² This passage is emblematic of Augustine and Kierkegaard's approach to writing. Their writings are interpretative and symbolic, neither authoritative nor arbitrary. They realize their own limitations but continue to participate in the "commonwealth" of interpretation.

In this responsibility to the community, Augustine's and Kierkegaard's writings often constitute acts of worship in the form of contemplative meditations, prayers or hymns. At times this same responsibility takes the form of prophetic warnings against injustice or spiritual apathy. It is perhaps easy to assume that this kind of language is

⁶¹ Trans. Maria Boulding (New York: Vintage, 1997), XII.25.34. References in the text will refer this edition.

⁶² There are limits to this openness, it is true. A particular community is concerned with certain religious experiences and not others. It is imperative that a member of that community remember, celebrate, interpret and re-encounter those experiences (and not others) honestly as lovers of wisdom. To mythologize Christ, for instance, is perhaps an interesting anthropological exercise but it betrays the original purpose of a community grounded in the Spirit of Christ, in active love and not in academic speculation (in gazing, in observing a spectacle). Therefore, Augustine says in the same passage, the interpretive "commonwealth" cannot but exclude those who do not "speak truly."

inherently irrational or arational. There is too much pathos in this kind of expression, we might say, too much naivety, too much that is uncritical and unmediated, too much that is indulgent. But for Kierkegaard and Augustine it is otherwise. The pathos of expressive joy or the ire of righteous anger does indeed take God seriously. But this is precisely why it cannot take *itself* too seriously. Every instance of expressive articulation in the spirit of truth is at the same time a longing for truth. This understanding of religious expression is the very possibility of community for Kierkegaard and Augustine. The Augustinian ðcommonwealthö of interpretation is possible because there is no private property in it. With Augustine Kierkegaard warns: let us ðnot to arrogate truth to ourselves as private property, lest we find ourselves deprived of it.ö

Let us now see how this understanding of longing unfolds in *The Confessions* in order to prepare for my discussion of Kierkegaard.

1.

In the account of his life in Carthage, Augustine writes that he was plagued there by an ðitch,ö an unexplained feeling in his soul. Augustine tries to "superficially scrape away at [his] itching self" in order to distract from it (III.4). The things that bring most immediate relief are superficial sensations. His soul, he says, was "longing to soothe its misery by rubbing against sensible things; yet these were soulless, and so could not be truly loved." Here Augustine tries to heal a superficial skin condition by equally superficial means. Augustine also uses feelings to cover up the itch. "In love with loving, I was casting about for something to love. . . ." (III.1.1). Augustine wants to feel

the effect of love inside himself, not submit himself to an actual love-relationship. Similarly, Augustine goes to the theatre, he notes, in order to feel something, anything, even sadness, "for I loved feeling sad and sought out whatever could cause me sadness" (III.4). Augustine's love of appearances also brings immediate relief. He puts his rhetorical skills into effect, not for the sake of communication, but for the sake of pleasure. He loves the pleasure of power over others, the satisfaction of winning arguments. In front of others, Augustine recounts, "my boundless vanity made me long to appear elegant and sophisticated." These means of "scraping" allow Augustine's soul some brief moments of distraction, no matter how base. But Augustine's skin condition is really a manifestation of a deeper illness. Augustine is malnourished. "I had no desire for the food that does not perish, not because I had my fill of it, but because the more empty I was, the more I turned from it in revulsion." Every attempt to quell his condition merely perpetuates the deeper problem, the "inner famine" in his soul (III.1.1). Only after Augustine reads Cicero's *Hortensius* does he begin to understand his itch as a symptom of hunger. The book whets Augustine's appetite for truth since "it was not merely as an instrument for sharpening my tongue that I used that book, for it had won me over not by its style but by what it had to say" (III.4.7). In reading the book Augustine is "aroused and kindled and set on fire to love and seek and capture and hold fast and strongly cling not to this or that school, but to wisdom itself, whatever it might be" (III.8). Here Augustine catches a small glimpse of something real beyond his own skin. Now for the first time he comes to understand something about his own restlessness. The itch in his soul is not merely a melancholy, a perpetually bad mood; it is a longing for wisdom, for

something beyond appearances. This longing had always expressed itself in his soul, even without understanding. But now Augustine has gained some clarity about his "moods." From this point on Augustine gains a measure of control over his desires. No longer merely passively tugged and pulled, his soul is "set on fire" for truth. Here for the first time Augustine begins to long for something beyond rhetoric; he longs to cling to something better, nobler, superior to himself.

As we continue to read we see that Augustine's longing for wisdom actually makes his life more insecure and eventually disrupts his entire career. Augustine might have lived a "comfortable" life of appearances; but in longing he is compelled to sacrifice his place of security for something greater. What is it that throws light on Augustine and disrupts his soul? Here a true mystery comes into play: Augustine does not know the answer to this question. The light beckons and puts his false desires into question but he does not know why. Throughout *The Confessions*, Augustine will try to find a place of belonging to satisfy his restlessness. He wants to make a home in the world, find his piece of territory. And yet these places prove themselves to be temporary places of relief. As he later reflects, they did not "welcome me or afford me the chance to say, 'This is enough, now all is well,' nor did they even release me to return to where I could well have found what was enough" (VII.7.11). Even as these dwelling places refuse to "release" him, even as they bid him satisfy his restlessness there, an even greater truth is at work, a light calling Augustine onward, elsewhere; it refuses to let him go; it refuses to coddle, to indulge, to say: "now all is well." And so Augustine remains a perpetually unwelcome immigrant.

As we continue reading we can see that Augustine cannot stand this perpetually disruptive movement in his soul. Ironically, he quickly becomes enamoured with Cicero's style, the soaring height of his rhetoric, the idea of his striving for wisdom itself, the idea of being wise itself. When Augustine turns to scripture in his spiritual search he is immediately offended by the simple language. It does not compare with "Cicero's dignified prose" and therefore seems "unworthy" of his attention. "My swollen pride recoiled from its style and my intelligence failed to penetrate to its inner meaning" (III.5.9). Augustine has already lost the spirit of Cicero's love of wisdom, "the longing to cling not to this or that school, but to wisdom itself, whatever it might be." Augustine has attached himself to the school of Cicero, to his style. This attachment satisfies Augustine's desires immediately. But scripture, Augustine comments, does not answer to the "scrutiny of the proud" nor is it "exposed to the gaze of the immature." It is "something lowly as one enters but lofty as one advances further" and at the time "I was in no state to enter, nor prepared to bow my head and accommodate myself to its ways" (42). Eventually Augustine will come to see that truth is neither discovered by prideful "scrutiny" nor readily available to the eye, a naked thing exposed to view. To enter into the relationship with truth Augustine will have to "bow" down and "accommodate" himself to it. Eventually Augustine will come to long for truth the way a lover longs for his beloved. He will long to become ennobled and healed by truth, to become more and more intimate with it and in intermingling with it become a new being. Augustine, the teacher of rhetoric will become the lover of wisdom, will subordinate himself to his beloved, become humbled in his love. Longing will reveal itself not as a wise teacher but

as an ignorant student, craving wisdom. This blurring of categorical distinctions -- a wisdom neither esoteric nor immediately exposed, something available neither to the proud nor the immature -- is essential to our understanding of longing in Augustine and Kierkegaard, as we shall see.

After Augustine's failed encounter with scripture, he continues his effort to suppress the longing in his soul. He falls in with the Manichees, who attract Augustine for the very reason that scripture offends him. They satisfy his pride, his love of striving itself. Augustine's main goal here is to overcome the mystery of the universe and defeat it. Here Augustine begins to differentiate himself from his lower inclinations. His former desires, he comes to see, are beneath him. His soul is worthy of greater things. Augustine attempts to gain possession of his own soul and in this struggle for self-possession to strive for something noble, something higher than his cravings for lower things. But this struggle is prideful, merely a means of distinguishing himself, calling attention to his superiority over inclination. The Manichees therefore do not heal him of pride but foster it. The Manichean religion does not even have the capacity confront Augustine's carnal desires. Manichean thought is easily digested. It allows him to imagine fantastical new realities that appear spiritual but are merely composites of bodily realities. The so-called spiritual realities are "counterfeit bodies." They are neither bodily nor spiritual. Material objects are "more real than they" and it would have been better "to love the sun in the sky, which at least our eyes perceive truly, than those chimeras offered to a mind that had been led astray through its eyes" (III.6.10). Manichean imagination, the use of bodily realities disguised as spiritual, protects Augustine from opening up his soul to something real.

Imagination gratifies, flatters him; it allows his mind to perpetuate its own train of thought, remain bound to its own categories of thought. "I conjured up material forms in my imagination, and I who was flesh disparaged the flesh, for I was a roving spirit that had not yet returned to you. I persisted in walking after things that had no existence for me by your truth but invented in material shape by my own vanity" (IV.15.26). The so-called "higher" intellectual desires are merely a more sophisticated version of sensual desire. "Yet I ate those offerings, believing that I was feeding on you; I ate them without appetite, for there was no taste in my mouth of you as you are, since those insubstantial shams were not you" (III.6.10). In his search for a homeland Augustine journeys to a land without being, a place beyond all places. But Augustine's imaginative journey leaves Augustine exhausted and hungry, without taste in the mouth. Augustine will eventually come to see that reality is not something defined merely by the striving intellect. Reality is the very thing that unravels the imagination, a light that disrupts human ambition. Even as Augustine tries to satisfy his pride his soul continues to ache. This ache places judgement on imagination, everything insubstantial. But the mystery remains: Augustine does not yet know "the substantial."

Even as Augustine tries to make a home for himself in the place without place, even as his intellect soars, he also makes the opposite movement. This movement (expressed most fully in his friendships) will educate Augustine in love, in the very humility that he found so offensive in his reading of scripture. Even as Augustine strives for the heavens, he subordinates himself to his friends, clings to them religiously, and pours his whole soul "into the sand" (IV.8.13). Augustine tells us that he cannot be happy

without his best friend. He loves him wholeheartedly "as though he would never die" (IV.6.11). And of his friends he says: No matter how many "carnal luxuries" I had, "I loved these friends for their own sake, and felt myself loved by them for mine" (VI.16.26). When his best friend dies Augustine falls into despair. For Augustine "life becomes no better than death for those who live on" (IV.9.14). He remembers the famous lovers Orestes and Pylades, who found life unbearable without each other (IV.6.11). Fully absorbed in their mutual love, they wished to die together. "I felt that my soul and his had been but one soul in two bodies, and I shrank from life with loathing because I could not bear to be only half alive. . ." (IV.6.11). Augustine loves his friend religiously; he is Augustine's salvation and now without his friend he is half a man. What remains is an ugly soul, "an unhappy place" he can neither live in nor "escape" (IV.7.12). But here Augustine discovers something about his love. Even in his darkest hour he does not really want to die with his friend. He is "amazed" that he still wants to live even after his friend's passing. This is not just because Augustine is afraid of death. He suggests that he wants to preserve "the whole of him" who had passed, "and perhaps I was so afraid of death" for this reason (IV.6.11). Augustine fears death because he loves life; he longs for the whole of him -- who was his other half. Augustine cannot find satisfaction within himself and it is not as if his friend had simply satisfied some subjective need that Augustine can now easily find anywhere. Augustine loved his friend for his own sake, "the whole of him." With a torn up heart he continues to ache.

Augustine flees from his "native land" to Carthage (IV.7.12). "Native land" here refers both to his own soul and the land that reminds him of his friend; he is neither at

home in his homeland nor even with his own self and he tries to flee from the memory of both. And yet even this fleeing is not just an escape. The journey is also a longing for another external good. Augustine is not just in despair. Surely a man who simply wants to die has no will to journey onward; he wastes away, remains rooted in the place of birth. But Augustine still longs to live. He continues to strive for a place of belonging, his other half. In Carthage Augustine does indeed find a place of temporary belonging, not in one particular friend but in a community of friends. The community "restored and re-created" him, he says (IV.8.13). Once again Augustine's love is devotional; he pours his whole soul out (or seemingly so). "We would teach and learn from each other, sadly missing any who were absent and blithely welcoming them when they returned. Such signs of friendship sprang from the hearts of friends who loved and knew their love returned, signs to be read in smiles, words, glances and a thousand gracious gestures. So were sparks kindled and our minds were fused inseparably, out of many becoming one." Augustine says of this community that it gathers individuals: "out of many becoming one." He says that he and his friends are united in "sharing jokes," in "reading elegantly written books together." They "teach and learn from each other" and "disagree but only in this spirit of teaching and learning." The religious language is no accident. Augustine calls his love of community, a "substitute" for God (IV.8.13).

Augustine here loves the whole community, the spirit that exceeds any particular member. However, Augustine remains restless even in this love. Here he begins to meditate on natural order, beauty and harmony. But we read that "no one shared" this "appreciation" with him (IV.14.23). Augustine is alone in his meditations, even as he

tries to share his love for beauty with his friends. His longing draws him out of the community in longing. Augustine is concerned here with sharing in a good higher than even his own community; he is not just concerned with preserving his own community, preserving what already belongs to him. The concern here is for a reality greater than any one community, a reality no community can claim to possess. Even as Augustine lives with his friends his soul is on a journey of its own. This seems like egoism; and yet this journey is a longing for participation in a reality greater than any ego and greater than any parochial attachment. In his longing for a universal, non-parochial good Augustine comes to admire science, its observations governed by empirically verifiable laws (V.4-5). Augustine turns against his former spiritual community for this reason. The Manichean religion proves itself to be irrational (V.3.6). It knows neither the physical world nor God: it is pure confusion, he says. It is false spirituality, disguised materialism. The Manichees' flights of fancy are merely fodder for the skeptic (V.10.19). But science teaches Augustine to ground his soul in something real and universal, not in an imaginary place beyond all place, nor a particular place of devotion, but the universal order that contains all places. Nevertheless mere knowledge of necessity and universality leaves Augustine's soul as hungry as before. Science has nothing to say about the origin of the universe, nor the soul's place in it. God resides outside of it and the soul is a mere moment in time determined by causal forces. The universe is impersonal, motion without meaning, pure necessity. Science (on its own terms) therefore cannot speak to Augustine's longing; it cannot on its own heal Augustine's broken heart, his longing for a true homeland, the true place of belonging (V.3.5-6).

After his failures with the Manichees, Augustine moves restlessly once again, this time to Rome. Augustine tells us his reasoning at the time: the unruly disordered nature of his students in Carthage, the prospect of better students in Rome, and the promptings of his friends who tempted him with a better salary and more prestige. But Augustine concludes that the real truth runs deeper. "But in truth it was you, my hope and my inheritance in the country of the living, who for my soul's salvation prompted me to change my country" with the hope of "allurements at Rome that attracted me; and this you did through the lovers of a life that is no more than death. . . ." (V.8.14). Once again, Augustine's love of the good, the land of the living, expresses itself "through" a desire for worldly things, "through" the love of a life "no more than death." His longing for God animates his love of life (a life "no better than death for those who live on" [IV.9.14], as Augustine puts after the death of his best friend). So far Augustine has travelled to a place without place even as in longing he tried to find a whole universe in one friend. In both cases Augustine was without lasting relationship. The prideful ascent above place was without other, without healing in the good, and the parochial attachment failed to capture Augustine's longing soul. His flirtation with science leaves him equally empty, since science in itself is without soul or God, without place, without relationship. But even as Augustine falls in love with a life moving towards death, even as he moves restlessly from place to place or aspires for the universe itself (the whole place), his true longing is for another homeland, the "country of the living."

After the death of his best friend Augustine comes face to face with death and judged that life is no better than death -- except for the presence of an inexplicable

longing in his soul for the òcountry of the living.ö Augustine's limited, parochial, idolatrous attachments and his prideful intellectualism fails time and time again. On their own these repeated failures could not but give rise to despair: the very idea that life and death is interchangeable, that òlife is not better than death.ö Here mortality could easily have become a fixation, an irresistible logic gripping his soul, pulling it down further and further. Augustine's desire for God would have been an expression of exhaustion, of the soul that grew tired of life and strove to dissolve itself in God, stop the flow of time, end all becoming and suffering. God would represent a desire for anything but life, the desire for non-being, suicide, the infantile or regressive desire for nothingness, the darkness of the womb. But if God were the whatever-we-humans-are-not -- if God were mere antithesis, if every thought of God were mere revolt, mere iconoclasm, a violence against everything earthly ó would Augustine not have set limits on God? In the name of reverence would he not have created an image of God: the anti-human, defined God by earthly reality as "against" "opposite," "unlike," and only that? There is comfort in this image of utter darkness; it expresses a desire for sleep, for forgetfulness, for eternal rest. At best, the longing in question is a wish-fulfillment, a longing for human life but only better and more perfected. At worst, God represents a violent reaction caused by earthly suffering. But how can this God, this product of despair save a person from despair? Even the most devout longing for an imaginary God cannot but exercise that part of soul already fixated on despair. Every infantile image of God merely lends credibility to the underlying cause of the wish-fulfillment or the death-wish. Despair proves itself over and over again. The cause of imagination (despair) is more real than its effect (imagination).

Imagination cannot ever suppress the underlying cause; it is precisely the death-wish or wish-fulfillment that feeds the imagination in the first place. Augustine discovers the true weakness of imagination after the death of his best friend.

I had become a great enigma to myself, and I questioned my soul, demanding why it was sorrowful and why it so disquieted me, but it had not answer. If I bade it, "Trust in God," it rightly disobeyed me, for the man it had held so dear and lost was more real and more lovable than the fantasy in which it was bidden to trust. Weeping alone brought me solace, and took my friend's place as the only comfort of my soul. (IV.4.9)

Imagination leaves untouched that part of the soul exhausted with life. The soul distracted by imagination can keep this game up for a while. But the cause of imagination is "more real and moral lovable than the fantasy," the false God constructed as antithesis and nothing more. Here weeping cannot but become the "only comfort." Imagination cannot save the despairing soul; it survives; it expresses itself, even as mere mood or vague feeling.

Augustine's longing uproots his soul, draws him from his homeland, and ruins his career. In longing Augustine moves into an unknown future. This movement is at first inarticulate, a mere itch, a restless feeling. It is a painful reminder that all is not well with his soul. This negative spirit is ever-present, always at odds with his most immediate desires. His soul is out of step with God and yet he is not at home in the country of his birth. Without fail longing wounds Augustine. But is the longing in question merely negative? And if so, is God not like a kind of death? Is there no country of rebirth, no life in God?

Augustine does not fall into the grip of despair. The journey of longing continues, even if Augustine does not know why. Even as he pours his heart into the sand, he remains alive -- with half a heart; but alive nonetheless. The very spirit of love that breathed life into his friendships continues to abide. But what is this everlasting spirit greater than Augustine's torn heart? In the darkness of his own soul, Augustine begins to orient himself in that very spirit, an experience that he will try to express in a new symbolic language throughout the rest of the book. Famously, Augustine's inability to find truth in any specific location outside himself draws him inward. But here "inwardness" does not refer to a location (inside the mind). "My mind scanned material forms" and when I turned towards the soul "I averted my trembling thought from incorporal reality and looked instead toward shapes and colors and distended mass, and since in the soul I could not see these, concluded that I was not able to see the soul" (IV.15.24). Augustine's previous attempts at finding his homeland had failed precisely because he tried to locate it or, in his intellectually ambitious endeavours, transcend place and relationality all-together. But the trembling in question here is precisely the expression of relationship, the soul humbling itself or being humbled before a reality neither located in a specific place nor vague, neither naked before the eye, nor inscrutable. "I did not realize that it [my mind] needed to be open to the radiance of another light in order to become a partaker in the truth, for it is not itself the essence of truth" (IV.15.25). Here for the first time Augustine's soul begins to turn towards the spiritual reality animating his various loves. Augustine says that even while he and his friends were discussing "distasteful things" there "flowed to me the power to discuss

these distasteful things with my friends and still find sweetness in our talks. . . ."

(VI.16.26). At that point Augustine could only experience this "sweetness" as a vague spiritual reality, present yet unseen. But in turning towards that reality itself Augustine begins another stage in his spiritual journey. Only as Augustine opens his soul to the very spirit of his failed loves does he advance in education. This öinwardö turn is possible, not because God is specifically inside Augustine but because God's light is everywhere, even in his distasteful conversations. "Let us love him, for he made these things and he is not far off, for he did not make them and then go away: they are from him but also in him. You know where he is, because you know where truth tastes sweet. He is most intimately present to the human heart, but the heart has strayed from him. Return to your heart then, you wrongdoers, and hold fast to him who made you" (IV.12.18). The mystery of this abiding light begins to move Augustine in new ways. He begins to contemplate the very possibility of love and friendship, the "sweetness" of life. In turning towards the life-giving source of everything beautiful and good, Augustine will begin to fall in love anew. A new spirit of thankfulness enters into his soul. Throughout the narrative this light always and everywhere sets itself in opposition to Augustine's ego. Augustine initially experiences this confrontation as an inarticulate pain, a mere itch. Only as his soul becomes familiar with this pain can he come to see it as the first expression of longing for God. Here the opposing force, the negative force that confronted his every attempt at self-possession, is revealed not as law but as love. The light begins to shine through and Augustine's soul, once plagued by disease, is illuminated. In "the innermost places of my being," Augustine says,

I entered, then, and with the vision of my spirit, such as it was, I saw the incommunicable light far above my spiritual ken, transcending my mind: not this common light which every carnal eye can see, nor any light of the same order but greater, as though this common light were shining much more powerfully, far more brightly, and so extensively as to fill the universe. The light I saw was not this common light at all, but something different, utterly different, from all these things. (VII.10.16)

The "utterly different" light is not a "light of the same order" as if it were only more expansive and powerful than the "common light." It is not this "common light at all." But neither is this light "higher than my mind in the sense that oil floats on water or the sky is above the earth; it was exalted because this very light made me, and I was below it because by it I was made. Anyone who knows truth knows it, and whoever knows it knows eternity. Love knows it" (VII.10.6). In the vision Augustine receives a small glimpse of his true relationship to God. This relationship is with the "utterly different" and yet it is not like oil in water or sky above earth. The light is praiseworthy, says Augustine, because "this very light made me." Augustine begins to orient himself in the light itself, an experience made possible because Augustine is already related to the light. Augustine was made by the very light he now seeks.

"I am the food of the mature; grow then, and you will eat me. You will not change me into yourself like bodily food: you will be changed into me" (VII.10.16). Augustine experiences his longing for God as a half-hearted need, a mere itch, a blind desire to consume and assimilate. But then in his spiritual journey, the appetite transfigures. The desire to consume becomes a desire to consummate, to unite soul with reality. Augustine eats the divine food and is gradually "changed into" the consumed truth. Blind craving for nourishment transfigures in relationship with God. Augustine,

the one who eats God, becomes the one consumed. The soul set on fire, longs for unknowing. What is at stake here pedagogically is not merely a technique for expanding knowledge, drawing Augustine's pre-existing knowledge to its proper conclusion. "I had sunk so low, and was so blind," says Augustine, that I once thought the Epicureans right. I used to ask my interlocutors: If "we were immortal," would "perpetual bodily pleasure," not constitute happiness? I was "so blind," he says, that I was "incapable of even conceiving the light of a goodness, a beauty, which deserved to be embraced for its own sake, which the bodily eye sees not, though it is seen by the spirit within" (VI.16.26). This "light of a goodness," this "beauty" is not just for more life (into infinity) but a higher order of life, "embraced for its own sake."

Desire tries to consume but is consumed in God. The self-possessed ego begins to lose itself. Ultimately, it is Christ who saves Augustine from the humiliation of this dispossessive movement. This is not because the glory of God is immediately disclosed in Christ (no one can possess divine glory immediately), but because Christ is the Way to glory. Christ is the Way of humble and prayerful openness to God. "O mortals," Augustine exclaims, "how long will you be heavy-hearted? Life has come down to you, and are you reluctant to ascend and live? But what room is there for you to ascend, you with your high-flown ways and lofty talk? Come down, that you may ascend, ascend even to God, for you have fallen in your attempts to ascend in defiance of God" (IV.12.19). Augustine comes to see that truth is the Way of descent. The proud do not know him as the Way whereby they can climb down from their lofty selves to him, and thus by him ascend to him" (V.4.5).

In Book X Augustine meditates on the *way* into God in a hymn of praise and worship. He begins to question the created beings in his search for God; but the earth and the sea, the animals, the wind, the birds, the heavenly bodies all reply: "I am not he." At the end of the hymn all the creatures and created bodies cry out "He made us."

Augustine's questioning here is not a cross examination but an intimate encounter: the "questioning was my attentive spirit,/ and their reply, their beauty" (X.6.9). And yet as Augustine falls in love with their beauty, his soul is led elsewhere in longing. Augustine remains restless here not because nature is evil or deficient as such; but because he senses a higher reality present in every encounter with beauty. The restlessness in question is a longing for God, the gift-giver who gives himself in his gifts. "Let us love him, for he made these things and he is not far off, for he did not make them and then go away: they are from him but also in him" (IV.12.18). Creation is *from him* and *in him*.

Augustine's soul (open to reality) participates in this spirit of creative love even as he takes joy in creation. This is why even as Augustine falls in love with beauty early in *The Confessions* it cannot capture his soul fully. "I was thinking about the beautiful and the harmonious, and longing to stand and hear you, that my joy might be perfect at the sound of the Bridegroom's voice. . ." (IV.15.27). Every partial encounter with God robs the soul of comfort, certainty, rest -- not because God is remote but because God gives himself in giving his gifts. Every particular gift leaves the learner hungry and in need of the Gift-giver. The gift robs because it is personal. It makes the receiver dependent on the Giver. As Augustine prays to God: ". . . you lavished your fragrance, I gasped, and now I pant for you;/ I tasted you, and I hunger and thirst;/ you touched, and I burned for your peace

(X.27.38). The more intimate Augustine becomes with God the more his need for God grows. This need is not a deficiency but the very spirit of his relationship with God. The relationship transforms Augustine's soul and even when he turns his face from God, he remains in need and in longing for God. Even as he forgets God in a superficial way his soul, loved forth by the encounter, continues to ache. At times this ache might even become an itch, a mere disturbance, a feeling. But Augustine cannot satisfy this pain anywhere, as if the source of the misery were a need merely inside him, a need he could fulfill anywhere. The source of the ache lies in the relationship itself. The ache is there because his soul was born into God and lives in God. God is not the practical solution to the problems in Augustine's life. As we have seen, Augustine's most profound affliction is precisely his very relationship with God. It is the relationship itself that gives rise to his longing. God pulls Augustine's self apart, thwarts every attempt at self-mastery. Augustine's longing is unlike a fullness of energy, an overflowing power, a gathering seed waiting for release. His longing spirit is too poor for this; it knows not how to teach but only how to learn. It knows its own emptiness and loves wisdom all the more for this very reason. This is the way of longing.

The way of longing is life itself, for Augustine. The problem of finitude and mortality, it is true, figures heavily in *The Confessions*. Augustine says that the soul "finds no place to rest" in carnal things "because they do not stand firm" and that we cannot "seize them, even near at hand." Our souls, he says, fall into despair because they try to "cling" to things "outside itself" which "arise and sink; in their rising they begin to exist and grow toward their perfection, but once perfect they grow old and perish; or, if

not all reach old age, yet certainly all perish." Do let my soul, he prays, "be glued fast to them [mortal things] by sensual love,/ for they are going whither they were always destined to go,/ toward extinction;/ and they rend my soul with death-dealing desires/, for it too longs to be, and loves to rest in what it loves" (IV.10.15). But the existential problem here is not just that beautiful things die, but also that the soul "longs to be." The flux of life is not merely a question of movement toward extinction but of longing for life. The soul "longs to be" and "rest in what it loves," Augustine says. This longing to be is precisely what plagues Augustine from the very beginning of the narrative. We can see what Augustine means by "rest" in the very first prayer and first passage of *The Confessions*. "Great are you, O Lord, and exceedingly worthy of praise. . . . And so we humans, who are due part of your creation, long to praise you. . . . You arouse us so that praising you may bring us joy, because you have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is unquiet until it rests in you" (I.1.1). Augustine's longing for God is not a longing for death or sleep. Even Augustine's mystical experiences are most fully awake, the complete opposite of an utter loss of consciousness. In vision Augustine falls to rest; but the rest in question is praise and worship of the living God. Without fail longing wounds Augustine with its call to a higher life. But only with time does the itch manifests itself as an ache, as a longing for another order of being, a higher love. Augustine suffers because he is called to participate in an unfamiliar good. But this good is already related to Augustine; it is not like "oil and water." It is not as if God bridges the infinite gap between himself and human understanding by imposing himself on the soul. Augustine is able to orient himself freely in the good because it is a way of life, a

way of being loved by God, not a passively imposed feeling or inculcated idea. "What is this light that shines through the chinks of my mind and pierces my heart, doing it no injury? I begin to shudder yet catch fire with longing: I shudder inasmuch as I am unlike him, yet I am afire with longing for him because of some likeness there" (XI.9.11). At every stage of spiritual growth the light "shines through" Augustine's protective armour and sets it on fire. The soul shudders and burns at the same time: shudders because the light comes from "the region of unlikeness" and burns because the soul is set free in God. There is "some likeness there" between soul and truth because God is always already intimately related to the soul. Yes, Augustine suffers in God's illumination: God "shines through the chinks . . . and pierces." But God, while "utterly different," is no mere disruption of life, a violent negation of life.

Living in God is a way of seeing the universe, Augustine says, because God is a way of seeing. Some people think creation is evil and others think creation is good. The latter

fail to find you within it, and look for their enjoyment in creation itself rather than in you. Different from both is the attitude of one who sees it as good in such a way that their God views its goodness through the person's human eyes. This means that God is loved in what he has made. But he could not be loved were it not through the Spirit he has given us, *because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit bestowed upon us*. Through him we see that everything is good. . . . (XIII.31.46, emphasis original).

In prayer a person sees not just a particular good thing in life but enjoys God's way of seeing. . "Solely by your abundant goodness has your creation come to be and stood firm, for you did not want so good a thing to be missing" (XIII.2.2). I am commanded, Augustine says, "to serve you and worship you that it may be well with me of your

bounty, who have granted me first to exist, that I may enjoy well-being," not that I might "pay cult" to you (XIII.1.1). Those who truly understand the universe are those who see "through your Spirit, for you are seeing it through their eyes." The Spirit of joy, "arousing their delight in these things" is the Spirit who "gives you joy in us" (XIII.31.46). Praise, joy, delight, we are told here, are not feelings produced in us, but a way of seeing, God's seeing through us. It is not as if God merely implants joy in the joyful person, a feeling unconnected with reality as a whole or with God himself (like oil and water; sky and water). The person who praises God participates in a divine activity, God's "delight in these things," just as God expresses his "joy in us." In God a person begins to long for vision, for divine joy. The sickness of longing is not unto death; it is the beginning of life at its fullest.

God creates, the hymn says, so that goodness might be and so that we might live in goodness. God has no interest in payment, in cult worship; his activity is infinitely free of all calculus. God loves the universe into existence, praises forth creation; he creates neither necessarily nor arbitrarily. Wholly inappropriate here would be the use of symbols that reduce God to unthinking emanation or dialectical opposition. There are some who say that creation is evil, that God created only "after vanquishing . . . enemies" and was "driven by necessity to create," Augustine notes (XIII.30.45). Presumably they think a perfect God, a self-sufficient and apathetic God (a willing without willing, as Schelling puts it) must have some alien power to conquer. What else could draw God out of his slumber? But, Augustine says, those who argue this fail to understand the universe because they do not participate in God's "Spirit arousing their delight in these things," the

Spirit who "gives you joy in us" (XIII.31.46). For Augustine, God is not *related* to creation dialectically (as in Schelling); nor is God *unrelated* to creation as unconscious emanation (as in Spinoza). In Augustine's mystical visions he begins to see a God who is essentially relational, who is the very joy of self-giving love. Why does God create? God creates so that goodness might be, so that no good thing should be missing (XIII.2.2). Why does God illuminate his creation? Because he needs human praise? "No," prays Augustine, "you command me to serve you and worship you that it may be well with me of your bounty, who have granted me first to exist, that I may enjoy well-being" (XIII.1.1). God, for Augustine, is essentially the perfect seeing and enjoyment of goodness. God sees and creates out of his seeing. Schelling says that for God to be self-conscious he must be divided against himself, at war with himself, in a sense. There must be an unconscious ground, a nature, for God to be conscious in the first place, something for the godhead to overpower. The ontological independence of the unconscious is the melancholy at the heart of Schelling's vision. But for Augustine, God is not related to himself in this way: as a higher consciousness related to something lower than itself: nature, blind desire, an abyss threatening to undo the very identity of the whole. It is not as if the impulse to create is ontologically distinct, a force to be reckoned with, a thing to control, a pent up energy waiting for release in artistic production, a force flowing unconsciously out of God. Unlike the artist who loses himself in his creation, who becomes "one" with artistic impulse, God does not lose perfection in creating, for Augustine. And it is not as if God's identity hinges on inhibiting this out-flowing force, gaining composure, withdrawing into himself and hypostatizing being. God creates out

of a way of seeing goodness, for Augustine. The seeing is the enjoyment of vision, God's delight in these things. This delight is God's internal dialogue, an eternal communion; it is God's Word. These two movements, the creative movement and internal movement of delight, are perfectly connected in God, for Augustine. When God creates and illuminates being he gives forth of his delight, his Word. When some changeable creature advises us, we are but led to that stable Truth, where we truly lean as we stand and listen to him, and are filled with joy on hearing the Bridegroom's voice, and surrender ourselves once more to him from whom we came (XI.8.10). In God a person hears the "voice," not a series of words disconnected from personality. Each word, as it were, promises a whole: God himself. God gives of himself in creating, gives his way of seeing. You are unchanging, Augustine prays to God, "never inconsistent in your action" (XII.7.7). To say that God gives himself means that God remains eternally himself in every action. The eternally begotten communion abides in every act.⁶³ Augustine says that God's "Word is untouched by time." But is this because God is timelessly monistic, a lifeless Unity? No, it is because God's Word "subsists with me eternally, equal to myself," Augustine says in God's voice. When a person prays with God, the person begins to participate in some small way in this eternal conversation. "What you see through my Spirit, I see, just as what you say through my Spirit, I say" (XIII.29.44). Longing is a perpetual orientation in God's way of seeing because God is eternally Word and creates through his Word. God is not a thing a person can contain in an idea or subjective feeling. The joy of praise and worship, for Augustine, is not just to enjoy the

⁶³ Cf. *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 1991), XV:37. "And if the charity by which the Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father inexpressibly shows forth the communion of them both, what more suitable than he who is the common Spirit of them both should be called charity?"

true Artist in his work but the Artist himself, his way of seeing and living. The way is eternal, an eternal consciousness of goodness. God's perfect vision and love of goodness is not an ideal that *once was* and is now in need of recovery. It lives eternally in relation to every creature. All creation, Augustine prays, both as *formless* being and as creature, are *summoned* back to your unity to *become* exceedingly good because they are from you, the one supreme Good (XIII.2.2).

Fundamentally, the longing in question is not a consequence of sin, for Augustine. The longing to see is a consequence of God's way of seeing. Even the highest orders of spiritual creation *contemplate* the Light in order to fully be; they are contemplatively active in God's creative joy and are *illuminated* thereby (XIII.3.4). Perfected beings long for God because God is eternally active. The longing is essentially an eternal impoverishment in relation to God, a need that grows the more a person knows God. If God were simply the solution to a practical problem, the need would satisfy itself. Or if perfectibility meant falling into an unconscious union with God, the need would annihilate itself. But God is neither the practical solution to a problem nor a death-wish, but a way of seeing the good for its own sake. The longing in question strives forever to orient itself in God's way of seeing. This neediness, the continual recognition of dependency is not a humiliation but a blessing in itself.

As Augustine continues to advance in love he will begin to meditate, not just on the relationship between God and created reality, but on God himself. Here he will experience brief moments of unnamable joy. These experiences leave him breathless and in darkness after returning to earth. They are a foretaste and promise a reality beyond this

life. But even these highest of mystical experiences are not merely beautiful moments in themselves. They are not like a death, an interruption of life, but rather a foretaste of true life itself. When Augustine interprets Psalm 113:16 (on "heaven's heaven"), he proceeds to praise God in hymns and stories about an order of being beatified by unceasing contemplation of God. This highest order of created being is beatified because it remains lovingly attentive to God, not because it loses being and becomes unconsciously absorbed into God.

The wisdom of which I speak is a created wisdom, the intellectual order of being which by contemplating the Light becomes light itself. Wisdom it is called, but it is a created wisdom, and as there is a vast difference between Light as source and that which is lit up by another, the difference is just as great between Wisdom that creates and the wisdom that has been created. A comparable gulf exists between the justice that justifies and the justice created in us by that act of justification, which is why even we are said to be 'your justice' in the words of a certain servant of yours: so that in him we might become the justice of God. (XII.15.20)

This created order has the "potential" to turn away from God's face; and it would "darken and grow cold" if it "did not cling" to God in "immense love" (XII.15.21). *ö*Drinking deeply from you in unswerving fidelity, such a creature shows no trace of mutability at any point, for it is bound fast by the whole strength of its love to you, who are always present to it. . . *ö* (XII.9.12)

These beings are one with God relationally. *ö*Participating in your eternity, though in no sense coeternal with you, O Trinity, this intellectual creation largely transcends its mutability through the intense bliss it enjoys in contemplation of you, and by holding fast to you with a constancy from which it has never fallen since its first creation, it is independent of the spinning changes of time *ö* (XII.9.9). The relationship here between created being and God is prayerful. The unity in question is relational, not static or

unconscious. This highest order of being lives in timeless unity with God, not because they came from the One and in their return become annihilated in God. As Augustine puts it, this order of being ðnever loosens its grip or slips away from him into any temporal succession or the vicissitudes of time, but rest in utterly real contemplation of him alone?ö (XII.14.19). *Time* here for Augustine is a question slipping away from God, slipping away from relationship. Time is not the opposite of unconscious unity. Time is precisely a falling away from relationship, from eternally active, contemplative joy. ðAnd what is its life, but yourself? And what are your days but your eternity; what else are they but your years that fail not, because you are ever the same?ö (XII.12.13). God's way of life, Augustine says, is timeless, eternal days, unfailing years. The ambiguity here is intentional. To say that God has days and years is in itself improper, since God is timeless. But it would also be improper to speak of God as if God were unthinking emanation.

The difficulty with language here shows precisely how Augustine is striving, indeed, longing for God in word. The difficulty is that we are conditioned to see timeless reality as static. In one sense, we want God to be practical, to solve human problems. As an eternally static idea and immobile unity, God *solves* the problem of motion: the static idea puts a stop to motion, the suffering of change and variation, everything imperfectly mobile. But here God becomes defined by the problem. There is no way to know and love God for God's own sake. But for Augustine God is ðnever inconsistent in . . . actionö (XII.7.7). God is eternally himself in all action. God is not the solution that puts a stop to action. Philosophers influenced by science try to put a stop to God's activity,

Augustine says. But while they say true things about creation, they do not find the Truth who is artificer of creation because they do not seek him with reverence. Or, if they do find him and recognize God, they do not honour him as God or give him thanks; their reasoning grows unsound as they claim to be wise and arrogate to themselves what is yours" (V.4.5). Augustine argues that theologians and philosophers enamoured by science, want power over being; they want to measure it, control it and confine it to laws. When they reach the edge of mystery, when they cross the boundaries of empirical observation, move past the observation of matter in *motion*, they posit the existence of an unmoved mover. The notion of an unmoved mover is the static idea par excellence. It puts a stop to motion absolutely. But Augustine says that those think of God like this do not "seek him with reverence" or "honour him as God or give him thanks," and so they will never know God. Even if "they do find him and recognize God" they do not really know him (V.3.5). Even if the scientifically-minded philosophers leap beyond science and find God they do not really find him. Augustine argues here that the path we take towards God is vital to our relationship with God. The one who only knows God as the solution to a problem cannot seek God reverently and therefore cannot know God at all. The person, Augustine prays to God, "who knows enough to become the owner of a tree and gives thanks to you for the benefits it brings him, is in a better state, even if ignorant of its height in feet and the extent of its spread, than another who measures and counts all its branches but neither owns it nor knows its creator nor loves him" (V.4.7). It is not as if the spiritual person knows the laws of motion first, then posits an unmoved mover, and then develops an affective relationship with God, as if we could approach God objectively

first and then subjectively. Faith is not something that merely transcends empirical observation. Augustine's argument is not merely that a person cannot measure Truth. His argument is that the astonishment a person feels in confronting the measureless, in feeling the need to leap beyond empirical reality is false religiosity. Enamoured by the laws of motion, a person can only posit God as a causal power. But this conception of God is empty, the mere negation of a causal chain of events. God becomes the name for the cessation of causality. The spiritual person and the scientist turned metaphysician know God differently because they love differently, Augustine says. Augustine, as he himself admits, once loved analysis and scrutiny more than God: I "readily chattered as though skilled in" theology; but I did not see "the difference between presumption and confession, between those who see the goal but not the way to it and the Way to our beatific homeland, a homeland to be not merely described but lived in" (VII.20.26). For Augustine, God is Way, a way of seeing and loving. For this reason God is ñnot merely described.ö God is ñlived in.ö No idea can contain God, no subjective feeling can draw a person to God. God is intimately related to a person but the relationship impoverishes the person, draws a person away from himself into the Way. A person journeys into God, sees God in God's way of seeing through the person.

To say that longing is a longing to see God also reveals the imperfection of language. How can contemplation be active, especially in God? Seeing might well connote a kind of passivity, the experience of being overwhelmed, overpowered by something alien. The German idealists viewed a philosopher like Friedrich Jacobi with suspicion for this reason. Jacobi argues that there are "two different faculties of

perception in man," one for corporal reality and one for spiritual reality. The existence of this faculty, this spiritual "organ" or "spiritual eye" is "made known to us through feelings alone," as he put it.⁶⁴ This organ reveals spiritual/rational truth the way the physical organs reveal the external world to us. "Reason does not produce concepts, it builds not systems, and does not even judge; instead, like the external senses, it simply reveals, it makes positive proclamations."⁶⁵ Here Jacobi retains the integrity of spiritual reality, since it reveals itself in only *in itself* and not by way of human logic. However, for Jacobi's philosophical contemporaries this validation of non-physical reality comes at an expense. The image here is of passive observer overtaken by seeing. The "utterly different" here does not involve the soul in its activity; it merely shows itself and the soul sees it in a glance; the soul cannot long for truth, intermingle with it, orient itself in it, become a new being in it. The human being remains uninvolved; the experience is removed from human activity and concern. As George Di Giovanni argues, "The picture conveyed was of an observer simply taking stock of activities that originate at a level of life where there is yet neither consciousness nor, hence, any issue of individual attribution and responsibility. Jacobi's objection to Lessing and Spinoza had been precisely that their description of the human situation make of human individuals observers rather than responsible agents of their own actions."⁶⁶ Or as Schelling puts it in his critique of Jacobi, "If immediate knowledge of reason were a knowledge of *God*, then *God could also only be that which* is immediately. . . .ö But this kind of öknowledge of God could only be a

⁶⁴ "David Hume on Faith" (Preface, 1815). *Op. cit.*, 569.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 562

⁶⁶ "An Essay in Analysis" in *Writings*. p. 98.

blind, i.e. a non-knowing knowledge. . . .⁶⁷ If God is timeless and non-historical, then he must reveal himself almost violently as a speaking in tongues, as an overpowering vision unrelated to life. By analogy, we might say that the passive vision of God is like trying to view art for art's sake, as if art were ideally disinterested, as if one were "disregarding everything in which a work [of art] is rooted (its original context of life, and the religious or secular function that gave it significance) . . .," as Hans Gadamer puts it. This ideal of "aesthetic differentiation" maintains the purity of art but also removes it from the *sensus communis*.⁶⁸ If we apply this notion of disinterest to mystical experience, we would have to admit that such experiences, as mere beautiful vision, could not but bring solipsistic despair. The vision would be private, in a sense, a speaking in tongues unrelated to anyone else. As Paul says, "Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies the church" (1 Cor. 14:4). Indeed, "Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the pipe or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes" (1 Cor. 14:7).

However, Augustine takes another path, the neither . . . nor . . . beyond the dichotomous formulation. On the one hand, there is always "distinction in the notes" in God. Creation is not blind production, a relationless unity. To say that God is timeless does not mean that there is no singing, no notes sung. On the other hand, Augustine says repeatedly that the seeing in question is timeless. Above and beyond history, God's perfect vision and love of the good abides. It is this love that God gives in every gift, for Augustine. To our sensate minds God appears like the most lifeless of ideas, an abstract

⁶⁷ F.W.J. von Schnelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, trans. Andrew Bowie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 171.

⁶⁸ *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed., trans. J. Weinsheimer and D. G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 2004), 74.

whole unrelated to life. But for Augustine, God is the utter opposite of abstraction. God is alive, a way of life, a way of seeing. The divine whole is Word, the divine communion above and beyond every divine gift. Every gift lives in this communion.

Augustine's longing to express this timeless relationality is emblematic of the inadequacy of language. *The Confessions* is full of hesitancy, qualifications, and starts.⁶⁹ Augustine strives towards a reality not contained in any word, sentence, paragraph or book. Even as Augustine's words of praise join together to make a hymn they do not of themselves invite enlightenment. They do not allow us to rest in the rhetoric but restlessly point elsewhere. Here we are perhaps reminded of an aside in Book 1: "What does it matter to me, if someone does not understand this? Let such a person rejoice even to ask the question, "What does this mean?" Yes, let him rejoice in that, and choose to find by not finding rather than by finding fail to find you" (I.6.10). And yet Augustine's words fail, not because he is trying to express some vague, wordless feeling, some unconscious drive. Augustine calls God Word, Father, Love. These symbols are, for Augustine, not arbitrary or merely conventional. These symbols are a response to his mystical experiences. For Augustine, personal language is the most accurate way of orienting himself in these experiences (even if every orientation is ultimately inadequate). They are most responsive to, most responsible to the experienced reality.

In this sense, humility is inherent to Augustine's mystical experiences. The experiences do not belong inside Augustine as private feeling; they are not his private property. They invite "finding," orientation, and journeying. Spiritual reality does not

⁶⁹ In one of the passages on heaven's heaven and the highest order of beings Augustine even qualifies his interpretation by remarking: "if any such [beings] there be!" (XII.11.12)

cause a feeling inside the person unrelated to itself. Augustine takes joy in creation *only* as he sees it well through God's Spirit. Joy here is not a private possession unrelated to God. Unlike God whose very being is infinite joy in creation (XIII.1.1-2, 2), a person has to approach and reapproach joy. All mortals fall away from God and long to rejoin him (XIII.28.43-31, 46). But even in this faithless movement, the relationship itself remains firmly established by God. Even as Augustine fails to remain in God in ecstasy, he has faith in the journey itself. The journey itself is not his to win or lose. The journey is into God, who is ever-faithful. Because Augustine's mystical visions are not private, something he can possess, they allow for community. Human relationships, Augustine holds, are ordered by shared goods. A relationship or community at large is not good because it shares in something, anything, whatever that might be. It is only good insofar as it shares in the good. Only in this abolition of private property, this admission of partial understanding can a true community flourish. At Ostia Augustine and his mother rise higher "by inward thought and wondering discourse on [God's] works." The experience of transcendence is first discursive: not an analytical discourse, which attempts to define concepts, but a reverent expression of praise and worship by which "we lifted ourselves in longing yet more ardent toward That Which Is. . ." (IX.10.24) Here the mystical ascent begins with loving discourse. Augustine and his mother, two people engaged in conversation, are "lifted" up "in longing" towards their Creator, towards an experience of creative love, gratuitous giving. In his mystical experiences Augustine remains in relationship with God under God, as do his fellow sojourners. Augustine continues to advance in understanding of his place under God. In the experiences

Augustine is very much aware of who he is -- indeed most intimately aware. Just as two lovers who never seek to be absolutely identical but continue to long for each other even their most intimate moments, the mystical experience is not a total loss of self. The experience does not belong to Augustine, to a particular place in time. Augustine can only share in it, along with all other people. *The Confessions* is therefore an invitation for the reader to join the interpretive "Commonwealth" and not a claim to authority. "Of this I am certain," writes Augustine, "and I am not afraid to declare it from my heart, that if I had to write something to which the highest authority would be attributed, I would rather write it in such a way that my words would reinforce for each reader whatever truth he was able to grasp about these matters, than express a single idea so unambiguously as to exclude others, provided these did not offend me by their falsehood" (XII.31.42). If Truth is personal and not logical, ambiguity is precisely the kind of language required. Logic remains inarticulate in personal matters, in its exclusion of all but *necessity*. Only a personal-symbolic language (a language that says: I do not claim authority, nevertheless I long for Truth) can invite the reader on a *shared* journey. The true member of a community, for Augustine, is serious in the pursuit of truth but self-deprecating in the admission of ignorance. For Augustine, it is both the gravity and comedy of human speech that allows for community.

3.

I now turn to my discussion of Kierkegaard. It might seem strange to compare Kierkegaard with Augustine. Kierkegaard rarely mentions Augustine in his published

works and if there is one figure of the past who truly influences Kierkegaard it is (Plato&Socrates).⁷⁰ However, I am not interested in the question of direct lines of influence here. I am interested in comparing Kierkegaard and Augustine because they share in a certain philosophical spirit, a certain love of wisdom that we might indeed call Socratic. However, I am ultimately interested in comparing Augustine with Kierkegaard because, in both cases, their love of wisdom calls them to orient themselves in Christian religious experience.

In this chapter I will examine the theme of longing and religious experience in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.⁷¹ In *Postscript* Kierkegaard creates a character (Climacus) who, like Augustine, is restlessly out of step with his contemporary religious and philosophical environment. Climacus is plagued by a disruptive spirit, a longing for reality that he cannot fully explain or suppress. Of course, *Postscript* is not a narrative like *The Confessions*; but it *is* a snapshot of thinking in progress, a portrait of a thinker *in* longing. Like Augustine in *The Confessions*, Climacus wants to suppress this longing, dismiss it as a mere skin condition. How easy, Climacus muses, it would be to fall back into speculation, into the spectator&S (the astronomer&S) stance before the universe. And yet Climacus cannot do this; longing has already taken hold and he cannot escape its grip.

⁷⁰Robert Puchniak &Augustine: Kierkegaard&S Tempered Admiration of Augustine&S in *Kierkegaard and the Patristic and Medieval Traditions*, ed., Jon Stewart (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 11-22, shows that Kierkegaard refers more to Augustine in his journals. Here Kierkegaard shows an appreciation of Augustine on certain doctrinal issues, such as election by grace. However, Kierkegaard also critiques Augustine for intellectualizing Christianity (for making Christianity a matter of passive contemplation or abstract knowledge of God). My reading of *The Confessions* challenges the view that Augustine is simply concerned with passive contemplation of God or thinking *about* God. I argue that prayer is a way of life for Augustine, a way of participating actively in God&S love. In this sense, Kierkegaard&S critique of Augustine is unwarranted.

⁷¹ Trans. Howard V. Hong, Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). References in the following paragraphs will refer to this text.

The longing is too close to his heart; it leaves him at odds *with himself*. It is an anti-Copernican dis-integrating movement that makes him desperate for healing ó from the wounds of longing themselves. At issue here is a reading of spirituality fundamentally at odds with the Kantian readings of Kierkegaard noted above.⁷² Kant theorizes a transcendent noumenal realm. But for Kant it would be utterly impractical and irrational to orient one's life around the longing for *relationship* with God. From a Kantian perspective, longing has little or no place in philosophy. What could longing be but an inclination or emotion best left *unexamined* and ultimately suppressed or somehow integrated into the ego?

However, that Climacus is at odds with the Kantian psychological and anthropological framework is not immediately obvious. Climacus is a thinker shaped by modern thought, from Descartes to Kant to Hegel. *Postscript* is full of technical vocabulary inspired by Hegelian dialectics and Kant's critique of metaphysics. By following through with Hegel's dialectical treatment of the old metaphysical vocabulary, the traditional Western philosophical dichotomies (e.g. infinite/finite, being/becoming), Climacus wants to show how Hegel fails to mediate the dialectical tension inherent in these opposites. "By beginning straightway with ethical categories against the objective tendency [i.e. Hegelian mediation], one does wrong and fails to hit the mark, because one has nothing in common with the attacked. But by remaining within the metaphysical, one can employ the comic, which also is in the metaphysical sphere, in order to overtake" the university professor (124). Climacus uses modern philosophical language to parody

⁷² Climacus explicitly differentiates religiousness A from a moralistic struggle defined by self-mastery (see 572).

Hegel; but the very fact that he uses this kind of language (to critique the language itself) appears to suggest that Climacus is so steeped in modern philosophy that he cannot truly escape its grip. That is, once Climacus is done with this comedic treatment of Hegel, what is left? Is the language of modern philosophy authoritative for Kierkegaard in the sense that there is no other credible way to think? If Kant's critique of metaphysics is true and Hegel's attempt at speculation is a failure, are we not left with a stark choice: either Kant or blind faith? Is there no (non-Kantian) way to think? Is it not as if longing, the restless spirit that drives Kierkegaard to God finally extinguishes itself in utter self-annihilation, crucifixion, a leap into irrational darkness? Here it would seem that there is no wisdom in Climacus's longing for God. The longing is simply a death-wish. Climacus seems to have very little in common with Augustine.

At times Climacus does seem to write within a certain Kantian framework of understanding. He occasionally writes as if the idea of God were simply a regulative ideal, precisely as Kierkegaard's Kantian critics suggest. His discussion of the absolute *telos* and eternal happiness seems to imply that these are analogous to Kant's formal principles of practical reason (385ff). Climacus seems to say that we cannot know anything about the eternal (e.g. 434) but that the idea itself is somehow evidence for our spiritual nature. The concept of the eternal somehow shows up temporal, sensuous life as finite. It even has the power to cause a bad conscience (353). The formal principle has, it seems, a certain negative, practical relevance: it reveals the selfish as selfish, the parochial as parochial; it strives against natural inclinations and instincts. But as in Kant, it would appear that the formal principle does not qualify as true wisdom, as a good a

person can long for and ultimately love for its own sake. And yet, unlike Kant, Climacus seems to say that religion demands our devotional allegiance to this otherworldly ideal. In the first place, God appears to represent a regulative ideal, the capacity to live life according to the rule of law rather than according to natural instincts. God represents the mortification of the flesh, the law that Paul says kills but cannot give life. In the second place, Kierkegaard says we are supposed to go beyond on the law. But what could this mean? This appears like a death-leap, a second striving for mortification beyond the first one. To compare this reading of Climacus with Augustine: Augustine feels his longing for God first as an itch, as an inarticulate feeling that nevertheless places judgement on egoism. Over time Augustine comes to see the itch as a desire informed by God's love. The initial encounter with divine reality is a purgation of desire. But an illuminative movement complements the purgative movement. Augustine's longing for God is very impractical indeed, from a worldly perspective, a kind of madness. Augustine falls in love with God and appears to throw his life away. And yet, this "sickness" is unto new life in God. In Kierkegaard, all commentators acknowledge, something similar is going on, except that the divine madness appears (to some readers of Kierkegaard) as utter mortification, indeed a passion indistinguishable from a death-wish. There seems to be no understanding here of life after death, resurrection, the joy of Easter morning, the third day beyond the cross. We can now see why it is important to deal with Kierkegaard's understanding of Socratic wisdom, an understanding that I believe he shares with Augustine.⁷³ If thinking means Kantian thinking, if Kant's critical philosophy is

⁷³ I will deal with Kierkegaard's understanding of Socratic wisdom before exploring Kierkegaard's more

authoritative for Climacus, if Kant is the last standing representative of Western rationalism and takes thought to its utter limits -- then any leap beyond Kant is necessarily a leap beyond rational thought at its best. Here Kant's rational limits dare the religious enthusiast to go further; but this "beyond" would have to be into an irrational void; and here the only way of saving Kierkegaard from irrationalism would be to turn him *back* into a Kantian, as Green does.

In various passages on the nature of philosophical thinking, Climacus does indeed argue (against Hegel) that we cannot mediate the opposition between thought and existence, thought and being. Thought and existence (i.e., appetite, desire, the passions, love and so on) remain infinitely at odds. Beyond thought, the thing in itself apparently remains inscrutable. For instance, Climacus argues that thought cannot think existence (309), that Christ is a paradox that cannot be thought (561ff), and that the divine in Socratic-Greek philosophy cannot be thought either (570). Climacus says that negative thinking is vital, especially in an age when pure abstract thought has become triumphant. He complains that

there is nothing to love through, nothing to experience, everything is finished, and the task of speculative thought is to rubricate, classify, and methodically order the various categories of thought. . . . For six thousand years now people have loved and the poets have celebrated erotic love; therefore in the nineteenth century people certainly should know what erotic love is, and now the task is to assign it, especially marriage, a place in the system--for the professor himself marries absentmindedly." (344)

This passage illustrates the dichotomy well. On the one hand, we have existence and on the other we have abstract thought. But what status could we possibly confer on

overtly Christian thought in chapters three and four. In these chapters the significance of my discussion of Augustine will become even more apparent.

existence then? Is existence merely *unthinking* motion, drive, inclination? Does thought merely think itself and leave existence to run its course? At times Climacus seems to argue that the existential thinker cannot but admit his own ignorance. That is, he allows himself to suffer the impossibility of his own thought (e.g. 354), as if thought cannot participate in existence. "If existing cannot be thought, and the existing person is thinking nevertheless, what does this mean? It means that he thinks momentarily; he thinks before and he thinks afterward. His thinking cannot attain absolute continuity" (329). A thinker like this is split in two. At one moment he thinks negatively; at another moment he exists positively.⁷⁴ Existence comes "before" and "afterward." But Climacus goes even further. He seems to suggest that existence remains absolutely beyond thought, so that there are no gradations of thinking (no better and worse thinking). He says for instance that existential philosophy cannot think being either. "In a certain sense, the subjective thinker speaks just as abstractly as the abstract thinker, because the latter speaks about humanity in general, subjectivity in general, the other about the one human being. . . . But the one human being is an existing human being, and the difficulty is not

⁷⁴ The contradiction is illustrated by Descartes. In his preface to the *Meditations* Descartes writes: "But I should point out that at this point I am not at all dealing with sin, that is, the error that is committed in the pursuit of good and evil, but only of error that affects the discernment of true and false." I do not "examine matter to do with faith or with the conduct of one's life, but only speculative truths. . . ." This is because, as he argues in the "Replies," the "conduct of one's life" cannot be lived according to such speculative truths, since we "must bear in mind the distinction . . . between the conduct of life and the investigation of truth. For when it is a question of managing one's life, it would certainly be completely foolish not to believe in the senses, and there has never been anything but ridicule for the sceptics who neglected human interests to such an extent that their friends had to look after them to stop the hurling themselves over precipices. . ." (*Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Michael Moriarty. [Oxford, 2008], 12, 185). To subject "human interests" to speculative doubt is madness, Descartes argues here, we must make a distinction between "conduct of life" and "investigation of truth." And yet where does this leave the thinker who has to conduct her life at one moment and think in the next? What does it might mean to think without "interest" and live without thinking? What does it mean to think God as a speculative truth or, as in Kant, a postulate of reason, to say that God is a logical proposition, the condition for the possibility of knowing *ó* and then admit that this is not the God we experience in the "conduct of life"?

left out" (253). Here Climacus' self-critical stance seems particularly extreme. Existence apparently lies outside the boundaries of thought altogether; existential philosophy is just as abstract as anything else. In general, it seems, Kierkegaard seems to side with Kant contra Hegel. If there really is something beyond thought *itself*, then the limits of thought are the ones established by Kant. If this is correct, the way to "surpass" Kant religiously would be to come face to face with the impotence of thought and take a leap of faith into the abyss. This leap would surpass everything Kantian, everything hesitant and modest. And yet nothing would validate Kant more than to expose the irrationality of this very leap beyond Kant. Nothing would show up the limits of thought better than the madness of a religiously-inspired, eccentric Danish philosopher. If Kierkegaard assumes Kantian epistemology, then the leap of faith cannot be anything but pure religious feeling, a gathering of some thoughtless energy in the soul, a will-power stronger than doubt, some infusion of strength (grace?) to push us over the edge. Here again we return to the question addressed above in Augustine. Can we really show that, for Kierkegaard, longing is informed by God's illuminative self-communication, that the longing in question is anything more than a death-wish, an exhaustion with life itself?

There are many passages in *Postscript* about thought that seem to complicate this "Kantian-framework" argument, however. For instance, how are we to understand Climacus when he says that "it by no means follows that existence is thoughtless" (123). What could it mean to say that existence is thoughtful? What could it mean to say that human experiences (fear, joy, love and so on) are ways of thinking? How is such thinking different from abstract thinking? Is the thought that takes place in existence

always, already there before any formal philosophical attempt to think existence? Or how are we to understand Climacus' insistence that the existential thinker strives to understand himself in existence? "To understand oneself in existence was *the Greek principle*. . . . I am well aware that if anyone nowadays were to live as a Greek philosopher, that is, would existentially express what he would have to call his life-view, be existentially absorbed in it, he would be regarded as lunatic" (352). Or as he puts elsewhere: In Socratic-Greek thought (Religiousness A) "the individual sets himself aside in order to find God, since it is the individual himself who is the hindrance. Here the upbuilding is quite properly distinguishable by the negative, by the self-annihilation that finds the relationship with God within itself, that suffering-through sinks into relationship with God, finds its ground in it. . ." (560). Climacus says that the religious thinker who thinks negatively nevertheless "sinks into" God. But what does that mean? Is this sinking into thoughtless? How can it find "its ground" in God if it is thoughtless? How can there be a "relationship with God" if it is thoughtless? Or how are we to understand it when Climacus says that the thinker has to become absorbed in the various elements of life (even in imagination and feeling)? "With respect to existence, thinking is not at all superior to imagination and feeling but is coordinate. In existence, the supremacy of thinking plays havoc" (346-347). This means, Climacus says, that the thinker "is not to elevate the one at the expense of the other, but the task is equality, contemporaneity, and the medium in which they are united is *existing*" (348). But what does it mean to strive to become absorbed in life? What does it mean for thought to become united with existence? How is this different from abstract thought? And what does it mean to say

that thought and existence are united *in existence*? As if thinking *becomes* existence, transforms itself in existence (becomes more concrete)? Or how are we to understand Climacus when he says that the existing thinker orients himself in his own thinking, that he "is essentially interested in his own thinking" and in this interest "is existing in it" (73)? What does it mean to for the thinker to exist *in* her own thought -- *even as* the thinker strives to think *in* existence? What does it mean to stand in relation to thought, to become intimate with thought? As if a person's thinking did not belong to her at all. As if something were already thinking through the person before she started to think.

These are the questions that *Postscript* seems to raise but does not fully answer within a "Kantian" or any other kind of framework. Climacus is talking about a *relationship* between thought and reality. This relational understanding of thought preserves the tension between familiarity and the otherness of existence. When Climacus says "sink into" he cannot explain this *by means* of another "truer" language, translate it into something more epistemologically complete. The illusiveness of this kind of non-technical language is perhaps the point. Might we not say that it is more adequate to the task precisely because it reveals its own inadequacy? We know that it falls short of reality precisely because it does not pretend to be anything other than a symbol. And yet the symbol invites a person to go beyond the rhetoric or concern with definitions or the meaning of words relative to each other. We might put it like this: The "naiveté" of Kierkegaard's symbolic language is infinitely more playful than any technical language that does not know itself as symbol (as striving for reality) *but* infinitely more serious than any modern negative theological language that (again) does not know itself as

symbol (as in relationship with reality). A symbol expresses a restlessness, a longing for reality, what Climacus calls the "duplexity [*Dobbelthed*] of thought-existence [*Tanke-Tilværelse*]" (74). Again, anyone who thinks Climacus is a skeptic, defined by the categorical limitations of modern epistemology, would have a difficult time explaining what he means by this hyphenated (duplexed) word, "thought-existence."

We can now begin to see how Kantian thought might not be authoritative for Climacus. In anticipation of my reading of the discourses, this is an important argument to make. If Kant really does set the boundaries of thought for Kierkegaard, then there really is no reason to take the discourses seriously. The discourses would merely represent a popularization of the more important *Postscript* or an indulgent regression into devotionalism. But we should not assume that for Kierkegaard the apparently more technical vocabulary of *Postscript* has a special claim on truth over and against the more devotional language of the discourses. Beyond the comical and ironic use of metaphysics in *Postscript*, the book is also filled with narratives, stories, excursions of various sorts, sometimes in the footnotes and sometimes in the text itself. These excursions are not just breaths of fresh air or rays of light shining through a dense text. They are essential to understanding the text, as we shall see below. This point is easy to miss because (as noted) Climacus is largely working with the remnants of Western metaphysics and modern skepticism. That a different sort of language (something more Socratic or Augustinian) peers through the thickets every now and again -- well, we might simply call this a nice diversion, a quirky illustration, a rambling excursion or poetical venture -- but is it really essential in any way?

Take the following passage, for instance: In *Postscript* Climacus refers to a passage from Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, where Falstaff (in Climacus' paraphrasing) remarks "that he once had an honest face, but the year and the date of it are obliterated." This "once" could mean many things, Climacus observes. It could mean that Falstaff used to have an honest face or that he had only had an honest face once in his life. But it could also be a statement about memory, about how easy it is to forget the good, about how rare it would be for an individual -- in this age of the crowd -- to remember their true face, "the Deity's eternal stamp," about how rare it would be for this image to stand out "purely, clearly, and distinctly as it once did." If we could imagine a person who had not forgotten his true image, what would it be like? For such a person, Climacus muses, time would not "interpose like an eternity between him and that recollected eternal impression." For him "even the longest life" would be but "a yesterday" "compared with the powerful presence of that eternity." The eternal would not signify the immeasurable distance between person and eternity but the undying presence, the "impression" of the good in the human soul so near that it would make even a lifetime seem like "a yesterday." The eternal would not be a future time beyond time, but the eternal presence that puts the present in the past tense, the timeless memory of the good that reduces this moment right now to obscurity. And yet even this presence, so abundant, would merely be an "impression," an image, a "stamp" of the Deity. It would therefore also be the impoverished trace of the divine, so that the lover would gain himself, remember his true face lost in forgetfulness by striving "backward in order to gain the originality that was

his eternal source!" (153). Immediately following this passage Climacus turns defensive.

He knows that this kind of language will sound ridiculous to modern ears.

If anyone says that this is only an exercise in elocution, that I have only a bit of irony, a bit of pathos, a bit of dialectic with which to work, I shall answer: What else should the person have who wants to present the ethical? Should he perhaps have managed to put it objectively in paragraphs and *geläufigt* [glibly] by rote, and thus contradict himself by the form? I believe that if the ethical *quod erat demonstrandum* [that which was to be demonstrated], then irony, pathos, and dialectic are *quod desideratur* [that which is wanted]. (153)

The imagined interlocutor complains here that Climacus uses "a bit" of philosophical vocabulary but does not understand the true logical significance of his categories, fails to take his own thinking far enough, and fails truly to set thought in dialectical motion. But Climacus argues that the interlocutor's dichotomy (a wholly serious technical vocabulary/a wholly unserious, emotional, pathetic, rhetorical vocabulary) is invalid. He says that this kind of language is not really a falling short, a lack of rigour at all. He says that this language is precisely what is required in ethical-religious thought.

4.

Let me explore this language in *Postscript* further. Climacus is a philosopher steeped in Kantian and Hegelian dialectics. But he also longs to explore a different kind of philosophical thinking. Throughout *Postscript*, Climacus toys with a certain understanding of longing and a vision of cosmic order that he sometimes identifies with Socrates and/or Plato (he calls this movement religiousness A). Whether or not this understanding of cosmic order is faithful to Socrates or Plato I will not decide. It is perhaps not the most important question either since Climacus never presents this vision

systematically. Indeed, Socrates is Climacus's philosophical exemplar precisely because he is unsystematic. For Climacus, Socrates never claims to have obtained a birds-eye view of the cosmos. His thinking begins with longing, a disquieting and dis-possessive understanding that all is not right with his soul, that he has become alienated (though not essentially so) from reality. Socrates comes to see this longing, not as irrational, but as a kind of wisdom. Here Socrates comes to see (in the very experience of longing) that he is already related (in some way) to reality, already connected to a cosmic order beyond himself.

More specifically, Climacus tells us, the longing in question is informed by an incomplete, not fully-articulate vision of immanent continuity between God and being. The vision is of cosmic unity, *an eternal becoming-of-the-deity* (581), in which *in immanence* God is neither a something, but everything, and is infinitely everything, nor outside the individual *but also in the individual* (561). However, the wise person also senses a falling away from God in the very longing for this cosmic order. This alienation from God is essentially an illusion, a forgetfulness of God, a blindness to the essential (if hidden) unity of being with divine reality. The philosopher sees (in some measure) that existence is *a lesser thing that hinders me in being the infinitely higher that I am* (573). For this reason, an individual cannot simply *imagine* God; he has to become intimate with cosmic order, strip himself of illusion, and begin to participate lovingly in the whole. The wise individual neither forgets God nor pretends to have overcome all illusions. On the one hand, he begins to see more clearly the illusions that disconnect him from ultimate reality, from the cosmic unity that underlies all being (205-207). On the other hand, he

takes courage in the understanding that ðI [*already*] amö the ðinfinitely higher,ö the good beyond all illusions.

The longing that grips the lover of wisdom is for the whole. But it is also true that this whole (if fully revealed) might absorb the individual in itself, in the One, show every human striving to be a jest, every human endeavour a triviality, perhaps even show itself to be beyond good and evil (156-157, 148-149, 578). The most consistent understanding of immanent continuity would be pantheism, Climacus notes.⁷⁵ Here the struggle of existence would ultimately be to self-annihilate, to become nothing and immortal at the same time, to become nothing and everything in God. The struggle here would be to take oneself out of existence back into the eternal through recollection, whereby all existence-decisions become only shadow play compared with what is eternally decided from behindö (226). Of course, such a universe ultimately reduces even the wise personö brief seventy years on earth to obscurity, so that we begin to question even the significance of wisdom. If every human endeavour is mere jest what is the difference between the wise and unwise person; why does wisdom even matter (see 581-582). This is perhaps what motivates the speculative philosopherö disengaged spectator-stance before the universe. Dispassionate speculation and apathy are perhaps a way of giving voice to the understanding that no-thing ultimately matters. Nevertheless Socrates (and this is why he is important for Climacus) cannot fall into apathy (see 582). He is plagued and captivated by a longing for immortality, to join up with reality, with the cosmic

⁷⁵ I am indebted to Thomas C. Andersonö article, ðIs the Religion of *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* Religiousness A?ö in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, ed., Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003), 51-76, for drawing my attention to the question of cosmology, including pantheism, in *Postscript*.

whole. This longing is not merely for self-annihilation for its own sake (an annihilation driven by despair). It might well be that existence in temporality has no decisive significance, because there is continually the possibility of taking oneself back into eternity by recollecting; and yet this possibility is continually annulled in existence itself, in the longing for the good (206). The philosopher, guided by and plagued by his half-articulate vision of reality, is too much in love to fall into despair, to simply annihilate himself for its own sake. Self-annihilation is for the sake of the good. How can the lover of wisdom annihilate himself until his soul has truly found rest in the good, truly assimilated itself with reality? The soul will continue to long as long as it remains estranged from its true home.

In order to articulate this understanding of longing better I will (in this chapter) examine Climacus's understanding of Socratic longing. Socrates helps Climacus articulate what it means to long, what it means to respond to a vision of the divine that is neither utterly vague nor fully transparent. This discussion will lead us into Kierkegaard's Christian theology, a theology comparable with Augustine's. While for Climacus, longing is a disruptive desire, a humbling spirit that forever leaves a person dis-integrated, it is also a divine spirit, a foretaste of immortal life in God. Wisdom begins with an openness to this spirit; the wise person lets the wounds of longing breathe without trying to cover them over superficially. In a passage in *Postscript*, Climacus speaks of the relationship between eternal truth and existence. The relationship is established when "the eternal aims from above at the existing person, who by existing is in motion and thus at the moment the eternal touches is already a little moment away from there [from the eternal]"

(488). This touch disrupts the soul by showing up the difference between God and temporal illusions. Even as the eternal graces the soul it still remains "a little moment away," always uncontainable, incomprehensible, out of reach. This moment is "chasmic abyss" for a worldly mentality always striving for results (see 423). The disruption requires that a person turn his soul towards the eternal or reject it. This decision will begin to shape the person's soul. The religious thinker "is not an abstract X who accomplishes something and then goes further, goes through life" and leaves the experience "undigested" or "in a pocket"; no, she "becomes concrete in what has been experienced" (489). This experience of the eternal and the decision to turn towards it now becomes a part of the person's self. The experience and the decision are not left "undigested." The soul assimilates the experience. Climacus goes on to narrate what it means to "be before God" (489). The religious lover, he says, is gripped by a longing for God. No person has to tell the person "to seek God; rather the opposite, he is gripped in such a way that there must be diversion lest he perish" (491). And yet every diversion -- every time when the person is "absent" from the "relationship with God" or not as "present" as "in the intense moment" -- gives way to longing (491). But what does it mean to be away from God and then present with God again? There seems to be a difference between carrying God around in the pocket, as a containable idea, and *actually* being "present" with God "in the intense moment." "If people say it is hard for lovers to be separated" surely it must be as "hard for the religious person. . ." (491). At times the longing to be *with* God is so strong that the lover wants to abandon the world in order to express her love absolutely. Climacus describes this as being held captive by finitude

(483-484). The smallest pleasures of life lose their taste and yet the lover of God, as human, is still bound to them. If it is true that "a girl by being loved by the one she admired is annihilated in the suffering of happiness--no wonder then that the Jew assumed that the sight of God was death and the pagans that the God-relationship was the harbinger of madness!" In love for God a person "wills to do everything" and "wants to express this relation absolutely, but he cannot make the finite commensurate with it" (484). "The person who had a relationship with the beloved only in the thought of love knows something else--when willing to do everything still does not seem enough, and the effort of willing everything creates powerlessness, and he once again stands at the beginning" (485). The longing for God is so overwhelming that the religious person is always in danger, always tempted by the superhuman, to become more than she is. In her capacity for striving, in her very participation in God, she forgets herself and imagines equality with God. But she is not equal, since she "cannot endure to lead uninterruptedly the life of eternity." The person forgets the poverty of her soul and overreaches in her striving for God (491, 492).

Now all of this might simply mean that the religious person is more emotional than other people. One person postulates the concept of God rationally and another person works herself up emotionally about that concept. The concept is the same, we say, but the subjective response is different. But this is not what Climacus says. The first touch of the eternal is not something a person can possess, even as a thought. It is precisely the opposite; it is a movement, a dying to self, a going under that opens a person up to God. The lover of God, Climacus says, always longs to return to her relationship

with new eyes, like the writer "who is never finished with something but 'stirs the waters of language' whenever he begins, so that to him the most ordinary expression comes into existence with newborn originality." During "the period of courtshipö the lover is never satisfied since öto be absolutely certain that one is loved is a sure sign that one is not in love," even though "no one can make a person in love think that it is not blissful to be in love" (455). Below, we will explore this understanding courtship and bliss positively. But for now, let me note the negative aspects of this longing to be with God for *its own sake*. The courtship with God "could bring a sensate person to despair, for one continually feels an urge to have something finished"; and yet for the religious lover "this urge is of evil and must be renounced. The perpetual process of becoming is the uncertainty of earthly life, in which everything is uncertain" (86). The religious person knows the future, knows the road that stretches before her -- and that road is infinite longing. It is öblissful to be in loveö and yet this bliss only lives in an unfinished state, in the love that keeps orienting itself in the relationship. The lover strives to be *present* with the beloved öin the intense moment.ö For the lover of God, this struggle to orient herself is measureless. Such love is unlike the love of a man who strives to conquer a girl, then wins her, and eventually exhausts his love in marriage (396). Of such love we say: there is a time for being in love. But love of God is for all time; it is absolute. "To be in love for a half year and rash enough to risk everything, that is really something; but then one must jolly well also get the girl and stretch one's weary limbs on the privileged marriage bed" (396-397). This kind of struggle for power exhausts itself and then completes itself in the final conquering act of marriage. But for the religious lover there is no time for

being in love, since "all time, existence, is a time for being in love" (397). This is why the idea of the Absolute is "abstract," and from a sensate view point "the meagerest of conceptions" because it breaks absolutely with all relative aims. The individual who relates herself to the Absolute is never finished. The absolute end of the religious person is not a something; it does not exist relative to anything else but is desired only for its "own sake" (394). She cannot bargain her way into a more definite conception of the Beyond but must renounce her imagination. This is why most people stop search for God. "They marry, they enter occupations, in consequence of which they must out of decency finish something, must have results. . . . However, longing for God, good *for his own sake* (that is, the *telos* of life), is simply impractical and so people avoid "shame before people" -- but "what modesty before the god [*Guden*] might bid gives far less thought" (85). The irreligious obsession with public opinion trumps the religious movement of modesty. Those afflicted by shame cease to strive or they complain about not having time to strive for anything, and so they "sigh over one's inability to pursue the higher because one is grasping for the lower, instead of refraining from sighing and refraining from grasping for the lower!" (85).

However, for Climacus, the longing that appears like a death-wish is the religious person's very life. The religious person is helped in her absolute desire for God by living in God. God, the very cause of the lover's suffering, is also the help. Only from God can a person know "what it means to be before God." "From God he must draw his comfort, lest his entire religiousness become a rumor and not a "lust for preaching" so that he "be hindered in experiencing within himself what thousands and thousands before

him have experiencedö (490). The longing for God is not just a desire that purges a person of worldly desire; it is really a desire to be *with* God, *live* in God. Climacus goes on to compare the religious person to a humorist: öThe humorist continually holds the conception of God together withö finitude, with mundane life öand brings out the contradictionö but he does not relate himself to God in religious passion. . . ö (505).

Climacus says that humorist has a conception of God and is continually thinking about God. And yet he is not related *to* God. Likewise, those who

are busy obtaining a truer and truer conception of God . . . seem to forget the first basic principle: that one ought to fear God. And the objective religious person in the objective human mass does not fear God; he does not hear him in the thunder, because that is a law of nature, and perhaps he is right. He does not see him in events, because they are immanent necessity of cause and effect, and perhaps he is right. But what about the inwardness of being alone before God? Well, that is too little for him; he is not familiar with it, he who is on the way to accomplish the objective. (544)

But what is the difference between having a true öconception of Godö and öbeing alone before Godö? The religious thinker, for Climacus

sets himself aside in order to find God, since it is the individual himself who is the hindrance. Here the upbuilding is quite properly distinguishable by the negative, by the self-annihilation that finds the relationship with God within itself, that suffering-through sinks into the relationship with God, finds its ground in it, because God is the in the ground only when everything that is in the way is cleared out, every finitude, and first and foremost the individual himself in his finitude, in his cavilling against God. (560)

Climacus says that the suffering before God happens öwithin himself.ö But Climacus also says that the self is the meeting place with God *only* öif the individual has annihilated himselfö (561). Only then can a person begin to know God, begin to sink öinto relationship.ö The task here is *precisely* not to postulate God or will God, raise oneself up

to God. The task is to *lose* identity (not integrate the ego but rather to become selfless and immortal in God's life, for thought and reality to intermingle and unite). People who think abstractly about God, Kierkegaard says, "grope as in a dream for a concept of God without feeling any terror in so doing but on the contrary boasting of this superiority, which in its dizziness of thought and with the vagueness of impersonality has an intimation, as it were, of God in the indefinite, and in imagination meets him whose existence remains more or less like that of the mermaid" (544-545). What does it mean to think vaguely about God, to have an "indefinite" or "imaginative" idea about God? Is there a kind of thinking that is less vague, less abstract, that "meets him whose existence is real and not like that of a mermaid"?

Let us continue to examine this understanding of thought. In *Postscript Climacus* refers to Plato's myth of the origin of Eros (92). In the myth, as we remember, Poros (spirit of resource and wisdom) lies drunk on nectar after a night of feasting in celebration of Aphrodite's birth. Penia (need, poverty) comes to the door. Having no resources of her own she plots to have a child by him. The sleeping Poros impregnates the empty Penia, who conceives Eros. Before this encounter Penia is outside, utterly removed from Aphrodite's presence. She is the very personification of emptiness, the negative, the anti-Poros, the aporitic. In Plato's myth, Eros is not the child of Aphrodite but a consequence of this activity in the presence of Aphrodite. When he is born, Eros becomes another attendant of Aphrodite. Eros is neither a god (Aphrodite's child) nor her aporitic opposite. He is born of fullness and emptiness. He "is neither mortal nor immortal" and "never either without resources nor wealthy, but is in between wisdom and lack of

understanding."⁷⁶ Eros is therefore a philosopher: not wise himself, but a lover of wisdom. Through Eros, the myth tells us, the memory of Aphrodite is alive in us, however faint it may be; and so we continue to long for beauty and wisdom. But every moment of encounter with beauty also leaves the lover of wisdom empty. The philosopher strives again, or strives further -- in longing for Aphrodite. The lover possesses the memory; and yet the memory also dispossesses the lover. In *Postscript Climacus* alludes to this myth and notes that eros was, for Plato, "existence" itself, "or that by which life is in everything." Otherwise put, "love is continually striving, that is, the thinking subject is existing" (92). For the existing (i.e. erotic) Greek thinker, "continually wanting to be a learner was not regarded as a great discovery or the inspired undertaking of an exceptional individual, since it was neither more nor less than the understanding that one is existing and that to be conscious of this is no merit but to forget it is thoughtlessness" (122). Thoughtlessness and forgetfulness was a characteristic of the unwise person who failed to remember that he was merely a lover of wisdom and not wise himself. The lover of wisdom, writes Climacus, was always "in the process of becoming," and perpetually striving "backward" in longing towards "the originality that was his eternal source!" (153). For the Greeks, philosophy was therefore a continual dying to old ways of living and thinking. "The Greek philosopher was an existing person, and he did not forget this. Therefore he resorted to suicide or to dying in the Pythagorean sense or to being dead in the Socratic sense in order to be able to think." The philosopher, "in order to be able truly to think . . . did away with himself" (309).

⁷⁶ *Symposium* in *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. Seth Benardete (New York: Bantam), 296.

Thinking erotically called for a knowing that was also an unknowing; the sentence
ōwhatever is known is known in the mode of the knowerō must ōbe amplified in such a
way that there is also a mode in which the knower knows nothing whatever or that his
knowing amounts to a delusionō (52). Knowing, in this sense, is ecstatic: it brings the
lover out of herself, dispossesses her, leaves her poor, robs her of certainty.⁷⁷ Climacus
identifies existence with *eros* in the passage quoted above (92). Existence, in this sense,
is not simply an irrational movement, but a spirit that connects soul with reality. Like
Plato and Augustine, Climacus here is concerned with the love of reality, with what it
means to long for reality. The existential question here is a person's relationship with
reality. The lover of wisdom, Climacus tells us, becomes more and more intimate with
God. This is a striving that Kantian or modern thought in general eliminates altogether.
It is a loving movement towards God *in* God, neither Penia nor Porus.

An idea -- or rather the idea of ideas, the ideal of ideas -- has a purity about it that
removes it from the realm of existence, Climacus argues. Indeed, it is possible to be a
thinker who "does not love, does not have faith, does not act"; but claims to know "what
erotic love is, what faith is, and the question is only about" how these fit into his system
of thought (344). Such a thinker plays at life, takes hold of being like the pieces of a
puzzle; and imagines the task nearly complete. But for Plato, Climacus notes, the idea
was never God. It was "the connecting link" with God; and while the human being was
"not himself the idea," he "must indeed participate in the idea" (331). Modern

⁷⁷ As the Christian mystic, Pseudo-Dionysius puts it, "divine yearning brings ecstasy so that the lover belongs not to self but to the beloved." *The Divine Names in The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibh id (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 82.

philosophy "smiles superiorly" at the asceticism of the Greek thinkers who, in thought, perpetually strove for immortality. Modern thought calls such striving "childishness," since the modern thinker "wants to be exclusively eternal within time" (56) and "knows that thinking and being are one" (309). The modern thinker is able to dispense with striving in "pure thinking," (314) since "the systematians and the objectivists have ceased to be human beings and have become speculative thought, which dwells in pure being" (92). Granted, even such thinkers are lovers, for they love the god's eye view of the cosmos; they love the spectacle and therefore "become speculative thought"; they have "inhumanly" become thought (73). But surely, Climacus proposes, human beings are not "an idea." Surely the individual is "an imperfection compared with the eternal life of the idea, but a perfection in relation to not being at all." Might we not say, Climacus suggests, that existence is a "somewhat intermediate state" and that this is "suitable for an intermediate being such as a human being is" (329)? In a relationship the lover longs to know the beloved and yet longs because she knows. This simultaneous disunion *and* union of thought and being forms the basis of Climacus' critique of Hegelian logic (not his retreat back to Kant). Surely thought is not being, Climacus argues. "Surely the opposite holds true here--namely, that because I exist and am thinking I therefore think that I exist. Here existence separates the ideal identity of thinking and being; I must exist in order to be able to think, and I must be able to think (for example, the good) in order to exist in it" (330). The thinker thinks the good, *not* because he has gained a speculative stance (the stance of the spectator) but because he "exist[s] in it." Here lies the mystery of thought in this sense: that it does not merely

perpetuate itself, extend its own chain of reasoning, impose itself, but strives to orient itself in reality. What if, Climacus asks, "the individual" would have to "exist inö religious life in order to understand it, rather than merely observe it (378)? (To apply this to Christianity for a moment: What if only two sorts of people could know Christianity: ". . . those who are impassionedly, infinitely interested in their eternal happiness and in faith build this happiness on their faith-bound relation to it, and those who with the opposite passion (yet with passion) reject it--the happy and the unhappy lovers?" [52]). This would explain why religious love is a kind of suffering. Love does not merely think about God but strives in God. This relationship transforms the thinker's identity. Unlike the emperor, who "conquers the whole world and makes the people slaves" and yet leaves his "own existence" intact, it would seem that the religious thinker is "continually changed within himself" (432, 433). This is because he identifies "himself with what is thought in order to exist in it" (339). The thinker longs "to be what he thinks" (309). This is unlike the thinker who is concerned with the idea's theoretical correctness, the thinker who tries to conquer the object of knowledge and is "outside" herself "in the ideality of possibility." Thinking therefore is not a "knowledge about" something (347). The idea of eternal happiness, for instance, does not remain "outside" the subject as "possibility"; rather, the subject is "transformed into the actuality of the idea," and it "transforms" her "whole existence" (387). The passion, the suffering, the striving of thought lies, not in talking about "eternal happiness" objectively, "but in transforming one's own existence into a testimony to it" (394). This transformation of the soul in relationship is what Climacus calls "subjectivity." "Subjectivity," Climacus says, should

not be identified with "the accidental, the angular, the selfish, the eccentric, etc." for "such things are to be discarded"(131). Subjectivity is not merely a private dialogue, the self with itself, but an encounter with reality that transforms the soul into a "testimony" of reality. The subjective thinker becomes "absorbed" in reality (352) and this transforms his entire existence so that he becomes a new being in this relationship. There is a relationship between thought and reality here: the longing is to become *in* the good, in *likeness* with the good.⁷⁸

Climacus illustrates this understanding of longing and ecstatic thought. Think of the experience of a particular good in life, he says. According to the pastor I am supposed to thank God for all the good that he gives. "So I am to thank God, says the pastor and for what? For the good that he gives me. Excellent! But for what good? Presumably for the good that I can discern is a good. Stop! If I thank God for the good I can discern to be a good, I am making a fool of God, because then *my relationship with God means that I am transforming God in likeness to me instead of my being transformed in likeness to him.*" Shall I therefore stop giving thanks to God for good things? "Not quite that, but I am to bear in mind that my having wished" some good "ardently" is "no merit." It is a good according to "my poor finite understanding" only (177, emphasis added).

Consequently, with my giving thanks I am to include an apology so as to be sure that it is God with whom I have the honor of speaking and not my friend and

⁷⁸ As Pseudo-Dionysius puts it, Love is the "capacity to effect a unity, an alliance, and a particular commingling in the Beautiful and the Good" (*op. cit.*, 81). Or as Augustine writes in *Trinity*, the soul is transformed by loving the good and this is not the good it can hover over in judgement, but the good it can "cleave to" in love (*op. cit.*, VIII: 4). Similarly, Climacus is speaking here of a transformation of soul by which it becomes an image to its beloved other.

comrade [*Dusbroder*] Councilor Andersen. I must shamefacedly admit that it looks so good to me that I must pray for forgiveness for giving thanks for it, because I cannot help it. Consequently, I must pray for forgiveness for giving thanks. That is not what the pastor said. So either the pastor must want to make a fool of me or he does not know what he himself is saying. . . . In my relationship with God, I must learn simply to give up my finite understanding, and with it the drawing of distinctions that is natural to me, in order always to be able in divine madness to give thanks. (178)

To "give up my finite understanding" is the suffering of longing for Climacus; but this is not merely a *gap in knowledge*, something a person wants to conquer or give up on altogether in despair over the absolute otherness of God. If this were the case, the soul would give up striving like the emperor who "conquers the whole world and makes the people slaves" and yet leaves its "own existence" intact. Only the soul in relationship longs for its own transformation *in* its beloved other. This longing for likeness in intimacy is poor in its *infinite* need to become like its beloved, but wealthy because this need was born in relationship with that very beloved. The term "infinite" here is a symbol for the experience of "being transformed in likeness to" God rather than "transforming God in likeness to me." As Augustine puts it (in God's voice): "I am the food of the mature; grow then, and you will eat me. You will not change me into yourself like bodily food: you will be changed into me" (VII.10.16). For Climacus, a person's relationship to God is in itself always and everywhere a longing for God, an approach, an encounter, and ultimately a love-relationship. It is never finished but always longing for transformation in its beloved other. This is like "an erotic relationship," in which the "maiden in love yearns for the wedding day because this would give her assured certainty," and would "make herself comfortable in legal security as a spouse" and

"preferred marital yawning to maidenly yearning" -- "then the man would rightfully deplore her unfaithfulness, although she indeed did not love anyone else, because she would have lost the idea and actually did not love him" (74). Real love, it would seem, *begins* on the wedding day, the hour of consummation -- just as it begins again every moment. The bride who strives for certainty, the *result* of marriage, (like the emperor who "conquers the whole world and makes the people slaves") leaves her own existence intact. But how is this? We understand "marital yawning" and we understand "maidenly yearning"; but what is marital yearning? If the very "goal" of courtship is merely more striving in marriage, if the "ideal" itself is not absolute identity but *relationship*, if longing longs for more longing after marriage *in* marriage -- what does this say about the beginning of the journey? The beginning that does not strive for a "result" and yet begins to strive, the beginning that turns outward, not inward in defensiveness, but comes into the presence of the Beloved, strives to preserve the love relationship *itself*. Climacus says that just as romantic lovers do not exhaust their love quickly and then move on to the next love but are "continually renewed in the same erotic love," which "continually flowers anew in mood and exuberance," so it is with the lover of God (259-260). If this is true, then love does not remain identical over time; it is "continually renewed." And yet the lover struggles to renew herself in "the same erotic love." But how is this? What does it mean to say that the infinite lives "in the soul" (84) so the lover loves what she knows and yet longs to know more intimately, so that every movement of love towards the Bridegroom is full of expectancy? As Augustine expresses the mystery: ". . . I tasted

you, and I hunger and thirst;/you touched , and I burned for your peace.⁷⁹ The mystery, for Climacus, is that every movement of religious love *already* belongs to God and yet longs to renew itself in God. The soul comes to know itself in a narrative of encounter and renewal; it remembers the experience of coming to be in reality and in this experience turns towards God again and again. This turning of the soul in utter neediness is not simply a deficiency that needs correction, an *empty* hole in the heart to be filled ó and then the relationship ceases. Climacus suggests that longing is so essential to a person's relationship with God that "even if a person has achieved the highest," he will nevertheless continue to strive. "This is just like the Platonic conception of love; it is a want, and not only does that person feel a want who craves something he does not have but also that person who desires the continued possession of what he has" (121).

Climacus's epistemological modesty here has nothing to do with Kantianism. There is no talk here of an *unapproachable* noumenal realm. The suffering of thought lies precisely in the *approach* of thought, the orientation in reality, the soul's transformation in likeness to reality. Let me put this in ethical terms. The law tells a person how *not* to live; the law kills, fights inclination. But Climacus is referring to an attraction to God that strives to become like God, cling to God, *be* in God. From a Kantian perspective it is nonsense to speak of living in God for its own sake. The moralistic person is certainly alive and breathing; there is life in him insofar as he has inclinations. But in practical terms, the spiritual aspect of life is defined negatively ó precisely by a person's capacity to fight inclination. A person proves her spiritual worth

⁷⁹ *The Confessions*, X.27.28.

by conquering life. True, Kant posits to a life beyond this life, but a person cannot long for it or love it. The person posits God, reasons her way to the idea, puts it in her pocket for safekeeping -- then goes back to real life. God is the solution to a certain intellectual or existential problem. God is whatever human beings need God to be. But a person cannot love God for his own sake because God is unreal; God is the servant of human reason, God brings thought to its *conclusion*. For Climacus, however, God is not the conclusion of thought. In God, a person is always *beginning*.

Let me illustrate this movement of longing and thought further in a passage about the illusiveness of infinitude. In the passage Climacus says that the infinite is "illusiv" (82-83) and that the "existing thinker who has the infinite in his soul has it always, and therefore his form is continually negative" (84). The experience disrupts "custom and habit" (85) and throws the soul into another realm of being. In this experience the thinker begins to experience his own limitations, and even his own mortality (82). The religious thinker, writes Climacus,

is cognizant of the negativity of the infinite in existence [*Tilværelse*]; he always keeps open the wound of negativity, which at times is a saving factor (the others let the wound close and become positive--deceived); in his communication, he expresses the same thing. He is, therefore, never a teacher, but a learner, and if he is continually *just as negative as positive*, he is continually striving." (85, emphasis added)

The thinker graced by God experiences her own limitations against this immeasurable and uncontainable reality. However, Climacus also says in the same passage that illusiveness is only the "first expression" for the thinker's experience of the infinite. This is important because, for Kierkegaard, "illusiveness" is a symbol for a particular experience within the

context of being ða learner.ö The experience is not just a mysterious, fleeting encounter that leaves the soul empty and back where it first started. In the experience the existing person becomes ða learner" and begins to strive as a learner. The wise person leaves the wound (caused by the encounter with reality) exposed. Infinitude here is the symbol for this experience of being "a learner" always and everywhere in relation to God.

Illusiveness is precisely the right symbol for this experience of God's simultaneous presence and absence. The religious thinker is "just as negative as positive" and as positive as he is negative. The religious thinker strives because she has been graced by God's presence, not because she wants to *overcome* the negative -- out of curiosity, despair, or pride. As Climacus argues, the erotic thinker who thinks immortality, for instance, does not possess it "once and for all" (175), as if thinking were identical with the idea and the idea identical with God. But why not? If the idea of immortality were simply a postulate of reason, something to bring thinking to a *conclusion*, then surely a person could think it once and for all. This would be the case even if this idea were purely negative: the thought that God is unthinkable. But this kind of negative theology does precisely the opposite of what Climacus is talking about here. The ðopen wound of negativityö is precisely that, *open* to God. Unlike the negative theologian who contains God in the idea of the uncontainable, the erotic thinker is always ða learnerö and just as positive as he is negative. The lover of God cannot think immortality "once in a while in an altogether general way" as if it were a mere curiosity, since thought pertains to the well-being of the soul (177). The thinking in question is not *about* immortality; thought strives for immortality, strives to become a "likeness" of the idea. Only as the soul

transforms itself in this encounter, becomes what it thinks, can we begin to talk of immortality. The thought of immortality is not something contained in the head or kept in one's pocket (329). The thinker is always *learning* what it means to be immortal. The thinker "asks how he, existing, is to conduct himself in expressing his immortality, whether he actually does express it, and for the time being he is content with this task, which can easily be sufficient for a person's lifetime, since it is to be sufficient for an eternity" (177). What would it be like if this were not the case, if the idea of immortality did not pertain to life (if God were not the God of the living, indeed life itself), if thought were not essentially erotic, if the question of immortality were settled once and for all, if thinking were a mere curiosity, if immortality were not a journey towards God in God? There are people, Climacus muses, who have "fantastically dabbled in everything, have been everything possible," who cannot "endure being the same for a fortnight and therefore have gone through all kinds of transmutations." We can imagine, one day such a person suddenly asking the pastor whether or not he will "actually remain the same in the beyond." What would it be like for someone like that to become immortal? he asks. It "would admittedly be a peculiar metamorphosis if it could transmute an inhuman centipede such as that into the eternal identity with itself, which 'to be the same' means" (176). The concerned man here has a certain idea in his head about immortality (remaining the same) and yet does not really know what this means. This is because becoming immortal is essentially a transformation of the soul, not a lifeless, containable idea. The soul comes to know immortality, if at all, only in this transformation itself, in becoming immortal, not merely in speculating about it (gazing at it like a spectator).

Climacus' story here of a man who asks about the meaning of immortality (typical of Climacus' narrative approach in the *Postscript*) is not merely a rhetorical complement to his argument. This story about pedagogy -- whether or not immortality is a metamorphosis or a gradual orientation in reality -- is essential to the argument. We have here a man concerned with his future; he speaks superficially but even in his brief encounter with the question he begins to strive. The man õhasö an idea about immortality but still inquires about its *meaning*. By posing a question about "his" idea he shows that the idea is not really his -- that he does not really possess it. This realization is the beginning of wisdom, to realize the idea itself is somehow in flux. The question becomes: How is it possible to think something and yet not really think it? How is it that thought seems to participate in reality and yet strives for it at the same time? The thinker who thinks erotically, it would seem, is poor but far from destitute, far from a *Penia*. He is not "a perfection" but neither is he an õimperfection." The thinker is not identical with thought, nor the idea with God; he is impoverished in longing for God. And yet even immortality -- the mystical moment in the beyond -- is not a "metamorphosis," since the lover already belongs to God -- in longing for God.

In a true conversation no word overwhelms and every word strives for responsibility to the conversation as a whole. In this openness to the whole, each word, sentence, assertion, and expression transcends itself -- in the desire for the whole. Similarly, Climacus suggests, every word in the book of creation is merely the possibility of conversation, the possibility of relationship. In each word "there is a possibility" of communication and the individual who participates in the conversation knows herself as

"spirit according to this possibility" (246). For Climacus, only when a person participates in an intermediate way, as an intermediate being, does God's omnipresence become manifest "and then it is possible to see God everywhere" in creation (246-247). Longing, for Climacus, opens up the soul to this cosmic order, to this reality beyond the soul itself. Only as the lover opens herself up to reality, in her desire for encounter, can this order show itself. God "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." "Nature is certainly the work of God, but only the work is directly present, not God." (243). Imagine an author, writes Climacus, who "wrote 166 folio volumes and then read and read" and become overwhelmed by his own achievement. He would begin to notice only "the many volumes and the five hundred lines to the page" but forget that "this enormous work lies in the reader himself," that it no longer belongs to him but now belongs to the reader -- in the reader's longing for the word. The word that proceeds from the author must return to the author through the reader, in the reader's desire for communication, in the reader's openness to this relationship. Likewise, to stand before nature like a spectator, amazed "at how immense nature is and how innumerable the animal species are, is not understanding" (247). For Climacus, power commands attention and communicates in its own way; but it also kills the spirit. The one who feels the full force of God's communicated presence, his absolute abundance, turns passive and loses her freedom. The moment of violent impact represents the sum total of the relationship; communication is over as soon as it begins. What remains is fear and

aversion. Perhaps if God took the form of something rare such as an "enormously large green bird, with a red beak" whistling in an "unprecedented manner," writes Climacus -- perhaps then God would get noticed. But here the very "presence" of God as overwhelming force would render God utterly absent. Power here would transform communicated word into blunt instrument; it would break up the conversation. This violence, even in its iconoclastic manifestation, triumphs precisely where people have ceased to love God, when every image is idol, the destruction of being by power. For Climacus the religious lover in her devotional moments does not experience God as an abundance, as an overpowering energy. The desire of the lover always crosses over a distance towards the possibility of encounter. The possibility of encounter stands over, above, outside, on the other side. It abides eternally -- beyond the human desire for identity. This longing is not an energy that seeks to perpetuate itself, that strives to remain identical. It is not an overwhelming, overabundant force, a power without memory, without expectation, but a desire for relationship; it is the infinite tension between familiarity and transcendence. The dignity of the human being lies therefore in this independence from external forces: in her encounter with the good and the beautiful mercifully distant yet ever-present. To understand oneself in this cosmic order is to understand the fullness and poverty of spiritual vision.

Indirect communication, Climacus explains, communicates only in a person's desire to become a learner; only as a person becomes "humble before God, loving human beings in the feeling that God does not need him [the teacher] and that every human being is essentially spirit" (260-261). That is why "indirect communication," for Climacus

"applies first and foremost within the religious domain," since "the communicator" knows that he "is not God himself or does not presume to appeal to the miraculous authority of an apostle but is just a human being and also cares to have meaning in what he says and what he does" (74). Climacus argues here that only speech that remembers God "cares to have meaning," since it preserves the communicated word in its transcendence, its otherness, its independence from the marketplace, the commerce of the hagglers who buy and sell words. To "have meaning" therefore requires that we all are "held devoutly apart from one another" (79), since commerce transforms the holy truth into commodity. The religious communicator strives to give up authority in respect for others. She strives to educate her own desires, to abandon her striving for power. For Kierkegaard, community happens in striving for equality, in striving for a communion without gods and without beggars, since in God no one is a god and none are destitute. God does not need "geniuses" who are "indispensible" in his service, writes Climacus. God is the teacher and we are his servants. "And every human being is created in the image of God. This is the absolute; the little he has to learn from Tom, Dick, and Harry is not of great value" (n.261). It is therefore vanity to "believe that some other human being needs one's assistance in his God-relationship, as if God were not able to help himself and the person involved (78). Climacus argues that "the art of persuasion," is a "proficiency in capturing" adherents (260). It is a communication grounded in power of beautiful words and in the majesty of authoritative declaration. But this kind of power robs the listener; it takes away from her what "belongs" to her. It "is a fraud toward God (which possibly defrauds him of the worship of another person in truth), a fraud toward himself (as if he

had ceased to be an existing person), a fraud toward another human being (who possibly attains only a relative God-relationship). . ." (75). The power of authoritative discourse claims to possess divinity, supreme wisdom. It claims to place a finished product in the interlocutor's hands, something for her possession. And so it robs the interlocutor of the awareness of her own poverty. But it is also fraudulent because it claims to give even as it takes. It is like giving alms to the wealthy and, in the very act of giving, denying their resourcefulness. It sells its wisdom but sells what already belongs to the recipient. It denies that humans "must be assumed to possess essentially what belongs essentially to being a human being" (356). It assumes that "one party has ceased to be spirit," has ceased to be what she is (247). Longing for the good, for Climacus, is therefore is not a special skill developed by great personalities, "as if the ethical were a fortunate quality of genius," even if we suppose it to be a rare thing these days. No, longing belongs to all, since all come from the same "eternal source" and long to return to it. But longing, in its poverty, is a turning towards the abundance of God. As Augustine puts it, "This is why we must tremble before your judgments, O Lord, for your Truth is not mine, nor his, nor hers, but belongs to all of us whom you call to share it in communion with him, at the same time giving us the terrible warning not to arrogate truth to ourselves as private property, lest we find ourselves deprived of it" (XII.25.34).

When Socrates stands motionless in silent meditation he is "absorbed in the divine," Climacus writes (n. 90). But the pathos of prayer cannot reproduce itself directly and so his physical form is comedic and cause for ridicule. But laughter here is perhaps appropriate, precisely because we must preserve the distinction between sacred and

mundane, prayer and external expression. His prayer is silent "in such a way that he did not dare to say anything at all for fear of talking a lot of nonsense and for fear of having a wrong desire fulfilled" (presumably his false desire to become an auctioneer (n. 90). In his silence Socrates teaches, strives to turn the learner's soul away from appearances towards the good. Here he reveals his own poverty. But there is something dangerous in this too. How many people were repelled by Socrates' physical appearance? How many interlocutors left Socrates convinced of their own wisdom and of Socrates' foolishness? Religious communication is seemingly irresponsible because it has no technique. It strives to abandon control. It is unlike (what is popularly known as) the "Socratic method," the pedagogical method like the one practiced by the tutor in Rousseau's *Emile*, who pretends to leave nature or necessity to teach the child but is really pulling the strings behind his back, since he knows the desired result. It is precisely such technique that religious speech strives to annul, since the religious communicator has "no result" to speak of (242). Speech becomes here, not a method of instruction, but an ethic, a form of resignation, a denial of power that strives to let go of the learner. The teacher strives to give back to the learner what *already* belongs to her -- her relationship with God, her dignity, her divine independence -- since "every human being is created in the image of God" (note, 261). She therefore strives to speak in such a way that the received word is "not a direct reproduction of what was communicated" but "an echo," a "resonance in which what is said disappears," so that "what is said belongs to the recipient as if it were his own--and now it is indeed his own" (247). This gift-giving, which sets "the other free" (74), strives to "respect every human being" because it does not "dare to meddle

directly in his God-relation" (78). In her love of God the gift-giver saves herself "from the most dreadful of all untruths--an adherent" (260-261). There is nothing certain in this, Climacus would acknowledge. Who knows one's heart well enough to say with certainty that one has overcome all desire for authority? Who is honest enough fully to admit their duplicity or incisive enough fully to understand their own delusions? Danger is everywhere. Is there not even such a thing as negative thinkers who run off proclaiming "the negative widely and loudly," who have "found a result" and who "from that moment . . . no longer exist as thinkers but as hawkers and auctioneers" (84,85)? Unlike the religious person who can in "the infinite pathos of religiousness. . . say *Du* to God," (90) the negative thinker makes idols -- indeed, makes an idol out of iconoclasm. The iconoclast smashes the idols and then commodifies the violence, sells it cheaply and in his fear of idolatry, fails to find God anywhere. He is the zealot who speaks violently *about* God because he is without God. But the danger of communication is precisely why community is possible only when equality is presumed, only when everyone is presumed equal in their erotic imperfection, only when speaking becomes comedy, only when "the presumed teacher" becomes "a learner" and "makes all teaching a divine jest." The teacher here must strive to become that jester, to reveal in her own teaching the impossibility of teaching, to admit that "every human being is essentially taught solely by God" (101).

5.

Let me now begin to relate this discussion to chapters three and four of my thesis. Climacus is also attracted (though ultimately repelled) by another half-articulate vision of cosmic order (he sometimes calls this religiousness B). This vision is related to my reading of Augustine and the discourses. Here Climacus tries to orient himself in his longing for a personal God (156-157). The vision here is of a universe ordered relationally -- by God's illuminative love and soteriological beneficence. According to this understanding, "There is no immanent underlying kinship between the temporal and the eternal, because the eternal itself has entered into time and wants to establish kinship there" (573). Climacus finds this vision of personal "kinship" between God and humans both disturbing and laughable. First, it is laughable because we are speaking of a personal God. How ridiculous, Climacus says, to put so much at stake, to turn a brief lifespan into something eternally significant. How ridiculous, this God who loves the sparrow and the individual soul. What are we to do with this embarrassment? Indeed, is this Christian habit of referring to God in personal terms not in the "worst taste," as Nietzsche puts it in *Genealogy of Morality*?⁸⁰ Moreover, Climacus also finds his longing for a personal God disturbing. Like Augustine, Climacus is plagued by visions of human estrangement from God. Here it does no good to speak of an immanent kinship between God and being, since there is no natural, instinctive, involuntary or unconscious cosmic force that can bring being back to God. But note: this is not because the force that connects the universe to God is too weak to bring being back to God. It is because

⁸⁰ Ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 14.

there was no immanent continuity in the first place. The fall of being from God was not from a once-monistic, non-conscious will without willing, but rather from an omnipresent love in eternal kinship with being. In this sense, existence is essentially *existence-communication* (*Existents-Meddelelse*), as Climacus puts it (570). As Augustine shows, human beings are related to God communicatively, dialogically, and prayerfully. The relationship with God is essentially revelatory and *therefore* the return to God is essentially revelatory. Wisdom here means a perpetual orientation in transcendent love, in the *utterly different*, as Augustine puts it. But the longing for transcendent reality, this openness and receptivity to the *utterly different*, appears absurd, even humiliating to Climacus. *But if existence has in this way obtained power over [a person], he is prevented from taking himself back into eternity through recollection. If it is already paradoxical that the eternal truth is related to an existing person, now it is absolutely paradoxical that it is related to such an existing person* (208). The offense here is that there is no immanent cosmic process or force to unify the breached relationship. Divine communication is therefore always a revelation, a breach with human understanding. The communication is soteriological and ultimately eschatological, and from a Kantian perspective, heteronomous. The fall from God breaches a personal relationship and for this reason the return to God is personal, so that

if there is any remnant of immanence, any eternal qualification remaining in the existing person, then it cannot be done. The existing person must have lost continuity with himself, must have become someone else (not different from himself within himself), and now, by receiving the condition from the God, become a new creation. The contradiction is that becoming a Christian begins with the miracle of creation. . . (576).

This transcendent (non-immanent revelation) appears violent, a violation of human nature; it is the "miracle of creation" *ex nihilo*. Ought we not have an ontological understanding of the human being first? Does divine creative love not simply erase human nature and create a new being from scratch? Might we not say that human beings have a capacity to love God or even a natural desire for God?

As we shall see in the discourses (where Kierkegaard orients himself more thoroughly in this personal understanding of God), Kierkegaard has no problem with talking about human nature. But for Kierkegaard, the human capacity to love God is not a potency *waiting* for release, waiting for an occasion to express itself. The desire for God lives and breathes in relationship. The longing for God is always already evoked by God's self-revelation, God's desire to establish kinship with humanity. What is at stake here is really not human nature as such. Climacus wants to understand what it means to live in relationship with a personal God, a universe ordered by personal love, by soteriological beneficence and eschatological fulfillment, rather than in a universe governed by impersonal, unconscious and involuntary forces. In this sense, human nature is nothing if it is not relational. As Climacus writes in one of his more theistic passages, when God communicates he "communicates creatively in such a way that in creating he gives independence vis-à-vis himself" (260, emphasis original). God's creative act initiates a dialogue: the communication is with independent beings. A person's love of God is essentially the response to this original gesture. Love is the responsible response, the answerable answer. The lover remains eternally in this unoriginal state, born into a conversation she did not initiate. As we shall see below in the discourses, when

Kierkegaard addresses his audience he strives to speak in such a way that every utterance remembers another utterance, remembers the Word before the word. The speaker speaks but never poses the original question; the speaker strives to know her place in the conversation. Before she teaches, she strives to know herself as she is: suspended between listening and teaching. In the discourses Kierkegaard's task is to remember well, to call to mind the forgotten, to help others remember. And yet Kierkegaard himself is also the servant of memory, not just its teacher but a learner himself. In the Communion discourses examined below, for instance, Kierkegaard's aim is to prepare the congregation for the Lord's Supper; but even as he speaks he is also preparing himself for this gathering at the Communion table.

In *Postscript*, Climacus tells a story of a woman who was loved by the god.⁸¹ At first she is annihilated by the idea of equality with the god. But in love she is raised up to new *life*. Consequently, the mortal woman who was loved by the god would at first be annihilated in her lowliness, but then she presumably would be raised up by the idea that he surely must know all this better than she. She would be annihilated by thinking divinely about him, but in turn would be raised up by the thought that he thought humanly about her (491). The equality between the divine and human is relational here; there is an equality insofar as the god communicates, insofar as the god thinks humanly about her (491). Why put so much at stake, why allow oneself to be raised up like this? Why make the soul so significant (as a beloved of the god)? Climacus cannot really

⁸¹ I read the story here for its relevance to Climacus's understanding of Christian theism. Climacus tells a similar story in *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 26ff.

answer this question. It is too late to answer it, as it were. Climacus is writing about the experience of being wooed by the divine. From the aspect of eternity the soul does indeed appear utterly insignificant and anyone who takes this perspective is indeed annihilated. But ultimately, for Climacus, a person cannot *take on* this perspective. The soul is *not* radically free in this sense. It simply cannot silence divine love. What would it mean to see oneself from the aspect of eternity, to annihilate oneself like this, to sink back into immanent continuity with the universe? For Schelling, there is a sense in which all being strives for this (for a willing without willing). The only way Schelling can justify *being* is to take *joy* in the soul's estrangement from immanent reality, take joy in the very struggle for self-consciousness. And yet from Kierkegaard's perspective this kind of struggle is a false joy. It ultimately culminates in spiritual exhaustion and self-hatred, as we shall see in the next chapter.

However, for Kierkegaard, as we shall see in the discourses, the longing for God is *not* a desire to sink into nothingness, unconscious identity with the universe as a whole. But this is because reality never was a will-less willing, an unconscious immanent continuity, to begin with. God essentially was and is Word and a person's longing for God is a response to God's self-communication. This relational understanding of eternity is a response to prayerful experiences of God's personal love. For Kierkegaard (and Augustine) prayer is a way of living in God and knowing oneself in God ó but it is a knowing of oneself as one is known by God. Prayer here is a movement towards true life, divine illumination; it is a movement beyond self-annihilating resignation. Here Kierkegaard finds inspiration in Socrates. For Socrates, philosophy is a way of learning

how to die, of learning how to become immortally one with reality. But Socrates is also in love with wisdom and too erotic to simply pretend he is *already* immortal. Socrates cannot speculate, view himself or the universe from the aspect of eternity. He is still *in* longing for the eternal. In this sense, Socrates is an individual. But he is not an individual defined merely by an introverted struggle for self-mastery; he is defined by his openness to reality and his longing for immortality. In the Christian discourses and to some extent in the upbuilding discourses (which also contain Christian theological themes, as we shall see), Kierkegaard retains and intensifies this understanding of individuality. In God, the soul begins to sense that there is ultimately no way to annihilate the self in God, so that even as a person dies to *self* she is made alive in God's love ó eternally so.

6.

In the next chapter I will turn to the *Four Discourses* from *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*. These discourses are not directly Christian, but we nevertheless see Kierkegaard beginning to orient himself in a devotional understanding of longing for God. This discussion will therefore prepare us for the discussion of longing in the Christian discourses in chapter four.

For Kant, a symbol like "longing" can only refer to something purely subjective. Kant allows for something called "moral feeling"; but as we saw above, such feeling is cut off from any experience of the very noumenal reality to which it somehow remains causally connected. For Kierkegaard, it is otherwise. Kierkegaard's use of a symbol like

"longing" is intimately connected to his understanding of the soul's relationship with God. Longing, for Kierkegaard, is not a blind feeling, the stirring of a certain "vital force" in the body causally connected to a non-experiential cause; it is a way of responding to God's self-communication. In freeing a work like *Postscript* from the "Kantian framework," by reading it not as an anthropology or psychology of religion, but as a symbolic interpretation of religious experience, we can in turn read the discourses differently. We can begin to read the discourses interpretively and take their symbolic language seriously. We can show what it might mean for Kierkegaard to speak as a non-authoritative member of a community, either from the pulpit or in a text. In the *Four Upbuilding Discourses* and *Communion Discourses* we are not dealing with a philosophical-technical language but with a language aimed at upbuilding, admonishing or encouraging a particular faith-community. The discourses come from "inside" the community, as it were. Kierkegaard's aim here is not merely to critique the community but also to speak as a member of it. However, as I hope to show, the discourses are not merely rhetorical exercises aimed at stirring up religious emotions. They themselves articulate a certain longing for reality. So just as the *Postscript* is not merely abstractly theoretical, the discourses are not merely a less rigorous presentation of Kierkegaard's theoretical works. Always and everywhere Kierkegaard is concerned with the limits and possibilities of communication. In this he is utterly serious -- whether it be in his philosophical, comical or devotional passages.

Kierkegaard's struggle to articulate the nature of longing takes the reader on a path similar to Augustine's in *The Confessions*. The discourses give witness to a moral

struggle culminating in exhaustion and despair. But as we saw in *The Confessions*, another movement in the soul also presents itself: longing. As Augustine writes, "What is this light that shines through the chinks of my mind and pierces my heart, doing it no injury? I begin to shudder yet catch fire with longing: I shudder inasmuch as I am unlike him, yet I am afire with longing for him because of some likeness there" (XI.9.11). The soul experiences this longing as a threat to its integrated, self-possessed identity. Indeed, the Kantian interpretations discussed above want to preserve a certain understanding of self-possession in Kierkegaard for this very reason. If taken too seriously Kierkegaard's theology is unrelentingly dis-possessive. For a person whose ego is defined by self-mastery, Kierkegaard's understanding of longing (if taken seriously) appears as a death-leap, even a death-wish. In Kant, practical life is (in the end) defined by self-mastery. And in Schelling, the struggle *for* identity itself is the reason for being. From this perspective, Kierkegaard's apparent regression into devotionalism is disconcerting. What does it mean to lose one's very self in God? Climacus is a humourist and can retain a certain perspective on this question; but in his religious discourses Kierkegaard has to take the devotional language seriously. The language that Kierkegaard uses here is symbolic to be sure. But this is no excuse for ironic detachment. Kierkegaard's symbolic language *longs for* God, as it were. The pathos of this kind of communication is different from Climacus's comedic treatment of religion in *Postscript*. Climacus toys with religious language but in the discourses Kierkegaard is fully engaged with his community of readers and even with his faith-community.⁸² But if the language is so engaged, how

⁸² Kierkegaard actually presented two of the Communion discourses at Frue Church in Copenhagen

can he possibly retain rational perspective? Is Kierkegaard's language blindly rhetorical (or worse, something close to fanaticism)?

However, as we shall see, Kierkegaard's language is not simply affirmative and positive. Kierkegaard consistently draws attention to the inadequacy of his own language. Symbolic language is inherently un-fanatical because it is too much aware of its own limitations. This awareness is not a sign of ironic detachment. But neither is it blind to the difference between image and reality. Kierkegaard's personal-devotional language is a *response* to religious experiences that call for such language. However, the very longing to respond to this call reveals the inadequacy of the response. The response comes after the communication and Kierkegaard has to orient himself *in* the communication. Kierkegaard is merely the humble servant of the Word. Kierkegaard's words are therefore neither inconsequential nor authoritative, neither comedic nor fanatical. On the one hand, the soul is not radically free: that is, there is no way to gain a disengaged perspective here outside the soul's active involvement in God. The love comes to life as the soul suffers in God, as the soul is purged of selfish desires and illuminated by God. On the other hand, the communicative space between call and response is the very freedom of the soul, for Kierkegaard. Ultimately the light that "shines through" the person's protective armour and "pierces the heart" is communicative, not forceful; it does "no injury." The connection between God and soul is dialogical. The spirit of longing that draws a person to God is essentially a response to God's Word, God's communicative love. As in Augustine, even the apparently

(*Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*, *op. cit.*, 249).



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superficial skin condition shows itself to be communicative, a longing that stirs whenever God courts the soul, whenever God crosses the threshold, interrupts the ego striving for self-possession -- but alienated from God. As communicative, this courtship nevertheless allows a person to orient himself freely in God: to move towards God ó to respond to love and love without ceasing, again and again (ōmarital yearningō). However, a person also has the freedom to turn away in shame from God, has the freedom to turn back towards himself, his own struggle for self-mastery and ultimately his own guilt.

Chapter 3

THE SELF FIGHTS BACK: THE STRUGGLE FOR IDENTITY IN KIERKEGAARD'S *FOUR UPBUILDING DISCOURSES*

As we saw in the introduction, some critics argue that Kierkegaard's conception of the religious subject is contentless, a *Penia*, a non-erotic spirit. Other authors try to defend Kierkegaard from the charge of irrationalism by arguing that even his flights of religious fancy are kept in check gravitationally by a cosmic centre: the human ego. Along with his critics, I argue that the longing for God is fundamentally dis-possessive, for Kierkegaard. Unlike his critics, I argue that this longing is a response to God's self-communication. God and human beings are "utterly different" but not oil and water either, as Augustine puts it. The leap of faith is a choice to consent to love's bidding, not the aporetic opposite of certainty. I will deal here with the *Four Upbuilding Discourses (1844)* from *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*.⁸³ Essentially, these discourses speak of the intimate relationship between the Father and his children. They speak of longing for the Father; but this longing, as Kierkegaard shows, is a response to God's intimate presence in a person's life. The longing in question is dialogical, communicative, and relational.

1.

Let us explore this relationship between longing and communication in the first discourse ("To Need God Is a Human Being's Highest Perfection"). At first the aim of the discourse appears to be entirely negative, a spiritual exercise meant to teach the reader

⁸³ From *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses (op. cit.)*

how to overcome the world. Give up all your possessions, the discourse seems to say, prove the world illusory and then your longing for God will increase. Let us see if this reading holds. Kierkegaard begins with proverb: "A person needs only a little in order to live and needs that little only a little while." This proverb, Kierkegaard says, is a test: "But how much, then, is the little that a person needs? Let life answer, and let the discourse do what the distress and hardship of life sometimes do--strip a person in order to see how little it is that he needs" (298). Kierkegaard says here that the aim of the discourse is to imitate life, to strip away the reader's possessions over time. "And you, my listener, join in as you must or wish to join in according to your particular situation." However, while the discourse imitates life, it cannot substitute for it. Life is the better teacher and the discourse can only speak to the reader already familiar with the hardships in life or the inexperienced reader not blinded by illusions about life. The reader comes from a certain perspective then and must interpret the discourse according to her own experiences of suffering. The discourse can only remind the reader of forgotten truths or point the reader in new directions. The discourse invites all to participate in the spiritual exercise; but for the reader who thinks life is indulgent, who reads, for instance, the book of Job and finds nothing there of relevance, the discourse will be less kind (298). The reader who stakes her comfort on probabilities (for instance, on the probability of worldly success) is naive. "But who, then, is more wretched: the one who has experienced it [distress], or the cowardly, weak fool who does not perceive that his comfort is a fraud, that it is of little benefit when calamity strikes, that this is the rare instance?" (298).

Nevertheless, the warning stands out front; the discourse will not indulge the reader's fantasies. For the fool, the discourse is a hard taskmaster, like life.

However, like life the discourse does not teach its lessons all at once. While life is sometimes a hard taskmaster it is also gracious, Kierkegaard notes: it gradually strips a person of the "essentials." Slowly a person gets used to living without the things he used to crave absolutely. The discourse mirrors this progressive movement. Kierkegaard tells the story of a man who gradually loses more and more in life, even his reputation. As life continues to test the man he discovers he needs less and less. He does not even need to know that his last remaining possessions are secure. Here the man becomes more and more self-sufficient. Let us not forget, Kierkegaard says, that all life ends in the grave and here "every human being needs equally little" (299). The spiritual exercise, the vision of equality in death, helps to strip the soul of false needs. The grave mocks a life spent in struggle for more and more territory.

Based on this morbid exercise, it seems as if we are engaged in a kind of Stoical therapy of desire. Are we being asked to follow Zeno's wise man who aspires to imitate the gods in their self-sufficiency (303)? But the discourse begins to take a new direction. The discourse begins to strip the reader of even this comfort, the comfort of self-sufficiency. The reversal comes first with a piece of commonplace advice: the wisdom of the advice columnist, the friend who cannot think of what else to say, the word a person speaks because he cannot bear the silence: "you must be content with God's grace." The advice is like a consolation prize, something to soothe the wound of austerity inflicted by life -- and the discourse. In exchange for self-denial and suffering: God's grace. But,

Kierkegaard asks: is it not strange to suggest that a suffering person should be content with God, the *highest*? How can God's grace, which is the highest, lend the weary soul a little *bit* of contentment? Life has stripped the person of everything he loves and God promises a second-rate paradise? Is this the case: that eternal life holds no promise but will at least put the suffering person out of his earthly misery? The person who thinks this way holds earthly life in so much contempt that its very negation is his only hope. But if God were the solution to suffering, the utter annihilation of life, if this were the only way to hold God in high esteem, then religion would be nothing but misanthropy.

The suffering person's negative theology appears high-minded. The person says: do you really want to regress, to become a child who thinks God an indulgent father, the father who wants to fulfill every petty wish, the God who is nothing but a wish-fulfillment? But Kierkegaard does not argue along these lines. He says that God is neither the negative solution to human suffering nor a wish-fulfillment. Rather, God is the *source* of the most profound and ultimately only decisive kind of suffering: longing. This God-relationship is like when a poor person enjoys the friendship of a rich and powerful friend who nevertheless cannot benefit him. And yet the poor person enjoys the friendship for its own sake and not for material gain (302). But surely, according to our worldly mentality, this comparison is ridiculous. Is God not *all*-powerful? Surely he can benefit and satisfy a person's earthly needs. But this worldly mentality is the source of human impatience, Kierkegaard says. When God fails to satisfy every worldly desire, when a person is slowly stripped down and begins to need less and less ó here he becomes impatient and here that commonplace piece of advice gains purchase: ðyou must

be content with God's grace (302). Nevertheless, Kierkegaard says, every now and again, when the voices of the world (clamouring for the soul's attention) grow quiet, a person may well begin to see the glory of this contentment. As impatience is cooled and calmed down in the quiet incorruptibility of the inner being, the soul begins to understand this contentment better and better until the heart is stirred and sometimes, at least, sees the divine glory that had taken on a lowly form (302-303). But here something remarkable happens. The soul begins to fall into need and begins to long for this lowly form, this second-rate consolation, more and more. When a person in prayer sees "the divine glory that had taken on a lowly form" he understands that God's grace is desirable for its own sake. "And if this glory again vanishes for a person so that he is again destitute, as he still was also while he saw the glory, if it again seems to him that contentment still belongs to being contented with the grace of God, then he still at times shamefully admits that the grace of God is in itself worth being contented with—indeed, it alone is worth being desired; indeed, to possess it is the only blessedness." Here the person will see that God's glory is no consolation prize at all. Precisely the opposite: the person will become more and more *discontented*. Here "in a beautiful sense the human heart will gradually (the grace of God is never taken by force) become more and more discontented—that is, it will desire more and more ardently, will long more and more intensely, to be assured of grace" (303). Note here that this discontentment increases more and more in relationship with God and that the person was destitute even while he saw the glory. Beatific vision (the subject of the next discourse) is, in this sense, no *solution* to suffering but the very source of a person's true discontentment—even in the

fullness of glory. The existential problem at the heart of the discourse is precisely this poverty, this humiliating (from a worldly perspective) neediness. This neediness a person *cannot* learn in the world. God does not necessarily satisfy earthly needs; but God *does* increase (incalculably and decisively) a person's neediness. We do not comprehend this easily. The meaning of these words, Kierkegaard says, is a secret granted to the person who humbles himself in prayer. When a person "has become attentive to the words they will call him aside, where he no longer hears the secular mentality's earthly mother tongue, the speech of human beings, the noise of the shopkeepers, but where the words explain [*forklarer*] themselves to him, confide to him the secret of perfection: that to need God is nothing to be ashamed of but is perfection itself . . ." (303).

The discourse begins by stripping the person of worldly possessions and needs, then introduces God as a consolation; but then shows how God is no consolation at all (from a worldly perspective). God does not satisfy pre-existing needs, Kierkegaard says; the vision of God increases a person's neediness "and this is a person's highest blessing. "With respect to the earthly, one needs little, and to the degree that one needs less, the more perfect one is. . . . In a human being's relationship with God, it is inverted: the more he needs God, the more deeply he comprehends that he is in need of God, and then the more he in his need presses forward⁸⁴ to God, the more perfect he is" (303). It is as if for Kierkegaard, beatitude is a coming to rest in this longing, finding peace in perpetual humility, in unending worship, in the never-finished hymn of praise. And if this is the case, as I shall argue, then the beginning of wisdom is to see that God is the source of a

⁸⁴ " . . . i sin Trang trænger sig frem. . ." A closer translation to Danish would be: " . . . in his urge urges himself forward. . ." Note again the relationship between urge and voluntary activity. See notes 103 and 104.

person's discontentment, that even rebellion against God is nothing more than a fear of this discontentment, the fear of long-suffering, the fear of spiritual poverty, the fear of the understanding that "to need God is a human being's highest perfection." The existential crisis here is not over human suffering as such, but a rebellion against the neediness inherent in the God-relationship, the *perfection* of godly need. The "vision of divine glory in lowly form," meets the person where she is. The meeting place is the "lowly form," the furthest point from the Father, among the swine, in a foreign land. God is present even here and so the soul begins to "desire more and more" and "long more and more intensely." But the vision does not satisfy: it comes unexpectedly, precisely among the swine, when all *hope* is lost, precisely when a person no longer has the will to evade the longing. Here the person begins to see that the inheritance wasted in wild living, every moment of restless debauchery, was an evasion of the beatitude that renders a person "destitute" -- in "the glory" of God's presence.

Let us continue the spiritual exercise that Kierkegaard began above to see how this understanding of longing bears out. We left the person stripped of earthly possessions. The person had begun to see how worthless worldly possessions really are. This person, Kierkegaard says, will then even come to see that he himself is without "value" in the world. The person who is worth something in the world develops his talents and knows the purchasing-power of those talents. In this way "we speak of a person's self in terms of monetary value, and he who knows himself knows down to the last penny what he is worth and knows how to exchange himself so that he obtains the full value" (312). He is in demand in the social marketplace. But like any commodity he

only knows himself "in relationship to something else" but not "in relation to himself." His value therefore is constantly shifting depending on supply and demand. At one moment the person of great talent knows himself as the strongest and the most handsome and the richest. But then someone comes along who is stronger, more handsome and richer. Suddenly he no longer knows himself. He discovers that he requires re-valuation. But here "a person's real self seems to him to be so far distant that the whole world seems much closer to him" -- and yet the person has come to see that this world is an illusion (313).

But surely a person's dignity cannot be grounded in the "relationship to something else" but rather the "relation to himself," Kierkegaard says. Is worldly "value" not without merit, a false measure from the very beginning? Must we not look for a different standard of measurement, a "constant" in a human being, even as wealth and strength and physical beauty fade? But what is this "constant"? The new standard is a person's capacity for self-mastery. In a world of flux and constantly shifting values -- a gold standard. In the marketplace a person reaches outside himself, tries to gain value. His eye is like an arrow and his "passion and desire" draws the bowstring. His arm is "stretched out" and he reaches "outward" towards his conquest (308). But the one who strives for self-mastery comes to see that this man is nevertheless also the subject of conquest. He is "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 this craving, stimulates the drives. . . ." He is a slave to desire. But the person who seeks self-mastery fears this kind of slavishness more than anything in the world. If he

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 is in accord with the way the world plucks its strings; if he does not want to be like a mirror in which he intercepts the world or, rather, the world reflects itself; if he does not want this, 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; if he grasps the hand before it grasps for the external, so that it may belong to him and not he to the hand; if he wants this so earnestly that he is not afraid of tearing out the eye, cutting off the hand, shutting the window of the senses if necessary—well, then everything is changed; the [external] power is taken away from him, and the glory. He struggles not with the world but with himself. (308)

And so a new *identity* is forged: self-mastery. But is this new gold-standard really free of flux? Kierkegaard asks. The attempt to find an identity is forged precisely in the heat of battle, in the unceasing struggle for supremacy over self. Does this not mean that the new identity, the identity of self in opposition to itself, is also inherently unstable? The one who seeks self-mastery (the moralist) cares little about success in the world; he is unconcerned with good or bad fortune. He strives for godlike self-sufficiency unconditioned by luck, by external conditions. And so he "creates in his innermost being temptations of glory and temptations of fear and temptations of despondency, of pride and of defiance and of sensuality greater than those he meets in the external world, and this is the very reason he struggles with himself" (320). Without constantly testing himself, proving himself, the person would simply be a master over ða fortuitous degree of temptation— and the occasional ðvictory— would fail to prove his *identity* (320). The virtuous person is his own worst enemy, his hardest taskmaster. But the battle for supremacy is never-ending, because it is conditioned by limited powers, limited by the very fact that he *has* to prove himself to himself. He knows -- by the very fact of the struggle itself -- that his powers are finite. He *is* one thing, a human being, striving to

become a categorically different being, a god, unconditionally self-satisfied. The categorical nature of struggle is the contradiction. The struggler wants to conquer everything worldly and external, lack itself. He wants a new identity, unconditional supremacy over himself. Even if he could develop a *relative* degree of self-mastery, he could not but imagine more severe temptations. He "is able to do only so much, and this only by extreme effort, in resisting himself, but this, of course, is not overcoming himself" (320). He knows the war is perpetual, that his higher self will win some battles and lose some. And so the war continues and exhausts (309). In exhaustion he comes face to face with his own limitations ó not just accidentally - but categorically. He is condemned to finitude. He who turned away from worldly conquest to conquer his own soul, has met a most formidable enemy in himself. "Observe him now; his powerful figure is held embraced by another figure, and they hold each other so firmly interlocked and are so equally matched in suppleness and strength that the wrestling cannot even begin, because in that moment that other figure would overwhelm him" but that other figure is he himself" (309).

The moralist's struggle cannot but end in self-annihilation; and at this point we might expect Kierkegaard to introduce God into the equation to save the day. Who might help a person overcome himself but God? Who but God could claim victory over sin? Here God could prove himself practically relevant, feed the struggler's desire for self-mastery, turn stone into bread. But for Kierkegaard, God does not have a *function*, does not prove himself by helping a person overcome anything as such, externally in the world or internally in the soul's struggle with itself. It is not as if the weary sensualist tired of

worldly conquest then became a moralist, tried to conquer himself, and then finally in a religious phase overcome himself -- with God's assistance -- as if God were merely the finest of mercenary armies. The point here for Kierkegaard is not to spiritualize the violence of worldly conquest, to replicate mastery religiously. As we shall see here and in the following discourses, Kierkegaard says that self-annihilation gives way to love and that this is a person's salvation. The struggler's soul, Kierkegaard says, is like a "smoldering brand" that cannot consume itself or anything else. It does not consume "until the fire of God's love ignites the blaze in what the smoldering brand could not consume" (309). Self-annihilation prepares the ground for the soul's openness to God's love. For a person "who is conscious that he is capable of nothing at all has every day and every moment the desired and irrefragable opportunity to experience that God lives" (321,322). But without God's love, the purgation is mere violence, misanthropy uninformed by the good. The negative, self-annihilating movement opens up the soul; but exhaustion could just as well lead to despair ó were it not for God's love. God's love saves because it includes the beloved in a higher way of life. This higher life saves because it educates, not because it satisfies a pre-existing need. The education therefore corresponds to a person's openness to God. "Insofar as a person does not know himself in such a way that he knows that he himself is capable of nothing at all, he does not actually become conscious in the deeper sense that God *is [er til]*". Even though a person mentions his name at times, calls upon him occasionally, perhaps in the more momentous decisions thinks he sees him and is moved (since it is impossible, after all, to catch even a glimpse of God without being moved), he is nevertheless somewhat piously deceived if

he therefore believes it is manifest to him that God *is* . . . (322, emphasis original).

Kierkegaard says here that being moved subjectively is not the same as knowing God. A person can only know God relationally in prayerful humility, only insofar as a person is unconscious in the deeper sense that God *is* . . . God is neither in *my* particular place of worship, nor in *my* petitions when I call upon him occasionally or in *my* momentous decisions or in *my* emotions. But Kierkegaard says that catching a glimpse of God in a particular place is idolatry, not because God is aloof, but because there is an immeasurably more intimate way of knowing God. This way reveals itself precisely when a person stops trying see God somewhere in particular or feel God in a particular emotion. Here idolatry gives way to personal encounter, relationship, dialogue. In God a person

is well aware that God does not dwell in temples, but he also knows that God is with him at night when sleep refreshes and when he awakens in an alarming dream, is with him in the day of need when he is searching in vain from comfort, in the tumult of ideas when he listens in vain for a liberating word, in moral danger when the world does not help, in his anxiety when he is afraid of himself, in the moment of despair when his is working out his soul's salvation in fear and trembling. He knows that God is with him in the moment when anxiety rushes upon him with lightening speed, when it already seems too late and there is no time left to go to the house of the Lord; then he is with him, swifter than the light that pierces the darkness, swifter than the thought that chases away the fog-- present--yes, present as swiftly as only one can be who was already present. (322-323)

God is everywhere and is nowhere in particular. He is there when it already seems too late and there is no time left to go to the house of the Lord. The house of the Lord cannot contain God; no prayer, petition, no manifestation or sign can contain God because God is already present before the petitioner even utters a word. God's help is already present before the need arises and therefore is *no help* in the ordinary sense.

The need for God arises in a person in *response* to the "help." The so-called help only increases the need and in God's presence the person "will long more and more" for God (303). The moralist turns inward and "instead of gaining the whole world" tries "to gain himself." But the moralist fails and "instead of becoming the master" becomes "the one in need" (314). In worldly terms, this is humiliating. The self-sufficient person is "in the eyes of the world regarded as courageous" (309). But the person who catches a glimpse of "the divine glory that had taken on a lowly form," cannot help but long for God "more and more" (303) and is regarded as weak and cowardly. For Kierkegaard, God does not cause the discontentment in the human soul because he is distant. The longing for God increases because God is really present, really requires a person's prayerful attention, devotion, and love.

But in heaven, my listener, there lives the God who is capable of all things, or, more correctly, he lives everywhere, even if people do not perceive it. "Indeed, O Lord, if you were a weak, lifeless body like a flower that withers, if you were like a brook that flows by, if you were like a building that collapses in due time" then people would pay attention to you, then you would be an appropriate object for our low and brutish thoughts. "But this is not the way it is, and your very greatness makes you invisible, since in your wisdom you are much too far away from man's thoughts for him to be able to see you, and in your omnipresence you are too close to him for him to see you; in your goodness you conceal yourself from him, and your omnipotence makes it impossible for him to see you, since in that case he himself would become nothing!" (310)

Both the sensualist and moralist fail to see God. The sensualist confuses Creator and creature. But the moralist, who strives for self-sufficiency, cannot see God *because* God is "too close," because God increases a person's needs and, in worldly terms, the humiliation. As we shall see below, for Kierkegaard, the angst typically associated with existentialism, the obsession with human limitations and estrangement from God, is

egoistic. According to appearances the moralist is infinitely holier and purer than the sensualist. But this purity, as Kierkegaard says in the third discourse, is really a kind of cowardliness, a fear of God's intimate presence. False humility, Kierkegaard will say, puts God at a distance, makes God irrelevant (unlike the sensualist who makes God all-too-relevant). And as we shall see in the fourth discourse, the beginning of wisdom, for Kierkegaard, is the submission to God's illuminating presence. The spiritual journey for Kierkegaard begins with the annihilation, but an annihilation informed by love. The spiritual exercises in the discourses do *not* teach the reader how to wait for a God who is absent. The unbridged distance between human and God is a human invention. Pride causes this abyss because it cannot image how "divine glory" dwells in "lowly form," how God is already with a person *now*, even in the lowest point and furthest distance (according to appearances) from God. Only God's self-revelation can convince a person of this, Kierkegaard will say.

In the current discourse we can see how this understanding of illumination informs Kierkegaard's theology. The aim here is not just to teach God but to teach how *not* to teach God. For example, Kierkegaard asks, what would it mean to console another person with hope in God? God, he says, does not give licence to hope easily. God does not satisfy the learner's preconceived desires. To live in the light of the divine instruction is a "difficult matter" because one certainly wants to promise "indescribable comfort" but the learner has to go through the suffering of learning to even know what comfort means (306). The comfort cannot satisfy; the comfort is learned. For this reason a person cannot speak of God's grace with enthusiasm or "zealous words." The journey towards

God is a true education, gradual and "never taken by force." Understanding grows "more and more" (303) or "little by little" (306). Here no pedagogical technique can guarantee a result. The word of wisdom -- including the discourse itself -- "must chop down the bridge of probability" (306). The weather forecast interests us because its promises are calculable; but anyone who, in their longing for God, grasps for probabilities comes face to face with an abyss. All people, Kierkegaard, reminds us, the intelligent and unintelligent -- are equally powerless in God. In longing a person comes to this understanding: that he is "capable of nothing, nothing at all" (306).

2.

Kierkegaard continues to explore this pedagogy in the next discourse (δThe Thorn in the Fleshö) on 2 Corinthians 12:7 (Paulø's account of beatific vision and alienation from God). Here Kierkegaard shows how the suffering of alienation is pedagogical; it is the suffering of the soulø's transformation in God. The suffering in question is a suffering that pertains even to the beatified. Kierkegaard begins with a warning: do not think you understand Paulø's suffering immediately or immediately dismiss the Apostle's suffering because you cannot live up to his greatness. Only the interpretive encounter that lets Paul speak personally, neither patronizingly nor haughtily, can begin to understand Paulø's suffering. On the one hand, Kierkegaard says, it is terrible to receive comfort from an apostle. The sufferings of an apostle makes jest of petty grievances. Here is a man with no time "to waste on worldly sorrows" (333). On the other hand, Paulø's suffering pertains to all human beings. Every spiritual blessing is born in pain; the pain is not misfortune but

pedagogically essential: the education must "wound more deeply before it can heal"

(330). Is a person supposed to be thankful, Kierkegaard asks, that she has avoided the suffering in which the soul battles through to faith or the one in which faith is victorious over the world? Or how about "the pain in which hope is born" before it "becomes unshakable" or the self-annihilation of the ego "in which self-love breathes its last until love learns to know God. . ." (330)? Indeed, these sufferings are essential to life in God. The thorn that accompanies Paul's beatific vision is no mere coincidence. It exemplifies the sorrow that accompanies all comfort. "He [Paul] knows that in a certain sense the joining of earthly life with beatitude is always an unhappy marriage and that truly beatific union is concluded only in heaven, just as it was concluded there in the beginning; but he also knows that it is beneficial to him, and that this thorn in the flesh is given him so that he will not be arrogant" (328-329). Paul does not just suffer from a particular temptation or ailment. Something more essential is at stake. Even if all earthly things were taken from Paul, Kierkegaard says, "the apostle is still assured that neither angels nor devils nor things present nor things past nor things future will be able to separate him from the love in which God's witness testifies in his heart! And then what is all earthly suffering compared with this blessedness! Paul is "present (*nærværende*) in the flesh" but "absent (*fraværende*),⁸⁵ far away, so that those who think to wound him are only deceived!" (334). The suffering is the longing for God, originating in his vision of God. For a brief moment Paul dwells in "the home of the spirit" which "is in the eternal and the infinite" (337). Then he falls back to earth. But his earthly suffering is *not* over temporality, as such

⁸⁵ Literally: "close-existing" and "from-existing" or "close-be-ing" and "from-be-ing."

(indeed, ðwhat is all earthly suffering comparedö with beatitude); the suffering is *in* God, a longing to *return* to God. Indeed, there are *still* plenty of earthly blessings for Paul to enjoy, such as the ðbeautiful joyö of friendship, Kierkegaard notes. ðBut this expression [Udtryk]ö to be caught [*henrykt*]⁸⁶ up into the third heaven, to be made a participant [*deelagtiggjort*]⁸⁷ in sublime revelations, to sense an inexpressible [*uudsigelig*]⁸⁸ beatitudeö this he cannot use and has not used to describe that beautiful joy he shared [*deelte*] with others. But that inexpressible beatitude he could not express [*udsige*]ö alas, and to prevent it, he was given a thorn in the fleshö (334). Earthly life has its blessings, including friendship. But God is a higher blessing, the joy above all joys. And so Paul begins to long for God and suffer in his temporal condition. Paul no longer wants to satisfy his lower desires unconditionally. ðTo have been caught up into the third heaven, to have been hidden in the bosom of beatitude, to have been expanded in God, and now to be tethered by the thorn in the flesh to the thralldom of temporality. To have been made rich in God, inexpressibly so, and now to be broken down [*tilintegjort*]⁸⁹ to flesh and blood, to dust and corruption!ö (337). Kierkegaard says that beatitude is an expansion in God, a way of learning in God. This is precisely why the *return to self* is a kind of suffering. Paul is not simply expressing a ðsuffering of separationö comparable to ðthe separation of death.ö No, ðdeath only separates a person from the temporal and therefore is a release, whereas this separation shuts him out from the eternal and therefore is an

⁸⁶ Literally: he was ðoverjoyedö in the third heaven. *Hen* is equivalent to the prefix, ðover-.ö Rykt is from ryk, a sudden movement, a jerking motion. The word does not appear in Danish translations of the 2 Cor. Compare *Udtryk*, *ex-press* (pressing out) with the responsive experience of being joyed-over-into-heaven.

⁸⁷ To be made a participant. *Deel-* is equivalent to the English ðpart.ö

⁸⁸ Litererally: un-say-able. Can also mean, what one *ought* not say or *dare* not say.

⁸⁹ To be made nothing, annihilated. The movement here is away from the fullness of reality back to the insubstantial, to illusion.

imprisonment that again leaves the spirit sighing in the fragile earthen vessel. . . ö (337). Death is ða releaseö but Paul is estranged from *life* itself. Indeed, in returning to earth Paul is *tilintegjort*. Next to this instruction in beatitude, worldly things no longer command his unconditional allegiance. The light of God's glory shows up every one of Paul's obsessions, every one of his false, idolatrous desires. ðThen the thorn in the flesh festers, because if a person has not experienced the beatitude of heaven, he will not suffer as much, eitherö (345). The suffering here is over the estrangement from *beatitude*, not just temporality itself. Paul is tied down by ðthraldom,ö by illusions, by false desires. But in reality the weight of desire is nothing but an impediment to the soul's upward flight. The suffering is: ðTo want to run faster than ever and then not be able to move a foot. . . ö (345).

Paul longs for God but cannot ðmove a foot.ö Impatience tempts him; he wants ðto buy the moment by sacrificing everything,ö but comes ðto learn that it is not for sale, because -it depends not upon him who wills [*vil*] or upon him who runs but upon God, who shows mercyø(Romans 9:16)!ö (345). Paul learns that nothing practical, no amount of running, no amount of willing, can substitute for beatific vision. Only in love, in being loved by God, is Paul rescued from himself, from self-condemnation (338). Here past sins cannot condemn Paul because he is ðtransfigured in God.ö Here ðself-accusation is mitigated, forgotten in the understanding with Governances's inscrutable wisdom, in the blessed instruction of a reconciliation; so that the eternal fears no future, indeed, hopes for no future, but love possesses everything without ceasing, and there is no shadow of variationö (338). Here Paul's worst enemy, himself, is silenced. In the ðblessed

instruction in inscrutable wisdom Paul forgets his sinful past; he is healed of self-condemnation. There is no immediate substitute for this relationship, no temporary solution, no practical application. Only God can heal what *no repentance can entirely redeem* or *no trusting in God can entirely wipe out*. Even repentance and trust are inadequate; only God can heal in the inexpressible silence of beatitude (338, emphasis added). Forgetfulness cannot annihilate the consciousness of sin; only the blessedness of eternity is capable of this, because the soul is entirely filled with it (339). Indeed, it depends not upon him who *wills* or upon him who *runs*. Miraculously, Paul is able to see his suffering as beneficial for this reason. He knows that he cannot simply grab a hold of God immediately, that he cannot possess God. The road into God is long, an education, a Way (see 341). The education is purgative. Yet an apostle understands that this is beneficial for him, that every temporal anxiety that only desires must be consumed, every self-confidence that wants to be finished must be burned out in the purgatory of the future, every cowardliness that wants to sneak past the danger must perish in the desert of expectancy (345).

How does a person return to beatitude? Perhaps you have felt the urgency of this desire yourself, Kierkegaard addresses the reader: that time in life when God's blessings were lost in an ever-receding past. And yet, Kierkegaard reminds the reader: the more you struggled the further you fell from the goal. Here impatience suddenly awakened as strong as a giant and with its anxiety changed the little into much, the little period of time into an eternity, the little distance into a chasmic abyss... Here strength collapsed in weakness and all hope was lost (344). This is how it is, Kierkegaard says. A person

distracted by ungodly worries, encloses herself from God and tries to overcome herself.

In self-condemnation the "little period of time" turns "into a chasmic abyss." Here the person creates an image: the image is distance, unbridgeable distance, infinite void -- between earth and heaven. The abyss is the one the person *creates*, the abyss of self-condemnation. Nevertheless the person fails to overcome herself, even in superficial living, in the suppression of guilt; self-condemnation persists. In self-condemnation the beatified life, too full of love to fear, appears utterly improbable. From a practical point of view there is no *way* from here to there, no easily digested five-step plan to get the person there. There is nothing the person can do (339).

Is longing then nothing but sorrow, a thorn in the flesh? Does memory not mediate between the intimate, original experience and alienated consciousness? But Kierkegaard suggests that the memory of God only reminds a person how far she has fallen from God. The memory itself is powerless to heal; in this sense the memory is no mediation at all. The memory itself is nothing but torment; it can only promise a better future; but it cannot assure victory. The memory itself cannot prove how God will bridge the gap between Creator and sinful creature. There is no logical connection between promise and the assurance of promise. A promise in itself is empty. In the darkness of this uncertainty, the memory of light torments from a distance; and work substitutes for vision. Here the person begins to struggle against herself, falls into exhaustion, weary of self-scrutiny. The distance between God and soul is an illusion created by self-loathing, by the inward gaze that always fails to find God.

3.

As we shall see below, for Kierkegaard, God's love is not an empty promise and the longing for God is not a struggle for an empty, distant ideal. The moral ideals conjured up by the self-loathing spirit imitate God's self-revealed goodness. The light of God also puts the soul to shame; but in itself the cause of self-loathing is the person's creative spirit, what Kierkegaard in the third discourse (‘Against Cowardliness’) calls, an ‘enclosing reserve [*indesluttethed*]’ (351). The ‘enclosing reserve’ is a self-perpetuating movement of introspection, a movement that falls further and further from God in egoistic self-condemnation. At first it is not obvious that this is the subject of the third discourse. At first Kierkegaard seems to advocate precisely the kind of self-scrutiny that the previous discourse critiqued. The discourse appears to be simply about making a resolution of obedience to God. But is a resolution not something a person makes who has fallen from vision of God, who no longer sees God but needs some arbitrary measure and some *self*-inflicted punishment to gain God back? Kierkegaard writes:

Besides all other good qualities, the good, the truly great and noble, has the quality of not allowing the observer to be indifferent. It elicits a pledge, as it were, from the person⁹⁰ who has once caught a vision of it. However deep that person sinks, he never actually forgets it completely; even in his reprobate state, this recollection is certainly a torment to him, but also it humbles him, because it requires of him all his power and yet retains the authority to call him an unworthy servant even when he has done his utmost. Now it is extremely important for cowardliness to prevent this loving understanding, resolution's solemn agreement with the good on such humiliating terms (359)

⁹⁰ “. . . ham tager det ligesom et Løfte af . . .” Literally: ‘. . . he takes it like a promise from . . .’ Note this strange turn of phrase. The good, says Kierkegaard, *takes* a promise from the person. *Løfte* also means ‘to lift.’ Compare this raising up of the promise with the sinking down in forgetfulness (in the next sentence). See notes 103 and 104 on the question of passivity and activity in longing.

Kierkegaard seems to say that the good is an ideal that requires of the person ðall his powerö and yet forever remains unattainable. Moreover, Kierkegaard appears to say that the only way to overcome this contradiction is to make a resolution and leap into the arms of God. The leap seems to happen because the perpetually ðunworthy servantö is utterly exhausted. In addition, Kierkegaard seems to call this leap courageous and people cowardly who find this situation intolerable and ðhumiliating.ö Here Kierkegaard seems to praise courage itself, the blind leap of faith. Indeed, Kierkegaard goes on to chide the prideful person who has won independence from the crowd, and now walks upright and free, yet nevertheless loses courage before God. In his solitary existence the person encounters God and here he wavers and hesitates (361). Too afraid to be alone before God, he tries to retain his own independence and security. He conjures up innumerable excuses in the name of pride to avoid the relationship. Here Kierkegaard seems to turn the tables on pride by conflating it with cowardliness. But is the leap of faith then not a work by other means, the work above all works? What is faith then but courage in the face of God's otherworldly purity? What is faith then but a gathering of resolute strength uninformed by the good? How does a person know God will conquer sin? He has no evidence; but it must *be* so because the person *needs* it so. The leap is apparently nothing but willed belief, the resolution that creates the reality it wants. Is the leap the beginning and end of faith? Is faith mere decisionism? In the next chapter we will see that, for Kierkegaard, Christ reveals the way into God. But where does this way end? Christ dies alone on the cross, abandoned by the Father. All the miracles, the signs and wonders, all human understanding comes to nothing. Here, it seems, Christ really teaches us how to

die alone or live like orphans, children abandoned by their Father. Is this not what happens when God becomes human, so far removed from eternal glory that all hope is lost? At the cross Christ seems to smash all idols, break every practical connection between God and human. The Father abandons the Son and the Son is courageous enough to leap into the abyss. But is religion nothing but courage in face of human suffering, mortality, finitude? And here we ask: if courage *itself* is the only good, how do we differentiate between good and bad courage? (Who is more courageous than the suicide bomber? Who denies the world more thoroughly?). What can we say to this? After all, if we have poured all our energy into articulating the virtue of religious courage *itself*, the blind leap of faith *uninformed* by the good ó there is nothing else to say?

However, Kierkegaard's use of the term *cowardly* does not stem merely from a rhetorical license meant to shame his readers into submission. Kierkegaard says that when a person flees God, he is denying the ðpledgeö elicited by the ðvisionö of God. The original pledge or resolution was not a question of will-power. Cowardliness here is precisely catching a ðvisionö of the good and then, turning away in shame. The good ðelicits a pledge, as it were, from the person who has once caught a vision of it.ö The vision of the good, so at odds with human selfishness causes shame. In time a person ðforget[s] everything that is noble and sacredö and becomes ða slave in the service of the world, of the moment.ö Over time the person becomes more and more ðalienated from the eternal and the originalö and though he once had a ðstrong sense⁹¹ of the presence of the eternalö has now nearly forgotten it (347). One way to help remember, Kierkegaard

⁹¹ ð. . . *fornam det Evige stærkt og nærværende. . .*” My translation: ð. . . intuited the Eternal strong and intimately . . .ö

says, is to make a resolution. The resolution joins a person with the eternal, brings the eternal into time for him, jars him out of the drowsiness of uniformity. . . . It is a waking up to the eternal, a waking up from the dead like the widow's son from Nain who was taken for dead (346). But this resolution is fundamentally a response to that "original" encounter with the good. It is not as if a person abandoned by God gathered a certain amount of energy to fill the gap between real and ideal, that impossible, otherworldly, inhuman goal. The good "elicits a pledge, as it were, from the person who has once caught a vision of it." The resolution is but a moment in the person's relationship with God, the moment when the son with pods for food remembers the Father again. The misspent inheritance humiliates but the humiliation itself cannot awaken the son from his stupor. As we saw in *The Confessions*, only the spirit of the Father, his very presence even here among the swine can do this. Here the son (Augustine) begins the long walk home, guided by his longing for the Father. The spirit of the Father among the swine gives forth a promise, like a distant ideal. But the promise is personal, a giving forth in love. As we shall see below, for Kierkegaard, God gives himself in giving the promise. The promise *itself* is but a brief moment in a personal relationship. The relationship transcends the promise itself. The promise is not a platitude disconnected from the Father's self-giving love, the whole. The Father's promise lives *fully* here among the swine too ó as if the sty were paradise itself. Love, already present, carries the wayward soul forward. The first moment of love is the promise of a journey into God, but the journey has already begun.

Among the swine there is also talk of the Father. But the talk is mere talk, empty poetry praise of distant ideals. Kierkegaard says that cowardliness precisely wants to elevate the ðcontinued strivingö of life in order to ðprevent the decision of resolution.ö Cowardliness idealizes the ðfar-off great goalö of faith; here the goal becomes irrelevant, becomes ðso infinitely far off,ö that it is completely unrelated to the person. Faith (falsely named) becomes mere activity, mere practice uniformed by the good, a striving without end. Kierkegaard says that the leap is precisely not a far-off goal, but the beginning of a journey. The end informs the beginning; the leap is the first step towards the end. ðThat the continued striving still must have a beginning, especially in view of its presumably coming to an endö this neither cowardliness nor time wants to know about; only resolution knows this, as the phrase indicates, since the resolution [*Bestlutning*] is the beginning, and yet it takes its name from its knowing that a conclusion [*Slutning*] is coming.ö But cowardliness wants to ignore the initial resolution because it is merely focused on the ideal itself. ðWhat a proud thing to stare constantly into the clouds in this way without ever needing to bend its head to see its feet!ö God created human beings ðuprightö but cowardliness (in the form of pride) claims to have raised humanity even higher, with sights set on ðthe far-off great goal,ö the goal ðso infinitely far offö (357). Here it would seem that the problem for cowardliness is that the good is not high-minded enough, *not* ðinfinitely far off.ö Faith is compelled to make a decision, exercise personal responsibility, ðbend its head to see its feet.ö But the feet move, take the first step, because faith has not set its sights on heaven but is humble enough to learn from the good

-- already present.⁹² Pride, which sets the goal so high and refuses to see its own feet, is really cowardliness. It is self-satisfaction, a kind of hesitancy that never even takes the first step or a kind of cynical detachment from life that laughs at the ignorant and simple people of faith who leap too high towards an impossible goal (359-360). However, as Kierkegaard reminds the reader,

God does not give a spirit of cowardliness but a spirit of power and of love and of self-control, such as it necessary in order to know what is the good, what is truly great and noble, what significance it has for him and in relation to him; in order to love the good with the unselfish love that desires only to be an unworthy servant, which is always love's delight, and the opposite of it is a violation that pollutes love for him by making it profitable; and in order to maintain constancy, lest everything become unfruitful without the self-control that tempers the effort and the decision of resolution. This acknowledgment, this assent of resolution, is the first dedication [*Indvielse*]. Alas, how rarely a person experiences this in such a way that even merely in the moment of dedication he renounces all dreams and fancies, every mirage that wants to inflate him and cause him to be amazed at himself, and instead receives the power to envision it as it is, the power to embrace it with self-denying love, the power to make the pact of self-control with it! How rarely a person experiences this in such a way that even merely in the hour of dedication he has the power to hold to [*holde sig selv hen til*]⁹³ the good, which seemingly wants to destroy [*tilintetgjøre*] him, the love not to shrink from it, the self-control not to falsify himself! (360)

The good for Kierkegaard is both practical and impractical. God appears utterly useless to the sensate and this uselessness flatters the high-minded. However, for Kierkegaard, the good's uneconomic aspect is no cause for high-minded self-satisfaction. *On the one hand*, the good is not unfruitful, Kierkegaard says. The good is not so distant that it allows a person to feel intellectually superior over others. The love of the good is a way of living in God, an unselfish love that desires only to be an unworthy servant,

⁹² Cf. *The Confessions* (IV.12.19): "O mortals, how long will you be heavy-hearted? Life has come down to you, and are you reluctant to ascend and live? But what room is there for you to ascend, you with you high-flown ways and lofty talk? Come down, that you may ascend, ascend even to God, for you have fallen in your attempts to ascend in defiance of God."

⁹³ Literally: "hold oneself over to (or up against) the good. . ."

which is always love's delight. In the hour of dedication a person holds to the good and longs to live in it. The good is practical because it transfigures the soul, to the point where it seemingly wants to destroy it. The uneconomic good in question is a relationship established by God. The relationship is real, lest everything become unfruitful without the self-control that tempers the effort and the decision of resolution. But from the very beginning God himself has divided time, has separated day and night and likewise the good life moves towards its goal; has its day and night; it bears fruit in God. Otherwise faith would be like a friendship that continually rejects every opportunity life provides to express itself, meaningless, yes, un-lived, like the speech that is never heard, that in its superiority disdains every word and phrase the language offered (361). *On the other hand*, the practice in question is the wrong kind from a worldly perspective. The practice is longing, a worshipful journey into God. The journey is long-suffering, an education in God's love. The Father gives good gifts, neither snakes nor scorpions, but the gifts never satisfy; they increase a person's longing for the whole relationship, the *self-giving* of the giving, the intention with which the gift was given, the unconditional faithfulness of which the gift is merely an instance. The gift awakens the soul to the promise of love, the whole, the Father's perfect desire to create and perfect his creation. The opposite of loving the good for its own sake, Kierkegaard says, is the violation that pollutes love . . . by making it profitable. God is otherworldly, in this sense, *vis-a-vis* a secular mentality forgetful of God, a blindness to the uneconomic whole, to God's unconditional love. Let us say that in prayer and meditation a person begins to live in God's love. Every instance of prayer here is fruit. But in prayer a

person longs for God himself, God's way of love. The whole transcends every *instance* of action, every act of praise and worship. Praise and worship are instances of servitude, the responses of the ðunworthy servant to God's unconditional love. They are ðlove's delight, the desire to serve the good (361-363), God's way of dividing ðtime and separating ðday and night, so that the relationship is not a ðfriendship that continually rejects every opportunity life provides to express itself. . . . (361). Love's delight is the fruit of this relationship but no fruit *proves* the presence of love. A particular instance of ðlove's delight lives and breathes in the relational whole. The life of prayer, the enjoyment of God himself, is the fruit above all fruit.

At the beginning of the journey into God the student is made poor in God's instruction, not because the goal is ðfar off, but because the instruction has already begun. God has already invited the soul on a journey. The invitation is the first step but it belongs to the journey nonetheless. People have different talents and are capable of different things; some build higher towers than others, as Kierkegaard puts it. But Kierkegaard says that no fruit of the spirit is evidence for or against God's grace. The person who builds high towers, who does great things in the world, and the person of fewer means are equal in a sense. They are equal because both have been called to serve God (361). The *relationship*, which transcends every piece of evidence, is the same for both. It is true that because God is personal he relates specifically to a particular person and speaks the person's language, as it were, since the good is not ðjust something general and as such the general object of knowledge but ðparticular in relation to the individual's particular talent (358). However, the talent is not the good in itself. God

speaks a person's language, relates particularly to a person; but God also pours new wine into the old wineskins; no *moment* in itself reveals God. If a person could possess God by means of *his* abilities, his *particular* good fortune, it would be as if "exceptional capability were the good and limited capability the bad (what a bane for the fortunate, what despair for the unfortunate!)—no, talent is the indifferent that nevertheless has its importance" (358).

For Kierkegaard, Paul's mystical vision is a foretaste of Life itself, the beatified relationship with God. God gives particular gifts but the gift above all is prayer without ceasing, life in the Giver. The life of prayer is a ceaseless "instruction" in love, in being loved by God. The gift of prayer is not a private language like speaking in tongues. A private spirit lives for a moment inside the person; then it dies again. But the experience does not edify the soul; it is no *life* at all, no way of living. The experience is an interlude, an interruption of life. But Paul's vision of the good is *public*, in a sense. It does not belong to Paul. The "instruction" is potentially available to others because it is transcendent and real, a *life* of praise and worship, a communion to which all belong because all have been invited. This is Augustine's "commonwealth." There is a kind of godly silence, worshipful in its modesty and secrecy; but Kierkegaard also says that there is also a kind of silence that idolizes martyrdom, being misunderstood by world. This feeling of high-minded superiority over the world is also a kind of cowardliness because it privatizes God. Sometimes it is possible to be "wrong in being silent" and sometimes it is good to be "known to others" (373). A person violates the essential nature of the good when he fails to acknowledge that the good bears fruit, transfigures the soul. "Let each

one test himself to see whether he acknowledges the good that dwells within him, that moves and fills his heart, the good for which he lives.ö Let him do this in modesty öfor then and only then is he actually ðopen before Godø (374). This openness is true to the nature of the good, which is a way of life lived in openness before God, the transfiguration of a person in öthe good for which he lives.ö I cannot deal fully with the social implications of Kierkegaard's theology. However, the point in this paragraph is simply to show how one might approach the more social aspects of Kierkegaard's theology. The theological foundations for Kierkegaard's social theology are now clearer. For Kierkegaard, human relationships are good insofar as they share in the good. A person's poverty of spirit is no cause for misanthropy or a false asceticism that shuts out the world. Pride wants to keep God private, wants to be persecuted by the world, to feel superior to the world. The martyr idolizes his own martyrdom, does not want to share in the good, open himself up, let the light shine forth and give humble witness, let others live in God too. But this individualism, this false martyrdom, is ða hatred of oneself that wrongs the person himself so that he is merely inventive in increasing his own torment. But hatred of oneself is still also self-love, and all self-love is cowardlinessö (374). However, while the Communion is public (in this qualified sense) it does not allow for publicity. For Kierkegaard, there is no public *evidence* for God, no great sign or wonder by which to market the church. No church can contain the Word. It is true that the good instructs, gives forth a new way of living. It is true that God speaks to a particular people in a *particular* language; but he speaks new life: the wine-skins of language break in the very speaking itself. God has already loved forth the öcommonwealthö ó but God invited

only the unworthy servants. The church is essentially impoverished, a communion of unworthy servants before God. Here cowardliness has no winning hand to play. God neither conforms himself to tradition nor rests within himself.

Let us now compare in more detail this understanding of humility with Kierkegaard's understanding of moralism as strength collapsed in weakness (344). As we have seen, Kierkegaard says that only God can heal what no repentance can entirely redeem or no trusting in God can entirely wipe out. Moralistic struggle, he says, cannot heal the consciousness of sin; only the blessedness of eternity is capable of this, because the soul is entirely filled with it (339). The moralist strives with himself. Here *each instance* of moral transgression tests his very identity, the moralistic *whole*: the relationship between spirit and flesh. The moralist is essentially in charge of himself. The whole here is the self's relationship with itself. Let us say that the moral good calls a person to withhold a little bit of anger. But here this *little bit* suddenly puts the *whole* soul into question. After all, are we so irritable that we have to be so afraid of a little outburst. . . (364). In making a resolution a person strives to become victorious over the flesh, over earthly things, to be victorious over one's disposition and over one's enemies by reconciliation. . . But are we really victorious if even the little insults cause anger. If the little things are so magnified, what does this say about the state of a person's soul as whole? Here cowardliness steps in and appears to help the person; cowardliness tells the person to concern himself only with important things and actually flatters the person when he fails to accomplish something great for after all, only great people strive for great things. And so the person is victorious neither over small or great things; but

flattery maintains the illusion of greatness (365). How õstrangeö it is, says Kierkegaard, õthat life is such that the great men are unable to do the lesser things ordinary people are able to doö (367). In the end, the struggle for self-mastery ends in exhaustion. õIt is humble to admit that . . . even the person who walks his way with firm steps nevertheless does not walk with a hero's pace, indeed, that when the evening of life cools the contender after the long day there still is no opportunity for fanfare, since even the person who came closest to the goal does not arrive with the qualifications or the disposition for the rigors of a victory celebration but, weary and worn, desires a grave in which to rest and a blessed departure from there in peaceö (351).

The moralist õdesires a graveö because the battle with the self proves the person weak, in the end. As Augustine puts it after death of his friend, life appears no better than death. For Kierkegaard, the entire struggle is a forgetfulness of a person's first love, which showed up his desires as selfish, parochial, and egoistic in the first place. The person turned shameful because he õnce caught a visionö of the good. But the moralist forgot that next to the good even the strongest person's capability is õessentially nothing.ö Without the relationship as a *whole*, the struggle, even of great men against great evils, õis only a mirage; the resolution is still not the good resolution, since a person such as that does not completely give himself along [*hen*]⁹⁴ with everything to the good, namely, along with his weakness, and leave it up to God whetherö or not he become great in the eyes of others (368). The good is relational; it lives only in the relationship between person and God. Even the resolution is nothing but a coming to weakness in God. The

⁹⁴ Also means õover.ö

desire for God is the desire to surrender ðcompletely,ö because obedience is ðdearer to God than the fat of ramsö (369). The kind of self-conscious introspection favoured by the moralist is nothing but torment; it cannot but eat away at itself, as we have seen. I had become a great enigma to myself, and I questioned my soul, demanding why it was sorrowful and why it so disquieted me, but it had not answer (IV.4.9). As noted, Augustine has to flee his homeland, *himself*, before he can receive healing. The self is always the self's worst enemy. For Kierkegaard, this is why the moralist's self is no real identity at all. As I argued in chapter one, the higher part of the self has the undignified task of relating itself to something lower ó and then trying to forge an identity out of the two. For Kierkegaard, the contradiction between spirit and flesh is not simply a struggle between two unequally matched armies. The true struggle is spiritual, the soul's capacity to *create* and *imagine*. The moralistic self makes images, ideals it cannot realistically fulfill. The image of perfection is *absolute* self-mastery. But the unconditional goal is torment because the movement towards perfection is categorical, as we saw in the first discourse. Here the smallest misstep becomes all important. The misstep reminds the weary person that he is *essentially* human. The misstep is a foreboding, the promise of even greater temptations, of even greater sins to come. He doubts himself absolutely; he fails to see how he can ever perfect itself, metamorphose, become self-sufficient, a god. The identity the person has conferred on himself is: human being, imperfect, ungodly at heart. As we saw in chapter one, Kierkegaard never seeks to overcome this contradiction dialectically. The contradiction itself never gives way to mediation; at best, it can only bring a person to self-annihilation. Here Kierkegaard breaks decisively with his

philosophical contemporaries. As noted in chapter one, the German idealists argue that human beings are neither gods nor animals, but the identity of the two. Human dignity lies in the struggle between higher ideal and lower desires; the struggle itself is the identity. The spiritual task is *either* to conserve the energy in sensuous experience, allow it to give birth to creative, spiritual expression, *or* follow the struggle to its dialectical conclusion (as in Hegel, for whom abstract reason and thought ultimately triumph over everything contingent). But even the Romantic artist who uses unconscious feeling to make art in no way tries to *interpret* the feeling, as if feeling were anything more than an unconscious drive. The impulsive, unconscious part of the self can never be a *partner* in dialogue, but has been assigned the undignified task of necessary cause (for creative expression). The unconscious world has nothing to *say* to us; it is inarticulate, without meaning. No rational person can give up his autonomy, become one with nature. He would sever all ties to the community, become an untamed force, without reason. At best nature carries within itself the seed for culture, as in Schelling. But even so, humanity must sever its ties with nature. Only insofar as the artist or perhaps the philosopher *uses* impulse to create does nature become purposeful. In itself the impulse lives for a moment, then dies. In itself, the impulse is mute. If a person uses the impulse to create it joins up with language, raw feeling takes shape, the untamed becomes civilized, universal and lawful. Without reason uninhibited feeling is pure annihilation, uncontained energy, a split atom. And without uninhibited feeling, we have something formal, abstract, and legalistic. This is the dialectic; the tension between self-consciousness and the unconscious. Theologically, God is this whole, the very struggle between spirit and

matter, the struggle of which the human being is a microcosm. God is neither purely lawful nor unthinking energy; God is the dialectical whole. On the one hand, Kierkegaard's German contemporaries understand God as impersonal, lawful, logical, indeed law and logic itself. Only universal reason can conquer untamed nature. On the other hand, they have to add something dynamic to logical necessity. Uninhibited feeling gives content to an otherwise empty, purely spiritual (and unimaginable) existence. Logically both are necessary for each other. Spirit is tied to nature and nature is liberated by spirit. However, while philosophy solves the contradiction between spirit and flesh logically, in real life the *person* still has to overcome himself and here the war continues perpetually until death, until utter exhaustion. Indeed, human beings are tormented by nostalgia for uninhibited, animal-like life. But no rational human wants to lose his very identity, become animalistic. As noted in chapter one, Schelling's *Ages of the World* reminds us how tenuous the relationship between conscious spirit and unconscious nature is. Underneath the veneer of civilization, lurks a heart of darkness. The further we travel into the darkness the more we fall into despair, the more the horror becomes apparent. The melancholy at the heart of the struggle is apparent. Without law, without universal reason, sensuous life is horror and disgust. And yet without sensuous life existence is unimaginable, abstract, form without meaning. The rational person is married to his lower self. And so disgust lies at the heart of a rational person's very identity. While the law must tame sensuous life, the savage beast inside the body, the rational person is perpetually nostalgic, longs to become one with nature. The disgust-identity is a perpetual conflict and cannot but give way to utter exhaustion. This dialectic fits within

the Weberian framework of analysis, as noted in chapter one. If God is impersonal, uncommunicative, pure spirit, then earthly life remains a person's only source of purpose. Only sensuous life is practically relevant on a daily basis, even for the person who wants to prove himself spiritually. The only spiritual task relevant any more is how to *regulate* sensuous life. Here the philosopher allows God back into the picture. The philosopher identifies God with the law, with rational necessity. Now God has a practical purpose: he helps contain or suppress unruly nature, a person's lower self.

We can now see how Kierkegaard's understanding of identity differs from disgust-identity. For Kierkegaard, Paul *neither* loses himself in beatific vision *nor* regains himself, his autonomous dignity after he returns from the vision. The return is not the condition of freedom and of the liberated, as Kierkegaard puts it (338). The return is an affliction, not a source of dignity. The beatific vision is never unconscious to begin with. In the vision, Paul is most fully aware of himself in *relation* to God. The vision is an "instruction" in "inscrutable wisdom." The encounter as relational reveals the soul's true nature: beloved of God. In the vision Paul knows himself most fully; he is: beloved of God. Paul knows himself in God, knows God intimately, who is love. The intimate encounter is not a source of embarrassment or disgust after Paul returns to himself (the self alienated from God). In the "transfiguration" Paul loses his old self (the self at war with itself) and gains a new self, the self in God, in whom one "fears no future, indeed, hopes for no future, but love possesses everything without ceasing, and there is no shadow of variation" (338). The vision is not an escape from real life, but a foretaste of life in God, love "without ceasing." As we saw in my discussion of *The Confessions*,

Augustine does not symbolize his mystical experiences as unconscious, a total loss of self, an annihilation of self in dark pleasure. Paul longs to return to beatific vision because in vision he was fully alive in it, most fully aware of himself in relationship with God. But estranged from God, Paul becomes more and more self-enclosed obsessed with his own imperfections. Self-loathing feeds on itself. This is why Kierkegaard, unlike his philosophically immediate forefathers and contemporaries, can say that a person's *highest* blessing is to need God; in God the soul knows itself and God most fully. The soul gains itself in God; it does not lose itself in unconscious annihilation. The true self is nothing but relatedness to God, the instruction in beatific vision "without ceasing."

4.

For Kierkegaard, the more intimate a person becomes with God, the more he will long for God. God's loving presence promises a whole, a relationship. Every moment of encounter with the divine sets the soul on a spiritual journey. As Augustine puts it: "I tasted you, and I hunger and thirst;/ you touched, and I burned for your peace" (X.27.38)). We are not talking here about a struggle with the world or even struggle with self or even a purgative movement, but rather a struggle with God. What does it mean to struggle with God rather than with oneself? In the fourth discourse ("One Who Prays Aright Struggles in Prayer and Is Victorious" in *That God is Victorious*) Kierkegaard deals with this question. He imagines a speaker who gathers a crowd and comforts them with the joyful thought that spiritual warfare victory is assured; you win the battle precisely by losing it, he would claim. This message of certain victory would get the crowd's

attention. However, once the speaker explained the nature of the battle, the crowd would lose enthusiasm. What is the struggle in question? the crowd asks. It is prayer, the speaker answers. But the crowd thinks that praying is "the very opposite of struggling," a "cowardly and fainthearted business, left to women and children." The crowd wants to hear about struggle, since "struggling is to a man's liking." What is the victory in question? the crowd asks. The victory is the understanding that you have already lost the battle, the speaker answers. Here the crowd would begin to smile with pity, especially when the speaker showed himself to be serious. The speaker's understanding of "loss" here is quite literal, Kierkegaard says. Prayer is utterly unlike warfare; it *really is* defeat. For the crowd, the speaker is effeminate, irrelevant at best. This "fainthearted business" is not even a cause for offense; it is laughable. The speaker here speaks in a marketplace to a crowd hungry for war, which "is to a man's liking." But he has nothing to sell. "It is probably true, as people say, that gold also can be bought at too high a price, but the highest cannot be bought at too high a price. If one has bought at too high a price, then one has not bought the highest" (379). His message is unmarketable. It promises nothing in exchange. No worldly success, no admiration, nothing noble. "No, the soul must make a resolution in renunciation of all calculating, all sagacity and probability; it must will the good because it is the good, then it will certainly be perceived that it has its reward. . . ." (380).

But here the reader must be careful. Kierkegaard goes on to chide the merchants of the marketplace for their "cowardliness" and "hypersensitivity" (381). If prayer really is weakness, why tell the crowd to man-up? Kierkegaard first sentimentalizes prayer

(the buyers and sellers in marketplace, he says, do not understand the nature of spiritual battle unlike the poorest and simplest child who received the most meagre education in the charity school. . . [379]). But then he tells that same crowd that prayer is manly. Kierkegaard seems to talk like a hypocritical martyr: Rejoice in your weakness, he seems to say; take courage, your persecution is your reward; your life is unmarketable -- but this is your greatest asset. In prayer, he seems to say, you no longer struggle with men or yourself but with God and this is the most honourable struggle, the most courageous, the most manly of all. Alone before God, who sees you in secret, you win your honour. Weakness is strength and strength weakness. But what then is prayer but a secret venture (382), we ask? If Kierkegaard uses the rhetoric of the marketplace against the merchants, the rhetoric triumphs in the end, does it not? Lost in the rhetoric is the true distinction between poverty of spirit and virility. Kierkegaard's own critique of rhetoric (381) seems to lose credibility. Kierkegaard goes on to argue that the one who struggles with God invariably goes down in defeat. What begins as a manly struggle ends in humble submission. The struggler may well try to overcome God. He wants to war to be fruitful and end with a glorious result. But God is unchanging. God lives far off in heaven but is even further away from every human being in his changelessness. . . (387). Nevertheless, here again the critique of Kierkegaard's rhetoric appears valid. It seems that the way to God is purely negative. Worldly conquest turns to self-mastery; then finally the battle ends in utter exhaustion. The soul comes to nothing in God because God is nothing, incomprehensible and beyond reason. Only here in total annihilation, in utter defeat, in atheism nonetheless, can faith apparently begin. But this dialectic of faith,

one step beyond atheism, is a blind leap into the arms of God. Why make the leap? Because atheism is unbearable. But the leap promises nothing. A wager perhaps, a calculation perhaps, but, in all honesty, at bottom nothing but blind hope. God becomes indistinguishable from the death-wish. To sacrifice all earthly honour for a greater honour (before God) is total, categorical. The struggler says: I am human and I want to metamorphose. I want to be utterly different ó lifeless. I am weary of the world; I am disgusted with myself and here in weariness and utter exhaustion I summon one last bit of courage -- to become nothing. But here the rhetoric of manly virtue appears once again. Faith drags itself across the finish-line; leaps into annihilation and proves itself most courageous after all. In God's otherworldly silence faith has become purely practical, purely about human will-power, if at the last moment. Every faith-move is ultimately about human strength and courage: the *will* to believe. There is no telling how the soul manages to gather this strength, however. Is it God's grace felt affectively or an incomprehensible surge of energy from the body? We cannot know because the source remains hidden. We might as well become Nietzschean about it. Why not say that the source is a will to power, a power that gives birth to struggle, and eventually (in self-reflection and habitual training), manly virtue? Why not say that faith is really the courage to conjure up faith out of nothing, a creative enterprise?

However, with the hypothetical faith-journey extended to its paradoxical conclusion, we can now see how far Kierkegaard is from this line of argument. Like Paul, Kierkegaard says that knowledge and charitableness ó every human venture -- will come to end. But this is not because God is silent. Like Paul, Kierkegaard also says that

love is greater than knowledge, charitableness, greater even than faith and hope. The entire faith-narrative begins for Kierkegaard, not in despair, but in God's self-revelation, in a longing informed by God's communicative love. The soul loses its taste for worldly goods because earthly life does not compare with beatitude. In prayer the soul encounters God's intimate presence from the very beginning of the faith-journey, first imperfectly and then with greater perfection over time. This pedagogy is the history of the soul in relationship with God. At first everything becomes categorically distinct: the human and the divine are separated by an insurmountable chasm. But for Kierkegaard, as we shall see, the categorical chasm is ultimately an illusion created by the human spirit.

Let us narrate this history as presented in the discourse. The struggler moves from struggle with the world to struggle with self and then with God. The struggle with God, as narrated in the present discourse, moves towards greater and greater intimacy with God. It is important to note that the struggle with God is not about God's goodness or about atheism. "But what is the issue in the struggle? That God is goodness? Not at all. That God is love? Not at all" (388). At the beginning of this part of the spiritual journey, the struggle is over how to live a godly life in relationship with God. The struggle happens because the soul is already *related* to God, not because it is absolutely estranged from God. As Kierkegaard puts it, the struggle in prayer is with God, not against God. "How numerous the strugglers are, how varied the struggle in which the one who prays tries himself *with* God (since someone who tries himself *against* God does not struggle in prayer), how varied the means of prayer, the special nature of the prayer, with which the struggler seeks to overcome God!" (387, emphasis original). One person prays for

worldly goods, another for honour, another for his beloved, another for personal happiness. Another prays to forget the past, another to know the future. One prays for some wish-fulfillment another against the hastily made wish (387-388). But none of these strugglers doubt God's goodness or love, Kierkegaard says (388). Each struggler only wants to live a godly life, to clarify her wishes and needs before God. She wants God's blessing on her wishes, to know her direction in life. The struggle is ðwell intentioned toward God, because it is about truly being able to be happy in God, truly being able to give him thanks, truly being able to witness to his honor, truly being able to be assured that all fatherliness lives in heaven, truly being able to love him ð as people do indeed say when they designate the ultimate, to love as much as one loves God ð (388). Even at this point in the journey, the struggler is ðopen toward God, because he dares to testify to himself that he is not a child, does not fragment his soul so that he wishes for one thing this minute and something else the next. . . ð (388). The struggler at this point in the narrative has already turned towards God. But she wants live a godly life in the world and wants her relationship with God to bear fruit; she wants God to reveal a plan for her life, reveal *where* and *how* God's goodness will bear fruit. The struggler does wait despairingly for God, however; the struggle is the lover's struggle, full of expectancy; and this expectancy is not naive, Kierkegaard says. ðJust as the worst thing that can be said of a person is that he is an inhuman brute, so it is the worst and the most revolting blasphemy to say of God that he is inhuman, no matter if it is supposed to be very fashionable or bold to talk that way. No, the God to whom he [the struggler] prays is human, has the heart to feel humanly, the ear to hear a human being's complaint; and

even though he does not fulfill every wish, he still lives close to us and is moved by the struggler's cry, by his humble request, by his wretchedness when he sits abandoned and as if in prison, by his speedy joy over the fulfillment when in hope he anticipates it (387). The struggler already knows that the created world is good. Whether or not God fulfills every wish, the struggler is full of expectancy and is joyful over the fulfillment when it comes. The question is not about whether God gives good gifts but how and when God gives them. Nor is God's revelation either in Word or in nature at issue. Neither here nor anywhere else does Kierkegaard ever question the notion that God gives good gifts. In the *Postscript*, Climacus says that God "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." When a person participates in God then the book of nature opens up "and then it is possible to see God everywhere." "Nature is certainly the work of God, but only the work is directly present, not God" (243). Like Augustine, Kierkegaard thinks that God reveals himself in nature. Nature is God's gift and God reveals himself in his gifts. And like Augustine, Kierkegaard also says that God never reveals himself anywhere in particular. God is uncontainable. No particular moment in nature ever draws a person to God. In order to know the Creator in the creature, a person has to know God, has to know the gift as a sign of God's love. If God did not give himself in giving his gifts (253), how could a series of contingent events ever accumulate enough evidence to prove God good in a world where God sends rain good and evil alike, where a larger order of things apparently swallows up the contingency of

petty desires, in a world where ultimately everything must be ascribed to God if there is to be a God and a godly view of life (386)? To live a godly life a person is required to give thanks when abandoned and as if in prison and over the fulfillment when in hope he anticipates it (387). God cannot immediately penetrate the outward, which is in tune with the sensate person's ideas and conceptions. . . (386). So in a world of imperfect knowledge, where the order of things is not *immediately* evident, God's goodness is not immediately evident and every *particular gift in itself* is merely contingent. This is why Augustine says that we simply cannot know God in nature. He says that a person can really only know nature in God, because God gives himself in giving his gifts.⁹⁵ There are plenty of rapturous passages in *The Confessions* that praise nature. But Augustine sees the glory of nature meditatively, in a certain kind of spiritual vision, the vision of God. The spiritual joy is not immediately evident. It is a joy that comes from knowing God, the whole of God's unconditional love. Likewise, as we shall see below, Kierkegaard says that the beginning of wisdom is to know God himself. The problem for Kierkegaard, however, is that this revelation of wholeness is not immediate. It is not an idea God implants in the head. God reveals himself relationally. A person cannot see God directly through externals because God is solely spirit (386). For Kierkegaard, it really is a terrible thing to receive from God -- to fall into the hand of the living God, to receive the gift above all, which never satisfies but edifies. The gift above all is the relationship with God. The gift promises immeasurable joy but never gratifies

⁹⁵ Compare with *The Confessions*: "Let us love him, for he made these things and he is not far off, for he did not make them and then go away: they are from him but also in him. You know where he is, because you know where truth tastes sweet. He is most intimately present to the human heart, but the heart has strayed from him" (65-66).

immediately. The joy is not a subjective feeling implanted in the receiver of the gift. The promise of joy is God himself, the relationship with God itself. And so the promise gives way to longing for the whole. The gift leaves the soul impoverished and in longing; it fails to satisfy, leave intact the old wineskins of habit and tradition. "Who, indeed, would praise the piety of the adult who did not have a more earnest conception of life than to know how to distinguish between the pleasant and unpleasant and a more holy conception of God than to dare thoughtlessly to saddle, as it were, God with the same understanding, in which they were agreed that God gave and he thanked" (386). No *particular* gift bears witness to God because the true gift is given in a certain spirit and received in that same spirit. The spiritual reality is irreducible; it transcends the gift, every temptation of idolatry. That God creates, gives good gifts ó this is not at issue for Kierkegaard. The point is that only the personal encounter with God reveals the gift's true nature as intended, as an expression of unconditional love. A person knows the expression, the intention, by attending to the whole, to love *itself*. This attentiveness is a spiritual work, the education of a lifetime stretching into eternity. This education is the issue at the heart of Kierkegaard's narrative of spiritual development. We know God as creator because God creates; this is true. But without the God's spirit of love, created reality is simply atoms in motion. For Augustine and Kierkegaard creation is irreducible to measurement because God's works live and breathe only in the spiritual whole, the narrative of God's loving concern and joyful activity. The gift, the relational whole, is a way of living in God. A person comes to know the way over time; but the way is relational, a whole irreducible to its parts.

Let us continue Kierkegaard's narrative of struggle with God to explore this question of wholeness further. We remember that the person in question was struggling to live a godly life; she wanted God to reveal himself through his gifts and providential care. What happens to the person in the narrative? Kierkegaard says that the person gradually loses her desire to know providence with *specificity*, to know the *particular means* of fulfillment. Why? Because the struggle with God gives way to a *higher* love. This is one key to understanding the discourse: the prayer was never simply ignorant from the beginning. The struggler already knows God as good. With expectancy the struggler prays for fulfillment. However, over time God reveals himself more intimately. The first touch of God's personal care gives way to a higher love. This love calls the struggler to a better life and for this reason her prayers change as well. Let us see how the pedagogy unfolds. Kierkegaard illustrates the movement in question through a story. He tells a story (in the first-person) about going to a wise man for enlightenment. The person in the story wants to learn from the wise man but fails to understand him; the wise man's words seem "very strange." The two are "completely at odds," and the student begins to assert his own understanding against the wise man. The student wants to prove his own wisdom by winning the approval of the wiser man "in a crafty way" with "skill," as if he himself "were the stronger." In the "struggle of discussion" the student turns "almost violent"; but manages to contain himself because, as he puts it, he did not want "the wise one as my enemy." This is the key. The struggler is not eristic. He genuinely wants to be wise, not just win an argument; he is struggling *with* the teacher. After much struggle, "after fitfully wandering around" in discourse, the student comes to understand what the wise

man had said from the very beginning. He comes to this gradual understanding because the wise man chose not to patronize him but engage him in conversation. The wise man could ðhave ransomed [løskjøbt] himselfö from this struggle and ðbought [kjøbt]ö the student's admiration but the wise man refuses to sell out, refuses to sell his wisdom. And so he allows the struggle to unfold, even at the risk of insult. In the end the student comes to understand what the wise man was saying all along. The wise man teaches the student a particular truth; but more essentially he teaches the student what it means to care for another person's soul. ðMy listener, have you never talked with a person who although much wiser was nevertheless favourably disposed toward you, indeed, more or at least more soundly (and consequently more) concerned about your welfare than you yourself?ö The teacher here does not just give the student a piece of knowledge; he gives himself. The spiritual instruction is the very act of self-giving love, which takes precedence over any particular truth. The wise man is responsible for the care of the student's soul. He is not concerned with admiration or his own reputation. He is concerned with a truth that transcends the particularity of the very encounter itself. Any particular moment of instruction, any particular truth conveyed, presumes this concern for the student's whole being, the student's soul. This concern, which sacrifices ego, is the truth above all communicated in the instruction. The teacher gives himself sacrificially in the instruction. In this way the student begins to *know* the teacher even if he does not understand him in a *particular* instance. The student begins to know the teacher relationally.

Is this how it is with God? Kierkegaard then asks the reader. “Do not say, my listener, that this [analogy] is pious fancy; do not appeal to experience, that it does not go this way in life” (392). Yes, it is certainly true that unlike the student in the story people begin to struggle against God instead of with God, or simply forget God altogether. But the opposite might also be true: that God’s apparent silence is salutary and pedagogical. This is a truth the “no one can have learned except from God” (392). Therefore if you object, Kierkegaard tells the reader, you are either “coercing me” in order to win an argument or saying something neither provable nor un-provable (in logical terms) (391). The eristic reader fails here because the God teaches indirectly and the discourse follows suit. Whatever one might say about this pedagogy one can only learn from God, who is the essential teacher. Any discourse must ultimately and in utter humility point elsewhere beyond itself, point the reader back to God. The reader is ultimately alone before Truth. But Truth is a hard taskmaster and never sells out. Like the student in the story, even the naive struggler who strives to comprehend God learns that God does not sell out. In the story the dialogue bears fruit. The student comes to understand the teacher’s particular point of view. But the time between promise and fulfillment is the existential problem. What allows the struggle to continue? The struggle continues because God reveals the wholeness of the relationship, reveals the nature of love in loving the soul. God gives gifts but the gift above all is *himself*. Like the student in the story, the struggler begins to see the whole, the relationship between student and Teacher *itself*. The person who prays that God’s plan might be revealed on earth begins to attend to the God-relationship, which transcends any *particular* instance of fulfillment. The struggler begins to love God

for his own sake, not as ða means for the attainment of an endö (392). Again, this development does not come out of despair. The goodness of creation is not at stake. The important lesson, for example, is not *that* God created; but the *way* God created. This is the beginning of a godly life: to strive to live in the Creatorø's loving care for his creation. The struggler turns towards the *way*, strives to participate in Godø's life, to become godlike. The struggler desires God more and more, longs to live in God regardless of *particular* worldly conditions. The struggler wants to *be* good, to live *in* God no matter how and when Godø's *particular* promises bear fruit. The struggler says: ðLord, my God, I really have nothing at all for which to pray to you; even if you would promise to grant my every wish, I really cannot think of anythingö except that I may remain with you, as near as possible in this time of separation in which you and I are living, and entirely with you in all eternity?ö (392). The prayer is for intimacy here and now, not merely in the life to come. Who prays aright? Kierkegaard asks. The one fails to live in God, ðwhose restless eyes continuallyö pray for ðsome comfort for a particular sorrow, some fulfillment of a particular wish. Or ðthe one whose calm eyes seek only God?ö (392). It is the latter because ðthe wish, the earthly craving, the worldly concern is the temporal and ordinarily dies before the person dies even if he does not grasp the eternalö how then would it hold out with the eternal! Then the wish becomes less and less ardent, and finally its time is over; the worm of craving dies little by little, and craving becomes extinct; then the vigilance of concern falls asleep little by little, never to awaken again. . . .ö (392)

At first the struggler prayed over worldly conditions. Now the struggler prays over her own soul, that she might live a godly life regardless of *particular* external circumstances. “The more earnest one has put away childish things; he is not concerned with trivial things; he only wants to develop himself.” The struggle is to overcome guilt and become godlike. As in the previous stage of the discourse, Kierkegaard features a litany of requests in this section. One person, Kierkegaard writes, struggles against his own guilt, to justify himself; another for God to explain his guilt. “One person asks that the explanation will unite him to the race and that the explanation will lie in the fate common to all, which is meaningful for the whole. . . .” Another prays that God will bless his solitary struggle for truth. The struggler longs for God to heal him of guilt, to become holy in the sight of God, to live in God. The struggler wants to see truth, but knows that this will not come easily; in unceasing meditation he concentrates on God (394). In prayer the person is purged and “little by little he gives up that which according to his earthly conception is less important, since he does not really dare to come before God with it, and because he does not wish to forget the goodness of God by always importuning for this and that...” (394). In the dark night of the senses⁹⁶ the “craving dies little by little,” because God courts the soul, instructs it in eternal wisdom. The praying one’s “calm eyes seek only God” (392); he strives for changeless reality. But the changeless reality is relational, learned dialogically. The struggler comes to know God’s love in being loved by God. The “changelessness is not that chilling indifference, that devastating loftiness, that ambiguous distance, which the callous understanding lauded.

⁹⁶ See note 97.

No, on the contrary, this changelessness is intimate and warm and everywhere present; it is a changelessness in being concerned for a person, and therefore it does not admit of being changed by the scream of the one who prays as if everything were all over now, by his cowardliness when he finds it most convenient not to be able to help himself, by his false contrition [*Sønderknuselese*], of which he promptly repents [*fortryde*] as soon as the momentary alarm of the danger is past (393). How does the struggler come to know God intimately like this? Not in "the scream" or in the "false contrition." Not in the immediate revelation of God's spiritual care. Just like no *particular* creature reveals the Creator, so no *particular* fruit of the spirit reveals God's love. *That* God exists as first cause is one kind of knowledge. But *how* God creates and sustains the soul is another matter. How God cares for the soul is a truth "no one can have learned except from God" (392). Kierkegaard has plenty to say about God's intimate relationship with human beings. But the meaning of his words, these symbolic expressions, "no one can have learned except from God." The *way* is learned over time as the soul begins to conform itself to the divine instruction. The discourse cannot instruct immediately, coerce the reader. The person who struggles with God comes to know the meaning of the words, the spirit beyond the letter, because God is the teacher. God teaches the *way*, teaches the way of love by loving the soul. The student turns towards the essential, the whole, the relationship with God. No matter how much the student fumbles, no matter how many false moves she makes, God is present, "intimate and warm," changeless "in being concerned" for that person. This is the pedagogy: the relational whole, the eternal concern itself beyond every particular gift.

Negatively conceived, God's failure to answer every prayer (in the previous stage of the journey) is the dark night of the senses; and, as we shall see, God's failure to edify the soul immediately (in this stage of the journey) is the dark night of the soul. But the concern in the discourse, as we shall also see, is not the darkness in itself but the struggle *with* God.⁹⁷ The struggler wants to heal her soul in God. She wants to see God. She longs for God, concentrates her soul on this one wish. But she does not know how this will happen. Again, *that* God gives the gifts of the spirit is not at issue. The problem is that the Teacher does not sell out; the exact fulfillment of longing is unknowable beforehand. The student does not know how God will heal her soul. The moment of revelation never gratifies, satisfies, never enlightens immediately; it edifies.

“Efficacious” yes, that is the name of the bridge that the strugglers want to build across to God's blessedness, but alas, the bridge is continually being cut off! (395). God is not efficacious at all; God is entirely ineffective, impractical; and so faith is “the most foolish business arrangement ever made in the world.” God is in heaven and “he is not selling

⁹⁷ Here Kierkegaard is in line with the negative theology of other Christian thinkers. For instance, for St. John of the Cross, the purgation of worldly possessions happens when they are replaced by higher loves. He tells his listeners to “have a habitual desire to imitate Christ in all your deeds by bringing your life into conformity with His.” In imitation, “renounce and remain empty of any sensory satisfaction that is not purely for the honour and glory of God.” Do this “out of love for Jesus Christ” who “had no other gratification, nor desired any other, than the fulfillment of His Father's will...” (“The Ascent of Mount Carmel,” in *John of the Cross: Selected Writings* (Paulist Press, 1987), 77. But these lower loves must be replaced with higher loves, since “if the spiritual part of the soul is not fired with other more urgent longings for spiritual things, the soul will be able neither to overcome the yoke of nature nor enter the night of sense...” (80). It is only when the soul desires the higher that the lower shows up as such. “I looked at the earth, and it was empty and nothing; and at the heavens, and I saw they had no light” [Jer. 4: 23]. Without God, all creatures “are nothing, and a person's attachments to them are less than nothing since these attachments are an impediment to and deprive the soul of transformation in God—just as darkness is nothing and less than nothing since it is a privation of light” (66). In the dark night of the senses, we come to realize that all creatures are nothing in themselves and depend on God for being. They cannot be possessed. To deprive oneself of the gratification of the appetites in all things,” he writes, “is like living in darkness and in a void” (64). Similarly, the dark night of the soul is a disruption of self-possession.

out, whatever human beings doö (395). Those who mock the struggler's personal relationship with God are right: God is indeed unchanging and does lower himself to human standards. But the "mockery recoils on itself, because God truly is unchanged." Not even the philosophers who try to contain God in ideas can capture God. God "is himself the first inventor of language and the only one who holds the blessing in his hands; he is unchanging, even though he would not be able to satisfy the demands of the times!"ö (395). Kierkegaard reminds us that when Christ left his disciples he promised the Comforter. "No rich man became so poor by losing everything, and no lover became so poor by losing the beloved, and no one full of expectancy became so poor as the beloved, and no one full of expectancy became so poor as the disciples"ö (396). And do you think the disciples understood why Christ had to leave, Kierkegaard asks the reader? Remember, he says, that the Comforter did not come immediately. What of this time between promise and fulfillment? Who is wise enough to know the time or day, to know the promise *before* it is *fully* revealed. Speaking in human terms, the relationship is a most "foolish" and difficult business venture (396).

The prayerful person struggles to know how God will heal his soul. But in the end, every last bit of energy must exhaust itself in God. Only God can instruct the soul. In the end the struggle for an explanation will "draw a boundary line between" God and struggler "so that face-to-face with God he begins to resemble himself." The struggler in the moment of struggle fails to attend to God and is still at war with himself, and in this battle "it seems to him that he is reduced to nothing at all"ö (399). The struggler has ideas *about* God's grace, but the ideas are not grace precisely because the struggler *has* them in

his possession ó and God is in heaven. The struggle is with self-generated ideas, a conversation between self and self. In the dark night of the soul, the struggler comes face to face with himself. ðWhen life is noisy during the day and when everything is still at nightö the person struggles for an explanation, to know how God will heal him. (394). But every time the person tries he moves further ó from the ideal: he is distracted by the very attempt at an explanation. His theology generates explanation upon explanation ó but God is not an explanation. God is real and not selling out.

ðThen,ö writes Kierkegaard, ðthe Comforter comes with the explanation; then he makes everything new, strips the sufferer of his mourning apparel and gives him a new heart and an assured spirit. It may, however, take timeö (396). The time of waiting for the bridegroom is the suffering, the *inability* to do anything. And yet the struggler refuses to wait for God as one resigned to fate. He waits *expectantly*; he is working spiritually, striving to participate in God. What allows for this faith? If the struggler does not give up ðif he loves God greatly, if he longs for God humbly as one longs for someone without whom is nothing, fervently as one longs for someone by whom one becomes everything; if he deals honestly with his debt of thanksgiving and adoration to God, which constantly increases because as yet he cannot give thanks aright, cannot understand aright; if he deals with it as a good entrusted to him for better time, then he is struggling in prayerö (397-398). The struggler is humble; he prays ðas one who longsö to know God, to give thanks and adoration aright. The longing is not a substitute for beatitude, as if the subjective struggle could make up for God's absence. The longing makes up for nothing;

it is a poverty of spirit evoked by God, who has already begun to give himself. But here in poverty δ and only here δ can God illuminate the soul.

Only when he himself becomes nothing, only then can God illuminate [*forklare*] him so that he resembles God. However great he is, he cannot manifest God's likeness; God can imprint himself in him only when he himself has become nothing. When the ocean is exerting all its power, that is precisely the time when it cannot reflect the image of heaven, and even the slightest motion blurs the image; but when it becomes still and deep, then the image of heaven sinks into its nothingness. δ (399)

The struggler wanted to be godlike and wanted God to explain *how* this could happen.

But the true answer is no answer at all; the answer without a question. δ Or was it not a victory that instead of receiving an explanation [*Forklaring*] from God he was transfigured [*forklaret*] in God, and his transfiguration [*Forklarelse*] is this: to reflect the image of God δ (400). The person struggles to become godlike, to focus her attention on God. The person wants an explanation: she wants the explanation now, wants grace *now*. But God is not an explanation to a *previously* conceived problem. The person is allowed to ask questions because God respects the independence of the learner. But in the end the questions do nothing but focus the student's attention on the one needful thing: the answer which is no answer at all.

For Kierkegaard, the first existential problem is not the need for a particular gift; but rather the need to praise and worship the Gift-giver, the intention behind every gift. The need is not for satisfaction but to live in God. The δ solution δ comes before the δ problem. δ The δ solution δ is the δ problem. δ The δ solution δ fails to satisfy but edifies instead. The edification is an instruction in God, which takes place over time; it is never hasty and it makes the soul long. This is a pedagogical narrative the sensate person does

not want to hear: that God refuses to conform to the demands of immediacy, to impatient, childish, egoistical, worldly concerns. The sensate person misunderstands the education, not because he is epistemologically deficient, but because the pedagogy is offensive, even pitiful, a ðwomanlyö endeavour. Godø communication is a language beyond pale. Only by Godø grace does the soul come to know the whole of this narrative -- because over time the story teller arrests the soulø attention and draws it away from particular worries and concerns and towards the unwavering love of God. God creates and gives gifts with a certain intention, with love ó and directs the studentø attention to love itself. The soul experiences Godø way of life as higher. But the shame caused by this is not merely a bad conscience, a subjective feeling caused by some unknowable source; it is not a modification of the soul, not an affectation. It is the soulø inclusion in a way of life, a life that causes shame because it calls for orientation in an incalculable, unreasonable, ðvery strangeö communication ðcompletely at oddsö with a personø way of life; it is, as Augustine puts it, an ðincommunicable light far above my spiritual ken, transcending my mindö (VII.10.16). The new way of life demands the whole soul, demands conversion. The more the soul orients itself in love, the closer it comes to God. But closeness here is also alienation, for Kierkegaard. Every encounter with God impoverishes the soul, makes it less self-sufficient, and increases the longing and the suffering of change. Longing for God is a response to the personal communication, the actual experience of being addressed. This is how we are to understand the negative aspect of the communication. The negative is the very presence of Teacher, who does not sell out. Godø ðchangelessness is intimate and warm and everywhere present; it is a

changelessness in being concerned for a person and therefore it does not admit of being changed byö human impatience, cowardliness and pride (393). God is ötoo close.ö He bids the soul open up in order to free it from self-condemnation. The person obsessed with himself cannot hear the call. And yet God does not sell out; God remains unchanged and therefore eternally concerned for the person. The Teacher alienates the student but the alienation preserves the student's independence. The student now has to orient himself in the teaching, has to see for himself the teaching in its matchless glory. öIf, as is routine in any struggle, the distance between the contenders is determined in advance, then the struggle again seems impossible, because when there is no praying, God is in heaven and man is on earth, and consequently the distance is too great; but when there is praying, they are indeed too close to each other, then there is no in-between that can be marked out as the battle ground. In other words, if a person yields himself completely in prayer, he does not struggle, but if he does not yield himself at all, then he is not praying, even if he were to stay down on his knees praying day and nightö (383). The distance between student and teacher is the lover's struggle. God does not violate a person's freedom; the relationship is not so intimate that öthere is no in-between.ö At the same time there really is a relationship, two in dialogue. The communication alienates and joins together. öWho is the praying one who struggles with God in prayer and therefore simultaneously preserves a relationship of deep and inward devotion to God because he prays but is also so separate from God that they are able to struggle?ö (384).

As we saw in chapter one, Kant says that no one can struggle with God. Human beings are essentially meant to be autonomous and God must leave them to struggle alone

with themselves. Weber provides the best framework by which to read the consequences of this alienation from God. He shows what happens when we become disconnected from the source of our spiritual aspirations. In the iconoclastic urge identified by Weber to cleanse human life of impurity, God becomes uncommunicative. Spiritual life becomes a matter of proving oneself fit before an unknowable God. The law places judgement on every self-centered desire. But the bad conscience is disconnected from its source: the struggler cannot know the law-giver. In ordinary life the person only feels the ever-present pain of transgression; he knows nothing but the pain (in addition to a formal, lifeless principle). The only moral task at hand (the only task that gives *evidence* for spiritual freedom) is the struggle itself, as argued in chapter one. After the moralist has abstractly demonstrated the ideality of the law and postulated the existence of God, the only thing left to do on a daily basis is to prove himself worthy. The moralist has to prove himself since the proof is the only concrete evidence for the Spirit. And even if the moralist posits God, his true *interest* in God is practical. God has a function: to bring the struggle to some unimaginable conclusion. For Kant "there is no praying, God is in heaven and man is on earth, and consequently the distance is too great," to apply Kierkegaard's words (383). Kant saves human autonomy but makes God purely ideal, a postulate of reason. Kant's successors try to make God historical, relevant to affective life, but the distance between heaven and earth has already been severed and no amount of dialectics can unite them. On the one hand, the dialectician has been left to work with a postulate or formal principle. God is thoroughly impersonal. On the other hand, the dialectician has to give life to this formal principle. And so he adds something

sentimental, something affective, something irrational. He then shows how the two form a dialectical whole. But the whole is made up discarded parts, the crumbs leftover from a forgotten feast. What comes out of this tension between spirit and flesh? Nothing but a perpetual struggle between two unworthy contenders. And yet this struggle itself is the spiritual element in the equation. Without the struggle, without this movement towards exhaustion, a person has to choose between an either/or: either the God of formal reason or the gods of feeling. Either the emptiness of reason or the fullness of irrationalism. The struggle itself is the only spiritual task, the one thing that saves a person from either horn of the dilemma.

At issue here is the personal nature of God. Kant makes human beings autonomous, free of God's influence. He defends human freedom against heteronomy, fatalism, Pantheism, Spinozism ó anything that would render a human being an object. Theologically, the division between heaven and earth is iconoclastic; it preserves God's transcendence. The alienation itself allows human begins to develop spiritually, independently of blind forces. Kant's successors show how the alienating divisions in Kant's thinking are dialectically necessary. Here is where the argument against God's personal self-revelation gains traction. The dialectician says that the intimately encountered God has no divisions, no parts of speech, no grammar. God is One and therefore impersonal. If God is One, undivided and therefore not self-conscious, then human self-consciousness is a fall from an indifferent unity before all difference. If there is no fall, no divisions, then no consciousness either. This is unlike Paul who says that only love truly speaks, that love is neither a clanging of symbols, nor a sounding gong.

How does Kierkegaard allow for God's personal self-revelation? Kierkegaard says that God is "too close" in his "omnipresence" for a person to see him (310). We now have a better understanding of what this means. Let us deal with the statement in two parts. First, the understanding that God is omnipresent and then secondly that God is "too close." When Kierkegaard says that God is omnipresent he means that God is related to every being in the universe. God is not omnipresent in that he forces himself into every unfilled space, as if God creates by expanding himself physically. Kierkegaard wants to say that God is *not* everywhere in this sense. God is limited, in a sense, by his perfection, by his eternal unwillingness to overpower. God is not One in the metaphysical-monistic sense. But how is God self-conscious then, opposed to himself? The logician who finds Spinoza unpalatable posits some alien force that could bring God out of unconscious perfection. If God is not to be simply unconscious production, then surely he needs opposition. How else could light become aware of itself as light, if there were no darkness? But like Paul and Augustine, Kierkegaard tells a different story of God, a symbolic retelling of beatitude, of the soul's joy in God. The person blessed by vision tells a story of God's self-sufficiency: that God has fullness of vision within him in every act of creation and therefore creates intentionally, out of joy, for the sake of the good. That God sees goodness is essential to the mystical visions reported by Augustine. Augustine cannot symbolize his mystical experiences in a language that suggests unconscious annihilation in the One. The experiences themselves call Augustine to speak of a God who creates lovingly, gives forth of his very self.⁹⁸ As we shall see in the

⁹⁸ As I put it in chapter two, in a highly inadequate yet not entirely false manner: We are speaking here of a

Communion discourses, Kierkegaard will continue to orient himself in this mystery, the mystery of God's Word and self-communication. In this orientation Kierkegaard will begin to articulate a vision of God's eternal concern for creation. This concern is present in every act of creation and sanctifying grace. For Kierkegaard, the *promise* of the whole, God's Word, lives in every act. God gives forth lovingly, with attentive concern, because God is always already Speech, always already in communicative relationship with himself. In God, as Augustine puts it, we see through God's eyes; we see God's seeing us.⁹⁹ But God's seeing precedes all seeing. Kierkegaard's discourses are meant precisely to help the reader see herself through God: the seeing before every moment of self-condemnation, every moment of introspection, egoism and self-inflicted torment. The loving intention lives in every creative instance of fatherly care. God "delights" in creation, as Augustine puts. This delight is the eternal communion of God's Word. But God chooses to share the Spirit of this hidden communion (in some measure). With perfect love God shares *himself* and chooses to relate to his creatures, for the sake of their good. God gives forth the hidden aspect of himself, the internal Word. For Kierkegaard, God has not left the earth to its own devices, its own "enclosed reserve," its egoisms and petty desires. God illuminates and in illumination the soul begins "to reflect the image of God." The history of God is his desire to perfect every part of the universe, to draw the

timeless melody yet with distinction in the notes. To put it in another way, perhaps even more inadequately: The language here is striving to get at the mystery of divine personality, the wholeness that is not merely formal or an abstraction from a given set of parts, but dynamic in itself, the eternal personality that is timeless yet infinitely rich and complex, that is timeless yet not impersonal.

⁹⁹ Those who are spiritual "see creation through your Spirit, for you are seeing it through their eyes. Thus when such people see that these things are good, you are seeing that they are good; whatever created things please them for your sake, it is you who are arousing their delight in these things; and anything that gives us joy through your Spirit gives you joy in us" (*The Confessions*, XIII.31.46).

universe into relationship. God is present, intimate and warm, changeless in being concerned for all souls. The divine instruction is in God's changelessness, which is God's being concerned for a person, God's fatherliness (400). The sameness of God is not an abstract principle or a point of concentrated energy before all division, a point in need of expansion. And it is not as if God is merely an unconscious production extending itself further and further into the universe, overpowering everything alien to it. For Kierkegaard, God is everywhere relationally out of loving concern. The negative element, the non-God, is not the dichotomous other in need of overpowering but the beloved person, independent yet related to God in prayer. For Kierkegaard, the sameness of God is always already relational: it is a perfection of seeing goodness.

God gives himself; but for Kierkegaard, the invitation into God is not a thing for possession. The gifted person has nothing to hang on to: the gift fails to satisfy. It edifies instead and calls the invited person into a relationship immeasurably greater than any particular gift, than any attempt to contain God in a particular idea or feeling. As uncontainable, the gift of God's self makes the soul long (it lengthens the soul). The whole of God comes into view at this stage, not as a complete vision, but as a promise of relationship between learner and Teacher. But we can now also see why, for Kierkegaard, it is terrible to fall into the hands of the living God. God *fulfills* the promise. God crosses the threshold, enters the household, bids the person stop his self-obsessive economic activity. The person wants to keep his house in order but he fails to choose the better part. For Kierkegaard, to say that God is close invariably means that God is too close. A person cannot merely leap into God's nothingness, as if God were far-off, the

very antithesis of life, the denial of created reality, the denial of all gift-giving. Longing sees the whole, not as õfar-off goal,ö not as object, but as journey. Longing is full with prescient joy but nevertheless calls a person to see his own feet, remain humble and open. God is impractical because God is õtoo close.ö God *is* the most profound source of discontentment in a person's life. God does not satisfy every human desire; but God does illuminate. The illumination is relational, a poverty of spirit, a wealth of need. For Kierkegaard, while God is close, human history does not define God. God's edification of his people is the history above all. This divine history is not a fall from grace, for Kierkegaard. The dialectician, who discovers the necessity of divisions, contradictions and all manner of violence, does not save the day by bringing God into *fallen* time, out of his indifferent slumber. The story of God's loving care is the first and last story. God fulfills the promise of love and the student lives and learns in God. The student who submits to the instruction learns God's creative joy and loving care and follows God on a journey of love, from promise to fulfillment. This journey is the illumination; it is life in God.

In sin we are distracted by the lack of an explanation, as Kierkegaard puts it. But this lack of explanatory knowledge is ultimately insignificant compared with the riches of God's communicative presence, õtoo closeö for a person to see. For Kierkegaard, the instruction, the illumination, is not a second-best knowledge, an imperfection, as if a person were striving for a solution not yet at hand. Longing, in this sense, is not an imperfection. Even the beatified long for God. But they *long perfectly* because they rejoice in their need of God. Kierkegaard says that Paul longed for God even in beatific

vision. Beyond the question of finitude and sin lies a fundamental *existential* struggle: the longing for God. For Kierkegaard, behind every despair over sin itself lies a deeper suffering, a person's failure to *need* God aright. A person flees from godly neediness and wastes his inheritance in wild living, in false and secondary needs, to suppress the first need. For Kierkegaard, the need for God cannot satisfy a person because it is the first need above all: the soul was in need from the beginning, born to be in God. Sin is not a fall from a fullness of being, for Kierkegaard. No one being, even before sin, was ever merely full in God. In God every soul is as poor as it is rich; the relationship with God is a perpetual thanksgiving. It is the *first* way of living *before* the fall from grace. For Kierkegaard, a soul does not fall away from God before it needs God. The awareness of need, the joy of thanksgiving and praise is primary. As Kierkegaard puts it in the first discourse, the need for God is not a deficiency but the highest blessing. The beatified give thanks because they are *in* need of God and rejoice over the need. The beatified are separate from God, they are alive and live their own life, but they are not self-enclosed. The beatified do not desire to become God. But they long to cling to God and take joy in their longing, in their unending neediness.

5.

In the next chapter, I will begin to explore in more detail what it means to live in God, for Kierkegaard. What does it mean to submit to divine instruction, to illumination? What does it mean to live dis-integrated in God? As we shall see, Kierkegaard's Christ, even in his poverty of spirit and in his greatest torment, remains at one with the Father *in*

memory, communion, and prayer. For Kierkegaard, Christ redeems humankind, not because he overflows with power, but because of his infinite humility and infinite openness to the Father. Of course, this is not a comforting thought, for Kierkegaard. Christ's longing for the Father (as we shall see in the first Communion discourse) essentially sets him at odds with himself. He is pulled apart, drawn in love toward the Father, even as he is tempted to integrate himself with his worldly self, turn stone into bread. And so Christ dies alone on the cross, in utter obedience to the Father. Every moment of obedience, every moment of otherworldly longing takes Christ closer and closer towards the cross. For Kierkegaard, this is ultimately where the longing for God takes a person. The movement of longing is essentially purgative. But as we shall also see in the next chapter, even in longing for God a person begins to participate in God's life. Ultimately, this is a life lived in intimate communion with God, without fear of death or life, things present or things to come, since perfect love drives out fear. According to appearances, this is nothing but crucifixion. But there is life after death, for Kierkegaard. On the cross the Son is furthest from the Father and according to human understanding utterly alone and abandoned. But miraculously, Kierkegaard says, on this very day, even as Christ hangs on the cross, he is with the Father. At the very end, the Saviour-criminal, invites his fellow criminals on either side into this eternal communion with the Father. This ridiculous and laughable invitation is the very model for the Communion service, for Kierkegaard. The invitation to the meal goes out to all, to the outcast and socially integrated, to the criminal and the perfect citizen, to the rich person and the poor person, to the enemy and the friend. The only thing that stands in the way



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(temporarily) of this invitation, this holy communion, this paradise, is human selfishness.

As we shall see, the social gospel, for Kierkegaard, is essentially this: that God has already established a Church beyond all class distinctions, social or political divisions.

This Church is the way of illumination, the way that purges the soul of selfishness and teaches a person how to die to illusion, to worldly concerns, to all manner of distinctions between persons. The Communion service is ultimately a celebration of life in God, for Kierkegaard.

Chapter 4

NON-COMBATANCY: LONGING AND SURRENDER IN THE *DISCOURSES AT THE COMMUNION ON FRIDAYS*

But when longing grasps hold of us, oh, that we may also grasp hold of the longing; when it wants to carry us away, that we may also surrender ourselves; when you are close to us in the call, that we might also keep close to you in our calling to you; when in the longing you offer us the highest, that we may purchase its opportune moment, hold it fast, sanctify it in the quiet hours by earnest thoughts, by devout resolves, so that it might become the strong but also the well-tested, heartfelt longing that is required of those who worthily want to partake of the holy meal of Communion! Father in heaven, longing is your gift; no one can give it to himself; if it is not given, no one can purchase it, even if he were to sell everything--but when you give it, he can still sell everything in order to purchase it.¹⁰⁰

1.

After this opening prayer (quoted here in part) Kierkegaard begins his first meditation from *Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*. The verse for this discourse is Luke 22:15: "I have longed with all my heart to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." The words of this text do not belong to the institution of the Lord's Supper, Kierkegaard notes; and "yet they have the closest connection to it in the words of narrative; the words of institution follow immediately after these words" (251).

Kierkegaard reminds us that "the words of institution" are spoken by a man condemned to die. Even with a "most ignominious death" at hand, even with "his terrible knowledge of what will happen" (252), Christ comes to the Passover supper, not as one hiding from the

¹⁰⁰*Discourses at the Communion on Fridays* in *Christian Discourses*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 251. The following references will refer to this text, unless otherwise noted. These discourses are the fourth part of *Christian Discourses*. One limitation of this chapter is that I am unable to examine section four in the context of the whole book. For a reading of the rhetorical structure of the whole book see David J. Gouwens, "Kierkegaard's *Christian Discourses* on Upbuilding, Mildness, and Polemic: A Temple-Cleansing Celebration and Then the Quiet" in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Christian Discourses*, edited by Robert L. Perkins (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University, 2007), 143-163. For a discussion of Part Four in the context of the whole book see David R. Law, "Kierkegaard's Understanding of the Eucharist in *Christian Discourses*, Part Four," *op.cit.*, 277-279.

authorities, nor simply as one going to the slaughter, but in a spirit of celebration.

According to all appearances, the narrative is almost at an end. But in the next verse (22:16), Christ suggests that his longing will find fulfillment in the Kingdom to come.

The last supper, he tells his disciples, is not really the last. His death is not the end but the beginning of a new story. But Christ knows that his companions will judge him according to appearances. And so, Kierkegaard says, he withholds "his terrible knowledge," sparing them, for "he did not have the heart to initiate the apostles entirely into how close the danger was. . . ." Christ "who struggled alone in Gethsemane, alone because his disciples slept, is alone here also, even though he is sitting at supper with his only intimate friends." He chooses to keep his disciples in the dark and "bears alone his terrible knowledge of what will happen" (252). Christ cannot communicate his own prophetic vision because he knows his death will be nothing but a horror for them. He eats alone, even in the company of his disciples. With a heart full of longing, he celebrates without measure, without hesitancy -- on the very eve of his crucifixion.

There is one exception, however: one disciple, Judas, also knows the future. As Kierkegaard puts it, Christ knows the secret of his coming betrayal, "yes, and then one more, the betrayer, who was also present" (252). Christ and criminal remain united in shared secrecy. Christ joins Judas in shadows, who "chose the quiet of the night" to betray his teacher (252). Why is this? Why does Christ refuse to make visible what is hidden? In Kierkegaard's retelling of the passion narrative, Christ surrenders all advantage, all credibility, all credit in the world. Christ, apolitical and uneconomic to the last moment, allows Judas to haggle over his own body. Christ lets Judas rule the day,

command all things, measure all things -- even life itself. Thirty pieces of silver buys and sells Christ, transforms him into the object of commerce. Utterly impractical, uneconomic, impotent, Christ commands no power in the world. And yet he lets Judas, man of action, secure his place in the world. In Christ's infinite weakness he gives up the war even as Judas is haggling over his life.

Is it any coincidence that Judas remains Christ's most intimate companion at the Passover meal? The realist says that evil will invariably prevail, continue to lurk in the shadows, if the good do not fight back. But Kierkegaard's Christ lives a shadowy existence, a useless spirituality; he lets evil win the day. And yet Kierkegaard suggests that the real commodity here is not actually Christ's body but Judas' soul. In selling Jesus, Judas "was already bought to sell" him, as Kierkegaard puts it (252). From the viewpoint of eternity, Judas' soul is the real commodity, the decisive commercial exchange. Christ in his longing for the Father, in his vision of the Kingdom to come, in his victory over despair and death, reveals how eternally non-decisive Judas' intended venture really is. For Kierkegaard, Christ's apparent passivity in the face of evil is nothing but a longing for reality. When Kierkegaard finishes the passion narrative, Kierkegaard turns to the congregational listener: Would it not be terrible, he asks, if someone came to this Communion supper out of habit or custom, but without "heartfelt longing"? That is to say, would it not be terrible if you gained the whole world but lost your soul? Kierkegaard's question is meant to startle. Are we really to imitate Christ's otherworldly longing? What would it mean to long for the Communion just as Christ longed for Passover, to come to the Lord's table like this, to share oneself so immeasurably in the supper. Surely

in a person's heart, the realist counters, there is too much room for compromise and commerce. Surely a person needs some worldly comfort, faith in some earthly power to beat back the forces of evil. Or if not this, perhaps some worldly image of the Kingdom to come in exchange for earthly poverty: a promise of reward in the New Jerusalem. Is this image-making not the unavoidable human venture that smuggles back in some worldly reward, the "infinite calculation" that "supersedes the finite calculating that has been renounced"? The investment that banks the God "who sees in secret," the God who "will pay back your salary. . . on and infinitely greater scale."¹⁰¹ Is this not the heavenly consolation for the person who cannot bear to sit with Christ at the meal? How else could a person endure this cruelty, this passivity, this asceticism? How else could a person wait for God, live in the eternal gap between *this* hell and *that* heaven? How else could a person manage, if there were no venture, no investment in eternal dividend, if a person did not have this secret in pocket: that every Judas, every single one of those worldly-wise sceptics who mock otherworldly passivity, lose out in the end? Is this not how the ascetic gets his "delirium of sweet revenge"? He lets God enact his vengeance in the end; the "eternal recompense in 'the kingdom of God'" for that life on earth lived 'in faith', 'in love', 'in hope.'¹⁰² So it must be, the realist says, since the real Passion is unreproducible, a momentary revelation of the transcendent that can only live again in a person fraudulently: in the currency of violence, self-flagellation. Every attempt to take this event as raw material, add value to it, sell again been a fraud, the realist says. And if longing is so decidedly uneconomic, how can it gain enough currency for Kierkegaard to

¹⁰¹ Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (University of Chicago Press, 1995), 107.

¹⁰² Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, *op. cit.*, 31, 32.

address the congregation he is addressing now? How could Christ, the essentially passive and powerless one, who died alone, abandoned -- and essentially so -- how could the *real* Christ, possibly assemble a crowd, a congregation of believers, command this kind of attention? Is all speech *about* Jesus not essentially sophistry, the address that reproduces the original event at a bargain price? If so, there is no memory of Christ, no memorial, nothing to imitate; we have all forgotten, and necessarily so. Does this dis-possessive cruelty not leave us without resource in the world, beggars whose only comfort is a secret, the hidden hope (burning revenge?) that the tables will turn in the age to come, that evil will get its just reward then? Does the uneconomic status of the Passion narrative and the liturgical re-production of this event remain eternally at odds? Is this communicative moment, Kierkegaard's homily, the currency that enacts this exchange? Indeed, if the liturgy aims at the unification of believers, then it would seem that Kierkegaard must address the congregation with authority; the homily must become an institutional-political act, a moment in a discursive and liturgical formula imposed on its members. Remembering the Passion is nothing but irony, a violent remembering of the congregational body, a forcible gathering into one. This act, the realist says, must do violence to the original (non-institutional) event.

It is certainly true that for Kierkegaard longing is the very spirit that dispossesses a person, makes the here and now seem irrelevant. Longing at first seems like a private event, incommunicable, and asocial. Indeed, Kierkegaard says that longing was "stirring within" his listeners even before they came to the service. "It is not anything new we want to teach you; even less do we want to lead you into more difficult investigations by

leading you outside faith. We want only to try to express what was stirring within you when you felt the longing to receive Communion, the heartfelt longing with which you came here today" (253). Kierkegaard says here that he has nothing to give his listeners. His discourse is about longing and yet he claims that he cannot explain longing, let alone create a feeling of longing in his listeners. And since longing is already "stirring within" them, he says, to explain it would be unnecessary and a misunderstanding. Longing "wants to carry [*rive*] us away," Kierkegaard says in the Communion prayer.¹⁰³ It wants us to "surrender ourselves," but we cannot grasp it just as we cannot grasp the wind, as he puts it in allusion to the Gospel of John. And just as we hear the wind's sighing, but do not know where it comes from, so our "longing for God and the eternal" is not a thing we can strive for and possess. Its movement is "inexplicable, inasmuch as it is indeed from God, who in it is drawing you." It is "inexplicable, inasmuch as it is through him 'who lifted up from the earth will draw all to himself' (John 12:32). It is "inexplicable, inasmuch as it is the working of the Spirit in you. . . ." Longing's origin does not lie in the heart but comes from some otherworldly source. What else can the reasonable person

¹⁰³ As he prays: *ō . . . naar den vil rive os hen, at vi da ogsaa maatte give os hen. . .* Literally: *ō . . .* when it wants tear us away, that we might give ourselves away. Note here the relationship between God's communication and the human response. Longing grabs and in response we *give os hen*. As we shall see, longing grabs in the sense that the soul begins to experience its need of God. This need is evoked by God's self-communication. The communication educates, raises up, draws the soul onto life in God. This communicative-pedagogical aspect requires the free participation of the responsive person. The more a person participates freely in God, the more that person experiences the need of God and the blessing of being in need. But this freedom is never radical (original, spontaneously produced by the person). It exists in a dialogical context. Also, a person experiences the need as a painful disruption of ego-centricity, of pride. A person is therefore forced to make a choice between self-centered inwardness and openness to God. The person still has to *give sig hen*. As Lee C. Barrett puts it, "Kierkegaard does make it clear that this mysterious longing for fellowship with Christ is by no means self-generated; the individual does not decide by a Promethean exertion of will power to long for companionship with Christ. The presence of the longing in the individual's heart is a sheer gift of the Holy Spirit. But, however much its origins may reside beyond the sphere of human volition, the longing's presence in the individual's soul invites an intentional response." (*Op.cit.*, 256).

do but "ignore its call"? What else can the reasonable person do but call longing by its real name: a mood and "change it into an impulse [*Indskydelse*] of the moment, into a whim [*Indfald*] that vanishes without a trace the next moment"?¹⁰⁴ This would indeed allow a person to "let it die unused as a barren mood" (254), to abort the movement of the spirit inside, to regain composure, to become responsible, reasonable again. As with Christ at the Passover celebration, a person's very credibility is at stake. And so we call longing irresponsible and irrational, a hopeful pleading, even some impulse of the moment, some barren mood. To call longing a matter of impulse or urge is especially sly. The argument here is that the ascetic is really motivated by some bodily or primal urge, that his spiritual poverty is really an embarrassment of riches, the fullness of some irrational energy that expresses itself in self-sacrificial violence.

And yet Kierkegaard points to this mysterious quality of the longing: that it is neither simply a spirit of lack nor of fullness. Longing is not simply a sacrifice of life for an unknowable beyond. Kierkegaard says that the longing for God *already* participates in God. Longing is a gift from God, for what is more appropriately "called God's gifts than every prompting of the Spirit, every pull of the soul, every fervent stirring of the heart, every holy state of mind, every devout longing" (253). But this gift is not a thing handed over to us like "food and clothing." These stirrings in the soul are gifts "in a far deeper

¹⁰⁴ *Indskydelse* literally translates as in-shot, *Indfald* translates as in-fall. Compare with the following passage: "The sacred words just read are, then, if I may say so, the introductory (*Indledning*, lit. a leading into) words to the institution (*Indstiftelse*) of the Lord's supper, and this in turn is for every single individual the true devout introduction (*Indledning*) or entrance (*Indgang*): to come with heartfelt longing (252) [*"De forelæste hellige Ord er da, om jeg saa tørre sige, Indledning-Ordene, til Nadvarens Indstiftelse, og dette er igjen for hver Enkelt den sande gudelige Indledning eller Indgang: at komme med hjertelig Længsel."*]. Like Augustine in the *Confessions*, Kierkegaard is concerned with the way into God. For Kierkegaard, the communion with Christ is not something that a person falls into unconsciously (*infall*), or something that shoots up (*Inskydelse*) in a person's body. It is a leading-into, an initiation (*Indledning*) in God by way of God's leading. It is a divine pedagogy, a way of learning God in relationship with God.

sense," because God not only "gives them" but "gives himself in these gifts" (253). "I can wish myself away from the world's vanity and corruption, and even if a wish cannot do it, the heartfelt longing for the eternal is still able to lead me away, because in the longing itself the eternal *is*, just as God *is* in the longing that is *for* him" (260). Longing, Kierkegaard suggests, is not just a desire for something in the future; longing already belongs, in a sense, to the very goal for which it is striving. Even as it wants to "lead me away" toward God, even as longing dispossesses, longing already participates in God. The wish, Kierkegaard says, casts its glance out into the future, hopes to make the future present; and yet it cannot always lead a person from corruption. But longing draws a person back to "God and the eternal, the longing for our Saviour and Redeemer." Longing does not leave a person empty handed, for God "never leaves himself without witness" and "lavishes these his best gifts on every human being" (253). The gift of longing is a "terrible responsibility," Kierkegaard says, because God gives himself in giving the gift. If you were able "look deeply into people's inner, most being and very deeply into your own, you would surely discover with terror" how God's gifts dwell there (253). For "at some time, if not sooner, then in eternity, a person's recollections rise up accusingly against him, recollections of the many times and the many ways God spoke to him, but futilely, in his inner being. Recollection, yes, because even if he himself has long since forgotten what was wasted, so that he therefore does not recollect it, God and eternity have not forgotten; he is reminded of it, and in eternity it becomes his recollection" (253). Eternity remembers what a person dismisses so easily. This

recollection in hell (if not sooner) is the memory of longing suffered by the one who dismissed this gift.

The longing that is *for* God already *is* in God, Kierkegaard says. But how is this? *For* is a beggar, is it not? It strives for what it does not have. It measures, sizes up, puts a price on the goal; it pays for the expenses until the reward is had; it uses up time, labours now *for* a time beyond all longing. But longing, Kierkegaard suggests, is not the currency that purchases the goal. God *is* in "every prompting of the Spirit, every pull of the soul, every fervent stirring of the heart, every holy state of mind, every devout longing. . . ." Even as longing calls a person to "sell everything," he cannot sell anything to purchase longing, since "no one can purchase it, even if he were to sell everything." Only because longing is a gift can he "sell everything in order to purchase" -- what is already given him. There is only one way a person can "purchase" longing: by obtaining nothing to sell everything. It is the purchase that purchases nothing, the measureless "purchase" of the measureless. The attempted commercial venture fails: the exchange of mortification *for* eternal life, present resignation *for* future glory. The gift is the very thing that allows a person to "purchase" the gift in the first place. A person *already* has what he is trying to obtain. But now the word "purchase" is rendered unrecognizable, the meaning reversed. In longing a person receives immeasurably that he might sell. He sells *because* he is wealthy.

The person who listens to Kierkegaard's Communion discourse prepares himself to remember Christ. Perhaps he is even striving to remember him; perhaps he can barely call him to mind. And yet he already dwells in God even as he moves towards the altar,

as he comes in longing, as he comes to renew his love, to remember again. The longing in question is not an "impulse of the moment, a whim that vanishes without a trace the next moment," a "barren mood" (254).¹⁰⁵ The longing happens because it is *in* God, even as it is *for* God. But how is this? This would seem to suggest that longing is a kind of wisdom, a way of living in God even as one is moving towards God. But what is this wealth, this weal, this well-being of the lover's soul in the very poverty of longing?

Let us continue to read the next section of the first discourse to see how this understanding of longing develops. Kierkegaard begins the section like this: "So, then, longing awakened in your soul. Even if it was inexplicable. . . you still understood what was required of you" (254). The conjunction *so* connects the second and first sections of the discourse. Longing awakened. Why? Because, as stated, God gives to all. And moreover, you understood what was required. Why? Because, as stated, longing was already stirring in you. The sentence is stated in the past tense: Longing awakened. But because it already has awakened, you *now* understand what is required. A resolution follows, which is a response to this prior awakening. "Then you did promise yourself and God, did you not, that now you would also gratefully use it [longing]. You said to yourself: Just as longing has torn me away from what so easily entangles one in a spell, so by earnest thoughts will I also cooperate so that I may tear myself completely away from what still might hold me back" (254). The narrative transitions here to the first person singular. Kierkegaard addresses the listener who responds as speaker. The past tense becomes present tense. The speaker speaks about the future, but not as one who

¹⁰⁵ See previous note.

pires for a *distant* event. But the resolution is not strong-willed; it is weak, in a sense.

The person makes the resolution *because* he has already begun to long. The longing "has torn," has broken the spell; but *now* the person is summoned; now the person is responsible for the longing. The person can choose to let longing "die unused as a barren mood" or he can choose to nourish this relationship in "well-tested," "heartfelt," "earnest," "devout" longing (251). The person makes the resolution, gives his word, as one who has already received immeasurably from God. To let longing "die" is a choice, but it is a choice that must deliberately silence "the call." The gift of longing is the person's to waste, for God gives it to all without measure, and "never leaves Himself without a witness" (261). The person becomes subject as one who subjects himself to longing, lets longing draw him away. He becomes responsible as one who responds to longing. Throughout this section of the discourse, the speaker resolves to discipline herself. The phrases "I will remind myself"; "I will call to mind"; "I will remember" repeat themselves. The soul's dialogue with God becomes a dialogue with self.

With the spell broken the world begins to appear dark. In the light of longing the person enters the dark night of the senses. The person loses hope in worldly possessions, the speaker says, because longing has "torn me away from what so easily entangles one in a spell" (254). In this light of longing the world now shows up as darkness. The speaker notes how everything in nature is subject to change and decay, always in danger, vulnerable to forces beyond a person's control. "Everything, all that I see, is vanity and vicissitude as long as it exists, and finally it is the prey of corruption," the narrator says. The dark night of the senses has broken the spell of worldly attachment. The temporal is

shown up as such by the immortal light of God, which breaks the illusion of earthly permanence. In this darkness the soul begins to see the world as it really is: "So I will call to mind how uncertain everything is" and how "every moment . . . is like the darkest night" (255). And: "Then I will remind myself that just as every uncertainty of the next moment is like the dark night, so in turn the explanation of every event or occurrence is like a riddle that no one had solved," so that no can say if the fulfillment of my wishes is actually to my benefit or to my harm, that if fulfilled" they "would still not seem empty and meaningless to me." No one can guarantee the "next moment," the narrator remarks, neither the wisest person nor the simplest (256-257). Indeed, uncertainty is the greatest certainty in life, the speaker asserts. Nothing mocks the "next moment" more cunningly. It is true that "every moment is equally uncertain; but it is also true that every moment is "equally certain." Death becomes (from a human perspective) the absolute power over and against life. We moderns, one might add, have learnt to keep death at bay. Machinery has indeed overcome the limits of bodily exhaustion and medicine has extended life itself. And yet compared with the "absolute" power of uncertainty, of the accidental, a few years of extended life is a relative distinction. The accidental power of death over life is equally certain for the child born yesterday and for the man in his old age, as Kierkegaard puts it (257). Likewise, even if a person could condition herself to be satisfied with very little in this world, there is no guarantee that even this little would not be taken from him. "I will remember," the narrator vows, "that no covenant between individual is entered into, not the most loving, not the most fervent, without being entered into also with death, which is present ex officio in everything." Mortality -- the greatest

uncertainty and the greatest certainty -- mocks all human promises. From a human perspective it reveals a person as ultimately solitary: every connection between human and human is vulnerable, corruptible, and mortal. "I will remind myself that, *humanly* speaking, there is no one, no, no one at all, to depend on, not even God in heaven" (257). For humans, even the promise made in God's name, the promise that swears by God, is corruptible.

In the dark night of the senses, the soul is without direction; it cannot find its way in the world. Longing reveals earthly life in all its imperfection. And yet Kierkegaard tries to comfort his listeners: "But if you accept it [longing] with gratitude as a gift of God, it will indeed become a blessing to you. Oh, therefore never let the holy longing return empty-handed when it wants to visit you; even if it sometimes seems to you that by following it you would return empty-handed--do not believe it, it is not so, it cannot possibly be so; it still may become a blessing to you" (254). But we are still not sure how this can be. Longing appears as "empty-handed," a spiritual poverty pertinent to weak people. Christ longs for the Kingdom to come and then dies alone like a criminal. According to appearances he makes no *real* difference in world. How is longing not just an empty promise? Kierkegaard says that the longing is "a gift of God" that "will indeed become a blessing to you." It would seem that the longing already lives in God. Indeed, how else could longing tear a person "away from what so easily entangles one in a spell"? (254). Longing has to qualify as a kind of wisdom, as a light that shows up the darkness as such. But how is this?

Kierkegaard's interjecting voice here is followed by the first of two vows to join the Communion. "This is how you talked with yourself, and the more you surrendered to these thoughts, the more the longing for the eternal conquered in you, the longing for fellowship with God through your Redeemer, and you said: I long with all my heart for this supper" (258). In the dark night, the speaker resolves to join Passover feast along with Christ. But from where does this resolve come? Is the resolution merely something spurred on by the fear of the darkness? But this would make longing an empty-handed promise, indeed. Longing would be a mere wish (that could not *lead* out of corruption [260]).

The speaker then begins to meditate on another kind of uncertainty. Whereas the first meditation was on the corruption of bodies, fortune and misfortune, this meditation is on the corruption of the human soul. The speaker says: I will remember how "the world lies in evil." Even if I have only known loving and good people, this may be because they have not been spiritually tested by life, for it is spiritual tests that reveal "what good and evil dwells in a human being." Indeed, we should think again here of Peter, who at the moment of testing joined the crowd in mocking the dying Christ. "Then I will remind myself what I have heard about all the atrocities" done by people, about all the violence, cruelty they have committed against enemies, friends, and even brothers." I will recall how violence and war prevail in the world (266). But most of all, "I will recall" how the "Holy One" suffered at the hand of men, how holiness was tortured and treated as a criminal (259). At this point one might expect the first-person voice to continue the discussion of evil in the world. But the speaker quickly changes perspective, moving

from an examination on evil as an external condition, to self-examination. The speaker imagines herself as a contemporary of Jesus and begins to recall how easily it would be to follow in Peter's footsteps. "Good heavens, then I certainly would have taken part in the mockery--in order to save my life I would have screamed with the others. . ." (259-260). Like Peter she would have sold her friendship with Christ and her own soul in exchange for worldly advantage. Kierkegaard interjects at this point, reminding his listeners that preachers normally do not talk like this. In general, preachers would most likely accuse Jesus' contemporaries, talk about them as historical figures; but they would not talk to each person like this, he says. This is understandable, since the preacher does not want to be too severe; indeed, Kierkegaard concludes that he too would never directly accuse a congregation. But the point, he argues, is not to accuse; it is rather to call for self-examination: "Ah, but to myself I do dare to say it, and regrettably I must say it: I would have acted no better than the crowd of people!" (260). The first-person voice here makes the second Communion vow. "This is how you talked with yourself. And the more you surrendered to these thoughts, the more the longing for fellowship with him, the Holy One, conquered in you, and you said to yourself: I long with all my heart for this supper; I long for fellowship, away from this evil world where sin prevails" (260). The discourse, then, has moved from accusations to self-examination, from the dark night of the senses to the dark night of the soul. The longing for fellowship conquers and yet the speaker admits that she would have "acted no better" than Peter. Longing here is a wellness in the soul, the spirit that brings the lover to resolution; but it is also the spirit that reveals the soul's distance from God, its depravity. The speaker longs for fellowship but also knows

that evil "may lurk most deeply in my soul," and that this evil "possibly would yet burst out if I am led into the most terrible decision" (260).

Longing for God has stretched the soul out, made it long in expectation. This stretching towards the heights has put ordinary life in the shadows and revealed a soul divided against itself (between the high and the low, the ideal and the real). But so far it is difficult to see how longing is anything more than an inarticulate feeling. We are still not sure how longing qualifies as wisdom (that is, as acquaintance with reality, the beginning of a journey into God). Let us continue to read.

In the last paragraph of the discourse, Kierkegaard compares the longing for Christ with the longing for a lost friend. "See, if someone dear to you has died, it will certainly happen that again and again the longing to remember him will awaken in you. Then you perhaps go to his grave; and just as he now lies sunk in the bosom of the earth" (261). You go to the grave in order to satisfy the longing for a time; then you rejoin life again.¹⁰⁶ But it would be a "morbid" thing to continually return to the grave in order to increase the longing. "Life once again exercises its power over you" and "you understand that your paths are essentially separated, that you belong to life and to the claims life has upon you; you understand that longing should not increase with the years so that you more and more become a co-tenant of the grave" [*en Medbegraven*] (261). In order to live, a person must forget, in part, the departed one (although, as Kierkegaard would admit, for some "the claims of life" appear trivial and mundane without the

¹⁰⁶ Kierkegaard writes: ". . . it still cannot mean that you should live more and more apart from life in order to live in the grave with the departed one. . . (261). (. . . *saa kan det dog ikke være Meningen, at Du mere og mere skulde leve Dig ud af Livet for at leve Dig ind i Graven hos den Døde. . .*) Literally: it still cannot mean that you should live yourself out of life in order to live yourself into the grave with the dead one.

departed loved one, perhaps even meaningless). This is relevant because the congregation is of course gathered to remember Christ, the departed one. One might accuse Kierkegaard himself of morbidity. How can Kierkegaard affirm life, we say, if he is fixated on the crucifixion itself? In Christ, does human understanding not go to the grave? Christ breaks absolutely with finite desires and aims; he sacrifices all temporal goods, life itself, for an incomprehensible Beyond. What is more morbid than memorializing the cross? And yet, Kierkegaard says, Christ is not one who is dead and departed but one who is living. Indeed, you are really to live in and together with him; he is to be and become your life, so that you do not live to yourself, no longer live yourself, but Christ in you (261). This means that whenever a person remembers Christ his longing for Christ should increase. The longing here is not a question of becoming a *Medbegraven*; the longing is a way of living in Christ.¹⁰⁷ The longing is the very spirit of the communicative God-relationship. Therefore, just as heartfelt longing belongs to worthy remembrance, so in turn it belongs to heartfelt longing that longing is increased through remembrance. . . . The person who mourns the departed one goes to the grave in order to satisfy his longing. The person who comes to the Communion service with heartfelt longing leaves the service with increased heartfelt longing (261). The longing increases because Christ is alive and in Christ you do not live yourself but Christ lives in you. The longing is communicative, a response to the one who lives. It

¹⁰⁷ Compare with *Practice in Christianity*, trans. Edna H. Hong and Howard V. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 18: In the voice of Christ, Kierkegaard writes: "Come here also you, you whose residence has been assigned among the graves, you who in the eyes of society are regarded as dead but are not missed, are not lamented, not buried, yet dead, that is, belonging neither to life nor to death; you to whom human society cruelly locked its doors and for whom no grave has yet mercifully opened; you, too, come here, here is rest, and here is life!"

might be that the person could use the claims of life, the very mundane and trivial things of life, to forget a departed loved one. But this is not the kind of life Kierkegaard is talking about. The contrast here is not between the abyss of faith (the leap into the unknown, the morbid glorification of crucifixion itself) and the drudgery of earthly life, the life that commands power over you, as if martyrdom itself could give meaning to an otherwise mundane existence. As Augustine puts it in the *Confessions*, the soul longs to be (IV.10.15), to live in God. Against all appearances the one who died on the cross is the one who is living and you are really to live in and together with him. . . (261). As we shall see throughout this chapter, Kierkegaard wants to contrast a life lived according to appearances with real life; his aim is *not* to contrast mundane life with lifeless self-annihilation. Kierkegaard wants to affirm life, not glorify martyrdom in itself. But this affirmation comes at a price: the priceless gift of longing appears like a kind of death to the sensate person. The suffering of longing is the suffering of perpetual initiation, a suffering that appears as crucifixion, otherworldly and impractical. Here the person plagued by longing suppresses it by calling it an impulse or itch (like Augustine) and by letting "it die unused as a barren mood" (254). The life in question is a poverty of spirit; no person can buy this wisdom or possess it; a person remains needy, dependent on the communion with Christ into eternity. The more a person learns of God, the needier the person becomes. And yet for the person who accepts the gift of longing, the increase in longing is a blessing in itself. The fellowship with God's eternal Word, *is* true life itself, good for its own sake. It is the goal of all life, not a means to an end.

Here we can begin to get a sense of what it might mean to *live* in longing, for Kierkegaard. Longing, it would seem, is a response to God's active self-communication. It is a life of prayer, a life lived in constant need of God, in longing for God. This longing *is* life itself, not just a wishful glance into the future, not just a mortification of earthly life. In the next section I will continue to explore this understanding of life in God.

2.

Let us see how Kierkegaard develops this understanding of longing as life. The second discourse is a meditation on what it means to *live* in Christ. The verse for the discourse is the invitation in Matthew 11:28 (‘Come here all you who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest’). Kierkegaard calls this invitation ‘surprising’ since normally when people come together to celebrate or work they invite the ‘strong’ and ‘cheerful.’ They do this in order to gather their ‘strengths’ and to unite the many into one. But such a community necessarily excludes the weak and sorrowful, Kierkegaard notes. ‘Yes, the troubled person understands it very well without being told, and so many a troubled one perhaps stands apart and alone, will not participate with the others lest he spoil their fun or hold up the work’ (262). But Christ’s invitation calls out specifically to the weak and sorrowful. But what are we to think of this? Is this just another form of exclusion of the powerful and an act of revenge against them? But for Kierkegaard the invitation includes the strong too; it declares ‘equality for all human beings’ (263). How is this? Has Christ identified some common good that pertains to both the strong and the weak? Perhaps a *lowest* common denominator as a concession to weakness; some

political compromise to placate the resentful, some solution to avoid class conflict? But Kierkegaard is talking about an invitation that pertains *specifically* to the strong *too*. “If you, for example, are the most fortunate of all, alas, so that you are even envied by many” the Gospel nevertheless addresses itself just as much to you and requires of you that you labour and be burdened” (264). The invitation pertains to the powerful, says Kierkegaard, because it requires just as much of the strong as the weak. It “requires that the invited person labour and be burdened” in an unworldly and “more profound sense.” The invitation evokes “a longing [*Sorg*]¹⁰⁸ for God” that “pertains to nothing earthly and temporal, not to your external conditions [your power or weakness], not to your future; it is a longing for God.” The one who bears “this longing silently” is “labouring” and no worldly burden is as heavy (264). The invitation is remarkable because it fails to satisfy the pre-existing needs of either the weak or the powerful. Rather, it “requires” that a person “be burdened.” The invitation does not promise to enhance a person’s career or social status. It makes life more difficult. The invitation evokes a longing for a higher reality that shames both the weak and the strong. The higher reality gives rise to sorrow and the consciousness of sin and guilt, even in the self-satisfied and politically powerful (264). The invitation calls to mind actions forgotten and suppressed in worldly living; it pulls the self-satisfied ego apart in longing, calls forth a “concern, a deep, and eternal concern” in all human beings. This concern

pertains not to the external, not to our fortunes, past or future; it pertains to your actions and, alas, it pertains to those very ones that a person would prefer to have forgotten, because it pertains to the actions, secret or open, by which you offended

¹⁰⁸ According to Hong: “Here *Sorg* is synonymous with *Længsel* (longing)” *Christian Discourses, op. cit.*, 425, n. 27.

against God or against other persons. This concern is repentance; the one who sighs repentingô yes, he labours burdened. No one, no one else who labours is burdened in this way, and yet this is exactly what the Gospel's invitation requires (264)

In this way the invitation opens wounds previously covered over in forgetfulness, in the pursuit of ôfortunes, past or future.ö The business of life requires distinctions between weak and poor, requires that a person leave to obscurity offences ôagainst God or against other personsö for the sake of profit. But the invitation is bad for business, not just because it causes a bad consciousness, but also because it promises forgiveness, healing, and atonement. The sorrow of the penitent is a *response* to the very promise of an immeasurably better life. The invitation is not just the ônoö of a bad conscience but a sorrow evoked by a higher life.

This was the promise in the invitation. But who, then, is the *inviter*! It certainly would be a terribly confusing speech if the invitation "Come here" was heard in the world but it was not stated where one should go. . . . But you, my listener, of course know who the inviter is, and you have accepted the invitation in order to cling more closely to him. See, he stretches out his arms and says: Come here, come here to **me**, all you who labour and are burdened. . . , for it was only in our Saviour's earthly life that John lay closest to him upon his breast.ö (266, bold type original)

The invitation evokes sorrow because it includes a person in a higher way of life, a relationship more intimate than the beloved disciple's restful and privileged spot by Christ. It is not as if Christ sends out messengers with the news in hand. The invitation is personal. Christ sees the invited person specifically. The ôpromise in the invitationö stems from the personal nature of the invitation. The invitation is intended, not blind or arbitrary. As intended the invitation is full of promise. The invitation promises a relationship, a way of life. The Inviter gives himself, not a gift handed over, a gift

disconnected from himself. This gift of self transcends every particular gift. The gift above all is the relationship itself, not a particular gift. A person accepts the invitation in order to cling more closely to him, not to receive something specific; it pertains not to the external, not to our fortunes, past or future but rather to the relationship itself. The self-giving nature of the invitation is the offence that causes the burden of labour. Unconditional love calls forth shame, a concern, a deep, and eternal concern in the invited person. Next to this example of self-giving love, selfishness cannot but turn back in shame. The inviter promises a *whole*, himself. And there is the trustworthy inviter, he who still stands there by his words [*staar ved sit Ord hist*] and invites all (266). The inviter *himself* stands by his word.¹⁰⁹ In this sense the inviter is not just a spiritual guide (Sjelesørger, soul-caretaker) who gives his time, who commiserates for a time. The inviter is the soul-saviour, who gives himself (266). Come here, come here to **me**. For Kierkegaard, Christ's self-giving invitation is the perfect expression of God's unconditional love. In God a person encounters, not a passive object, but a living reality, a knowing directed at her. The blessedness of knowing God, Kierkegaard says, is precisely this, that he knows you (272, bold type original). The knowing is the blessing itself, the intimacy of clinging itself. But the very intimacy of invitation also fails to satisfy egoistic desires; it educates instead. It gives, but not anything for possession. It dispossesses and evokes a longing for the whole relationship, the eternal discovery of love, precisely because the invitation is personal and intimate.

¹⁰⁹ Compare with Kierkegaard's *Practice in Christianity*, *op. cit.*, 14: He stands by his word or he himself is his word; he is what he says in this sense, too, he is the Word.

In the third homily on John 10:27 (‘‘My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me’’), Kierkegaard speaks more specifically to this question of self-giving love. Kierkegaard prays: ‘‘Father in heaven! Your grace and mercy do not vary with the changing of times, do not age with the years, as if, like a human being, you were more gracious one day than on another, more gracious on the first day than on the last. Your grace remains unchanged, just as you are unchanged, the same, eternally young, new every new day’’ because you say ‘‘this very day’’ every day (269). God is terrible because he is eternal, above all variation and change; God swallows up time, reduces every *moment* to insignificance. And yet, Kierkegaard also says that the changeless God is ‘‘new every day, eternally young.’’ For a human being, it is a sign of faithlessness to say, ‘‘this very day’’ everyday. Indeed, ‘‘if a person pays attention to this phrase, is gripped [*griben*] by it, and in holy resolution earnestly says to himself, ‘‘this very day’’ then for him this means that he desires to be changed on this very day, desires that this very day might become more significant for him than other days. . . .’’ When a human being is gripped by grace and decides to say ‘‘this very day,’’ it ‘‘is the most powerful expression of the most profound change and decision. . . .’’ (268). When a person’s entire soul is at stake and then to say ‘‘this very day’’ the very next day -- this would be a sign of utter faithlessness. Only the *eternal* God can truly say ‘‘this very day’’ every day ‘‘to speak forth the word of promise daily. Kierkegaard acknowledges the imperfections of this paradoxical language. ‘‘We speak this way with you, O God; there is a language difference between us, and yet we strive to understand you and to make ourselves intelligible to you, and you are not ashamed to be called our God’’ (268). However, while

there is a language difference between God and humans, Kierkegaard says, we dare speak because we have been gripped by a vision of a God who is ðnot ashamedö of humanity, ðnot ashamedö to relate himself to time and change -- for he remains eternally himself in promising himself. For this reason, a person dares come to God, dares speak with God. This coming forth is not for sake of *self*-mastery but ðin order to cling more closely to himö (266). The speaking is relational, a way of clinging to God; the speaking is the blessing itself. The speaking is not a zealous attempt to speak *for* God but rather *with* God. ðToday it is very particularly, is simply and solely, *his* voice that is to be heard. . . . Certainly a sermon should also bear witness to him, proclaim his word and his teaching, but a sermon is still not *his* voice. At the Communion table, however, it is *his* voice you are to hearö (270-271). Kierkegaard notes self-critically that the overzealous discourse tries to make an immediate impression on the congregation, give voice to God himself. But this kind of discourse reveals a hidden motive, the thought that practical expediency is more important than godliness. God becomes a function. God becomes a condition for the possibility of ego integration, a striving for unity grounded in the fear of disunity. God becomes a function in a practical project. But this also means that God is discarded when used up. The practical takes precedence over the good. A discourse graced by the spirit of truth is impractical because it is spoken *in longing*; it gives ðwitness to him.ö As a beginning and not a conclusion, the discourse merely gives witness to the essential: that God gives himself in giving his gifts, that the word lives in ðhis voice.ö Here the speaker's word, inconclusive and dis-possessive in longing begins to live *in* God's active knowing, *new* every day. The discourse that tries to present God, make God present,

negates God's beginning in us, God's eternal youth. "When there at the Communion table every word by the Lord's servant is said accurately as handed down from the fathers, when you listen accurately as handed down from the fathers, when you listen accurately to every word so that not the least escapes you, not one jot or tittle" if you do not hear *his* voice, hear that it is he who is saying it, then you would receive Holy Communion in vain" (271). The overzealous sermon or sermon heard overzealously speaks accurately and falsely at the same time, Kierkegaard argues. Who is more earnest than the religious zealot, than the one who obeys the word, writes the word on his own heart, memorizes it and never forgets it? And who understands the grammar, the hidden meanings, the obscure symbolizations, the structure, the nuances of scripture better than the zealot? And yet, Kierkegaard says, the zealot misunderstands. "If you, believing, appropriate every word that is said, if you earnestly decide to take it to heart and to order life in accord with it" if you do not hear *his* voice (*Røst*), hear that it is he who is saying it, then you would receive Holy Communion in vain" (271). The zealot wants to appropriate the word, integrate it with his very self. But this appropriation misappropriates all the same. The zealot understands the letter of the word, but forgets the voice, the personal communication, that God gives himself in giving his word. Being earnest is not the same as being true, for Kierkegaard. A person cannot measure his spiritual health by the *strength* of his conviction. The focus on strength is nothing but a distraction because true religion is a weakness, a clinging to the Inviter, a journey into God eternally unfinished. For Kierkegaard, every word spoken about Christ, no matter how earnest or accurate, falsifies if it does not communicate this godly longing.

Kierkegaard gives the discourse in the middle of the service. The focus of the Friday Communion service (unlike the Sunday service) is on the Communion itself. If the liturgy is a movement towards the altar, a person hears the homily on the way as it were. The homily has no authority; it merely points forward. "At the Communion table there is no speaking about him; there he himself is present in person (*personligt tilstede*);¹¹⁰ there it is he who is speaking; if not, then you are not at the Communion

¹¹⁰ According to David R. Law, Kierkegaard follows the traditional Lutheran doctrine of the real presence, a doctrine articulated in the emphasis in the *Alter-Bog* that the Eucharistic element of bread and wine are the *true* body and the *true* blood of Christ. For Kierkegaard, Christ is really present at the Eucharist. Law notes that Kierkegaard, like Zwingli, thinks of the Communion service as a memorial of the atonement. However, like Luther, Kierkegaard thinks of the Eucharist itself as a celebration of his [Christ's] real presence among believers. "Unlike Luther, however, Kierkegaard does not seem to situate Christ's presence in the bread and wine, but in Christ's voice. This is vividly illustrated on the sole occasion that Kierkegaard quotes the words of consecration said over the elements: 'And it must be his voice you hear when he says: This is my body . . .' (294). This is related to Kierkegaard's understanding that the divine blessing, which is itself Christ's presence, is present not only in the Eucharistic elements, but in the entire divine drama of the Lord's Supper" (*op. cit.*, 295). Indeed, this drama continues as a person leaves the church and goes out into the world. For Kierkegaard, Christ's voice is ever-present and intimate, as we shall see.

Whether or not this trivializes the Communion service is an important question. Kierkegaard, however, does argue that the service itself is significant. He says that the service itself is a way of disciplining the mind. "Everything otherwise done here is only for the purpose of concentrating the attention of the mind on this, that it is *his* voice that is to be heard" (270). The service helps a person attend to God. But this attentiveness is nevertheless real life, everyday life, as we have seen. The service is only a special help. "You are on the way, and God's house is a bidding place [*Bedested*: resting place/prayer-place] where you seek rest for your soul. . . ." But this special place of prayer is emblematic of everyday life from now till the grave, since "even if you come again to seek this rest, it is still certain that it is the same rest in which you someday, when your last moment has come, will seek rest for your soul for the last time" (265). The rest is nothing but eternal rest in God, beyond the institutionalized, formal liturgy, the same rest a person will find in God at the moment of death. The "restful position" at the altar during the Communion service is therefore a "dim imitation of your soul's finding rest in God through the consciousness of the forgiveness of sins" (267).

I should also note that Kierkegaard calls his own discourse a brief rest:

From a confessional address you are not to learn what it means to confess; it would also be too late; but through it you make your confession before you go. Today no sermon is preached. What we say here in the prescribed brief moment is, again, no sermon, and when we have said Amen, the divine service is not as usual essentially over, but then the essential begins. Our address therefore only wants to have you pause for a moment on the way to the Communion table, because today the divine service does not as usual center on the pulpit but on the Communion table. And at the Communion table the point above all is to hear *his* voice. (271)

tableö (271). The aim of the Communion service is utterly impractical. It is confessional. The service accomplishes nothing worldly. For Kierkegaard, the aim of the confession is not to clear the air and get on with life (to integrate life once again). The aim of the confession is ultimately Christ himself, who is the blessing. The blessing, Kierkegaard says, is that a person is known by Christ. When there are many people at the Communion table it is almost as if the individual person gets absorbed in the crowd. But this is an illusion. There is no crowd, no matter how many people join the table. ðHe is himself personally present, and he knows those who are his own. He knows you, whoever you are, known by many or unknown by all; if you are his own, he knows you. Oh, what blessed comfort to be known by himö (272). In the ðrealö world the crowd gets things done and the weak ðhold up the workö (262). But at the Communion service the crowd is an illusion.

Kierkegaard now makes a startling conclusion, however. We might think that this understanding of the crowd only pertains to life inside the four walls of the church. But Kierkegaard goes on to say that the real world is inside the church and the outside world is an illusion. This is difficult to see. The Communion service falls on a weekday, an officially non-holy day. In the city life continues as normal; but Kierkegaard says that the day is *really* a holy day. While social and political pressure demand compliance on Sunday, while the official holy day establishes order, disciplines, imposes a certain rhythm on unruly life, the Friday Communion service reveals another order of life unmediated by institutional authority. You did not come to the service, Kierkegaard tells

The discourse is therefore a brief rest on the *Altergang* (lit. altar walk), the movement towards the altar. Kierkegaard's own word remains forever under the authority of the Word, active communicative love. It cannot substitute for the encounter with Christ.

his congregation, because of external pressure, custom or duty. “So it was not your duty to come here today; it was a need (*Trang*) within you” (270). The decision comes from a need for God himself, the Inviter himself, not for a particular thing in the world. “The noise of the daily activity of life out there sounds almost audibly within this vaulted space, where this sacred stillness is therefore even all the greater. The stillness that public authority can command civilly is nevertheless not godly stillness, but this stillness, while the world makes noise, is the godly stillness” (270). From Kierkegaard’s discussion above we know what “noise” means here. The noise is the prevailing political and social order, the hierarchical social system grounded in comparisons, class distinctions between the weak and strong. The Communion service silences the business and busyness of life, then proclaims the officially un-holy day holy. “Today . . . is not a holy day, and yet a little group has gathered here in the sanctuary, not because it is prescribed for all (since it is prescribed for none), but because each individual of those present must have especially felt, even though in different ways, the need to resort to this place precisely today. Today is not a holy day; today everyone goes routinely to his fields, to this business, to his work; only these few individuals came to the Lord’s house today” (269). Against the “noise” of life, the “stillness” of the Communion service appears like an escape from reality. Christ’s invitation pertains to the weak and the weak always “hold up the work” (262). Weakness is impractical and the Communion service is precisely that: a holding up of the work. Prayer fails to get the job done. This delaying action, this interruption (on a weekday nonetheless) is gratuitous and excessive. It is a symbol of what Kierkegaard thinks is most essential about religious life: that God is essentially *unnecessary*. For

those who pride themselves on being busy, prayer appears like leisure or escapism, a holiday from real life, something private and useless. The Communion service, the life of prayer as a whole seems indulgent because it is apparently a holiday from real life, a longing for rest, a rest defined by the mundane, secular all-too-busy world *out there*. And yet, Kierkegaard says, the communion with Christ pertains to life everywhere and always. The life of prayer is *real* life. “Yes, even if you fled to the uttermost parts of the world, he knows you; even if you hid in the bottomless pit, he knows you” but there is no reason to flee, no reason to seek a hiding place, because the blessedness is precisely this, that he knows you” (272). God is “human kind’s eternal sun” his acquaintance with humankind . . . penetrates to everyone everywhere like rays of light. . . .” (272). The Friday Communion service declares the weekday a holy day because *every* moment is holy. Being known by God, a person’s highest blessing, is *everyday* life. The crowd is essentially an illusion ó everywhere and always. The longing for God (which appears utterly impractical, as being dead to the world) is unto life.

But this understanding (that prayer is life itself) has profound implications. As Kierkegaard puts it referencing the gospels, “If you are offering your gift at the altar and you there remember that someone has something against you, then first go and become reconciled with your enemy and then come and offer your gift.” The altar, Kierkegaard says, is everywhere, for “where he is, there is the Communion table” (273). The “altar is neither on Moriah nor on Gerizim” but “is there where he [Christ] is.” *On the one hand*: what is more impractical than this: the non-combatant *neither . . . nor*. Practical life requires either Moriah or Gerizim and calls neutrality cowardice and escapism. The life of

prayer is impractical because it is out of step with life as we know it. It is life in God, who fails to distinguish properly between enemy and friend, strong and weak. *On the other hand*, what is more practical than the life of reconciliation? Just when a person is about to offer his gift at the altar he is called to offer *himself*, sacrifice his worldly reputation. Here the person struggling with his own sins, his *own* life, is *being known* by God -- and God knows the enemy too. Nothing is more concrete than this; but it is the wrong kind of concretion, neither Gerizim nor Moriah, but rather a life of prayer without ceasing, *always* and *everywhere*, in the presence of the enemy too. "Today is not a holy day; today there is a divine service on a weekday" oh, but a Christian's life is a divine service every day! "If you went up to the Lord's table and took part in the sacred act, if you could definitely certify that you had been to Communion, if the Lord's servant corroborates that he has handed the bread and wine to you in particular, just as to each of the others" if *he* did not know you, then you would receive Holy Communion in vain. One can point physically to the Communion table and say, "See, there it is," but in the spiritual sense the Communion table is *there* only if you are *known there* by him" (273, emphasis original). The communion is everywhere and confined to nowhere in particular; it is ordinary life, immeasurably practical. God is everywhere and so the Communion table is wherever "you are *known*" by God. A person can neither confine the Communion table to a particular time and place, nor pretend there is no table at all, no meal of reconciliation. The table has already been set and the outcast and a person's very enemy have been invited.

In the gospels Christ says that God ðovercome[s] all the power of the enemyö (Luke 10:19). But as Kierkegaard reminds us in the fourth discourse, this overcoming is not a question of political power. Alluding to Luke 10, Kierkegaard writes, ðOh, there are those who perhaps pray that it might be granted them to see what kings and princes futilely desired to see, one of his days of glory [see Luke 10:24]. Do not regret your choice, for truly that person chose the better part¹¹¹ who first and foremost prays that the terror [of this night] might stand vividly before himö (276). But what does it mean to overcome the power of enemy by turning inward in prayerful meditation on Christø passion? Is this inward turn away from the world a question of self-mastery? Is it an internal power-struggle, a substitute for external power?

Kierkegaard bids his congregation meditate again on Christø Passion in silence. ðLet it now become only night around you; indeed, this belongs to the holy act.ö As a miracle worker Christ attracted all who wanted him ðproclaimed kingö and ðwhom the high priests later did not dare lay hand because all the people clung to himö (276). But on this very night Christ is condemned to death. ðIt was in this way, humanly speaking, that he has now come down in the worldö (276).

Thus his life was retrogression [*Tilbagegang*]¹¹² instead of progression [*Fremgang*], the opposite of what the human mentality naturally thinks and covets. In a worldly way, a person ascends rung by rung in honor and prestige and power; steadily more and more people accept his cause, until he who was continually in the majority, finally admired by everyone, stands on the highest rung. But he, in reverse descended rung by rung, and yet he ascended; and this is how truth must sufferô or be singled out for distinction in the worldô so truly was he the truth. . . . [N]ow he ascends rung by rung through all the marks of abasement, until finally he is crucified. (277)

¹¹¹ Notice the allusion here to the impractical Mary, who sat at Christø feet (Luke 10:42).

¹¹² The Communion service, the *Altergang* (lit. altar walk) is a memorial of Christø *Tilbagegang*.

God, Kierkegaard says, is not relevant to any human calendar; God's time is the *holy weekday*. Here, even as the sun sets Christ rises and fills the dark night with glory. "The place is the same, the high priests are the same, the same governor, the people are the same" yes, and he also is the same. When at one time they wanted to proclaim him king, he *fled*, and when they come armed to arrest him, he *goes to meet* the sentry and says, "Whom do you seek?" (277, emphasis original). The drama before us is pure "retrogression," a "rung by rung" descent, in appearance nothing but defeat, *life* in retrogression. When the crowds try to idolize Christ he flees. When they come to arrest him he meets them. Here everything is opposite. God lives in time indeed and the glory of God shines forth; but God's history runs the wrong way. "He was betrayed" but he was Love: *on the night when he was betrayed*, he instituted the meal of love! Always the same! Those who crucified him, for them he prayed; and on the night when he was betrayed, he uses the occasion (infinitely deep the love that finds this very moment convenient!), he uses the occasion to institute the meal of reconciliation" (280). Christ finds precisely "this very moment," this dark night of betrayal, "inconvenient" and institutes the meal of reconciliation. Christ's life is nothing but a life of prayer, an orientation in the light of the Father's communicative presence, an unwavering participation in holiness. "Yes, he makes repayment [*Gjengjeld*] for what they do against him! They crucify him" in repayment his death on the cross is the sacrifice of Atonement for the sin of the world, also for this, that they crucified him! They betray him" in repayment he institutes the meal of reconciliation for all!" (280). This repayment is the uneconomic exchange above all ó Life for death. The repayment is utterly

impractical; it accomplishes nothing worldly. But it is real life, not escapism. Christ could have told his disciples to hope for a lifeless eternity not unlike death. In a sense, this would also have defeated sin. It would have mortified life and proved the spirit superior to the flesh. It would have been a viable *solution* to the problem of sin. But if God were merely a solution to sin, sin would define God. God would be a mere negation, a nihilistic desire. But there is only one reality that saves, Kierkegaard says: the God of the living, not the dead.

The communion with the living God remains politically impractical because it cannot teach a person how to defeat his enemy. The meal *is being* instituted and already includes the enemy. A person can accept the invitation, let the longing for the meal carry him away -- or not: this is the only choice; but in a person's refusal to join the meal he succumbs to illusion, an unreal, false life, a rebellion against God. We can now see again why God's communication is unsystematic, unmediated by political institutions or systematic philosophy for Kierkegaard. It is not because God speaks in tongues; it is not because the longing for God is a subjective feeling. It is because God initiates an unfailing "acquaintance," a new way of life, immeasurably superior to a person's old way of living. God's way of life gives new meaning to life, pours new wine into old wineskins; but this meaning educates, raises up; it fails to satisfy prevailing social or political expectations. As a true education it disorients and leaves the student perpetually uneasy and in longing for reality. This unease is a consequence of the communication and not a subjective feeling, a private possession. The education begins to communicate a whole life, a way of living, God's life. At first the whole appears merely as a shameful

offense. God gives himself unconditionally but fails to overpower evil and fails to distinguish between strong and weak. For Kierkegaard, it is indeed terrible to fall into the hands of the living God: God's immeasurable goodness is a person's shame and reason for escape ó from God. But Kierkegaard says that God's goodness, exemplified in his "acquaintance with humankind," is precisely why there is "no reason to flee." "Yes, even if you fled to the uttermost parts of the world, he knows you; even if you hid in the bottomless pit, he knows you" but there is no reason to flee, no reason to seek a hiding place, because the blessedness is precisely this, that he knows you" (272). God's very acquaintance gives reason to flee but also gives reason for longing ó for God. Clinging to God, for Kierkegaard, is not an escape from reality. A person's salvation lies not in escapism but in eternal reason: the no-reason-to-flee. God educates and fails to satisfy pre-existing needs, egoistic expectations ó but there *is* one need God satisfies: the very pain of the need to flee. God satisfies the very longing that God evokes in the soul.

For Kierkegaard, God gives himself and this giving happens in a particular culture. It is embodied in old wine skins, the same old words, the same body, the same system of symbols, signs and signifiers. But in God's communication the old vessels burst and new life pours out. The words become voice, his voice, personal communication. Is this a violence against culture in the name of universalism, a violence against the body in the name of transcendence? But Kierkegaard's understanding of divine communication is inherently self-critical. The key to humility is precisely to recognize that God transcends *our* understanding or *our* culture. This is impossible if we identify Christianity with a *particular* system of knowledge or institutions. But in fact,

for Kierkegaard, the meal of reconciliation remains relevant to different cultures because no one can possess God. The meal is real insofar as it actually and invariably confronts egoism, insofar as it actually includes ó against a person's own will ó his very enemy. We cannot understand the Passion narrative any other way, for Kierkegaard. The letter of the word only communicates if a person reads it prayerfully in the spirit of the divine acquaintance. This means that the first attitude towards God is one of self-critique, not triumphalism. "His innocent sacrifice is not past even though the cup of suffering is empty, is not a bygone event although it is past, is not an event finished and done with although it was eighteen hundred years ago, would not become that even if it were eighteen thousand years ago." We cannot "wash our hands" of Christ because "we are not spectators" (278). To say that God is historical is sometimes taken to be a comforting thought. If God has revealed himself in time and place, then we are *already* on the right track in a sense. After all, God revealed himself in flesh and now history has meaning. The history of princes and kings, Western history as a whole, is now also the history of God. But for Kierkegaard, to say that God is related to human beings is anything but comforting. In the prayerful reading of scripture a person is invited to the meal of reconciliation. This meal is as real as the first one. The invitation remains forever irrelevant to a person's desire for relevance because it is too historical, too close for comfort. God's eternal *now* ó his real acquaintance ó remains a disruption of every now. Very real and very intimate God's acquaintance places judgement on the everyday business of life, the holy weekday. Kierkegaard says that a person cannot presume to think that he too would not have rejected Christ's uneconomic repayment. Here,

Kierkegaard says, a person has to see himself in Peter one of Christ's closest companions, who nevertheless betrayed Christ. The presence of Christ was for Peter a never ending disruption, an eternal transcendence. Christ quoted the old scriptures; he spoke the old language; but at every turn his transcendent life offended Peter's expectations. "Alas, we human beings, even if we are of the truth, are still alongside *the truth*; when we walk side by side with the man who is *the Truth*, when *the Truth* is the criterion, we are still like children alongside a giant; in the moment of decision we still remain" accomplices" (278). Peter's betrayal says something about human beings, or rather (ethically speaking), it says something about *me*: " . . . I have seen *love* betrayed, and I have understood something about myself, that I also am a human being, and to be a human being is to be a sinful human being. I have not become misanthropic because of that, least of all so that I would hate other people, but I will never forget this sight nor what I have understood about myself" (279). The sight of love betrayed causes the self to shrink back in fear of *itself*. "From this moment I will no longer believe in myself; I will not let myself be deceived, as if I were better because I was not tried as were those contemporaries" (280). A person's acquaintance with truth (the "of the truth") is the very cause of longing for truth (the "alongside the truth"). The longing for God is evoked here by the discomfiting presence of truth. The uneconomic meal transcends every economy, every attempt to keep a person's house in order, every attempt at self-sufficiency. In the very *presence* of truth a person can only say: "From this moment I will no longer believe in myself." The sorrow of longing is not just over sin *itself*, but over the sight of love betrayed, the meal of love rejected, God's unending acquaintance with humankind. The

acquaintance is at first a mystery incomprehensible to understanding. But the mystery is not a vague feeling, an uneasy, ghostly experience, a sudden apparition. The mystery is communicated; it is language, a way of life; the exigency of the spoken Word reveals the personal nature of the communication. God gives himself. The communicator stands by his word. The first word promises the whole. Even that first moment of divine acquaintance makes the soul long; in longing the person turns away from self-satisfaction and practical needs towards the whole and into God's way of life. Christ speaks in word and action, makes use of the well-known signs; but the signs and forms break open, filled with a new spirit, new meaning pours out. A person understands the individual words *immediately*, but the message as a whole offends the sensibilities, offends common sense; the message makes no sense. The very exigency of the revelation arrests a person's attention and draws him away from self towards the whole, God's personal love. This drawing goes in the wrong direction; it is out of order, in worldly terms nothing but crucifixion.

From a worldly perspective Christ marches towards his own death and eternal irrelevancy. But appearances deceive. "The anxiety that wants to frighten me away from him, so that I, too, could betray him, is precisely what will attach me to him. . . ." The very thing that "wants to frighten me away is what binds me to him!" Therefore, I will not sink into "guilt consciousness" and "enclose myself in myself." "I will not" do this "because he moves me irresistibly [*bevæger mig uimodstaaeligh*]" (280).¹¹³ In Christ, a person *begins* to live again. This beginning belongs neither to Gerizim *nor* Moriah to be

¹¹³ See notes 103 and 104 on this question of being "moved" by God.

sure. But this neither . . . nor is nevertheless a beginning, a beginning immeasurably more concrete and real than either Gerizim or Moriah. The life of prayer for Kierkegaard is both real and true because it refuses the Weberian bargain, the exchange of uncritical conformity to practical life in exchange for heaven, the levelling of all worldly practice in exchange for something unreal, the demystification of earthly life in exchange for a paradise beyond life. The life of prayer begins now, for Kierkegaard; it begins in God's beginning in us. (Moreover, as we shall more explicitly in the following discourses, longing refuses a person the satisfaction of self-mastery. The person who cannot find a home in either Gerizim or Moriah may well turn inward. If he cannot conquer the world, integrate the world into his life, perhaps he can conquer himself. But the suffering of longing will not permit this illusion. The soul says: The sight of Christ "moves me irresistibly" and for this reason "I will no longer believe in myself." We turn to the theme of self-mastery in the next discourse; that is, we turn from the failure of world-mastery to the failure of self-mastery).

For Kierkegaard, a person only knows God by being invited and following the lovingly given invitation to the Communion table. In prayer a person *begins* to know God's way of life, the *whole* of God's eternal concern. To put it in Augustine's terms, the person begins to see God's way of seeing. A person begins to know the whole in being loved by God. Knowing in this sense takes place over time. Over time, over all times and places, above all distinctions, above the business of worldly living and distractions: God's timeless timeliness, the "infinitely deep love that finds this very moment convenient," that "uses the occasion to institute the meal of reconciliation." As it

happens, a person cannot perceive God's love-history immediately. Kierkegaard is talking about a gradual coming to know, a manner of orientation appropriate to longing; a knowing of love in love. This longsuffering is a useless and impractical pedagogy. God inhabits neither Gerizim nor Moriah and cannot distinguish between friend and enemy. God solves no preconceived problem. The invitation to the meal of reconciliation is the very problem itself, the very cause of the most profound kind of suffering: the longing for God.

Christ is the Teacher, for Kierkegaard, not because a person can possess him philosophically or dogmatically but because he is the perfection of humility. Normally a person wants life to progress rung by rung in honour and prestige and power. . . . (277). But Christ fails every expectation. As miracle worker Christ ascended the ladder of success even as he was really moving in the opposite direction; and so as the trappings of the illusions fell away, as he descended rung by rung, his true mission revealed itself (277). Nevertheless, this understanding of movement towards death is in itself an illusion. Kierkegaard also says that Christ ascends rung by rung through all the marks of abasement, until finally he is crucified (277). The descent is nevertheless an ascent. Christ's descent to the lowest point is a consequence of his ascent towards the Father. Christ, Kierkegaard seems to say, stretches from lowest to highest; he is the bridge, the one who revealed the Way, stretched between here and there: longing itself. Christ is both God's self-communication and human receptivity, the whole divine act of communication. This stretching out, this longing, this making long, is our example. But there is nothing here a person can hang onto politically or socially. Every time a person

claims Christ triumphalistically she falls into contradiction: she claims for herself utter humility, longing itself. The very perfection of Christ from a human perspective is nothing but self-emptying, an unwavering participation in the Father's communicative activity. This is the real history of a person's relationship to Christ, for Kierkegaard. A person discovers her very need for God only through God's actual self-communication, through the Word. A person has access to the Father at all places and times, not because he is an impersonal idea in the head, but because the Father communicates eternally. This is not the history of world as such but of the communication that eternally breaks through cultural prejudice and parochialism, *both Moriah and Gerizim*. The Father *is* in Christ's longing *for* the supper. Christ strives against temptation but this striving is utter obedience, a perfect attunement to the Father's acquaintance with humankind "new every day." Christ's victory over sin is not a cause for triumphalism because a person cannot admire it as a spectacle. No one can speak *about* Christ, as Kierkegaard puts it above. As it happens, the table has already been set, the guests already invited. There is no *about*.

For Kierkegaard, the Communion service does not establish anything politically permanent, tangibly real. According to scripture, as Kierkegaard notes in the third discourse, God has started "the good work in you" but will finish it "on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." In a devout sense we could call *this day* the day of the Lord. Nevertheless, "there is still only one day that really is called the day of Jesus Christ" (274). In longing, Kierkegaard says, a person looks forward with expectation because she has been called. The *presence* of the Word draws the person out of herself, calls her to a higher, *unfinished* life. The journey of God's love has begun but still longs for perfection.

This very day is an imperfection, a longing for perfection. *That* day is not *this* very day. As Kierkegaard tells his congregation, "God grant that when it [this day] is long since gone and forgotten" the blessing of this day, recollected again and again, may still be a vivid recollection for you, so that the remembrance of the blessing may be a blessing" (274). This day remains a blessing, a holy day; but it is nevertheless not *that* day. In this sense, today remains a holy day in recollection: a moment in God. Existentially a person struggles with the historical consciousness that reduces this very day to the past in recollection. A person even has the ungodly ability to make this day nothing but a past and the future nothing but a blind wish. *Nevertheless*, for Kierkegaard, longing for God here is precisely informed by God's love. A person longs for *that* day, not because she is fed up with today, but because she has already been invited to and perhaps even feasted on the meal of reconciliation in God's presence. Kierkegaard calls this very day a blessing because it already belongs to God -- in expectancy. This "today" is not merely fallen time but God's time. If the *today* of today were merely a cause for despair, *longing* would be superfluous, an unnecessary suffering. If a person were merely in despair, it would be easier to simply kill off the spirit, to escape the daily drudgery, everything polluted by human life, the nausea of living, to fall into limbo (lifeless eternity) by drugs or suicide. The problems of every-day life lends existential urgency to longing; but the longing in question here is not conditioned by daily life. The "today" of today is God's time, God's holy weekday.

The longing for God disrupts a person's attempt to integrate her life with the community at large. However, the soul's movement beyond Moriah or Gerizim does not *revert* to egoism and self-enclosure, to an inward struggle for self-mastery. Prayer life, for Kierkegaard, is not a way of integrating a person's ego. As Kierkegaard argues in the fifth discourse, prayer is a communicative relationship, not an introverted self-examination. Self-examination can certainly make a person more honest before God. But it is also true that the most "earnest and honest self-examination" leads to the Psalmist's conclusion: "Who knows his errors? From my hidden faults cleanse thou me" [Psalm 19:12] (287). Indeed, who "completely knows his faithlessness" and "who would dare to think that in his very self-examination there could not be faithlessness!" A person cannot, Kierkegaard says, find "rest this way" for his soul. A person can only find rest "in the blessed comfort that even if we are faithless, he still is faithful" (288). No amount of self-examination can cure this anxiety. There is "no perfectly blessed faithfulness except that with which a person clings to Christ" (284). Or as Augustine puts it in *The Trinity*, the good is not that which the soul "can hover over in judgement," but that which it can "cleave to" in love (*op. cit.*, VIII.4). Only in actually clinging can a person become faithful – *because* God is faithful. Faithfulness is not self-mastery, not a certainty a person can win. God, Kierkegaard says, "cannot enclose himself with his love within himself, he who out of love sacrificed himself for the world. But the one who encloses himself within himself and refuses to have anything to do with others, he indeed denies himself." Or as he puts it, quoting 2 Tim. 2:12-13: God "cannot deny himself" (288). By journeying into God, into Love, a person begins to see that God is essentially

self-giving and continually fulfills the promise of that first moment of self-revelation. God continues to perfect the relationship he first established. Even at that point when God seems furthest away, when a person is thrown out in the stream, as the teacher usually does with a pupil, even when God is seemingly testing a person or even then he does not enclose himself within himself. This is the experience of unconditional divine attentiveness, an eternal faithfulness that abides even on the darkest night, when God seems immeasurably distant. It is God's holding on to us without fail because he cannot deny himself (286). Faithfulness is therefore not a strenuous effort on a person's part, but rather a communion in divine love. But this means that prayer takes on new meaning. Prayer is not a struggle with self but a matter of silence and thanksgiving, because when you are silent you understand him, and best when you are completely silent; and when you give thanks, then he understands you, and best when you give thanks always (284). In silence a person begins to hear God and in thanksgiving God begins to hear the person. Thanksgiving is a divine language if it dwells in the spirit of the relationship with God. Here a person begins to know God in the dialogue. No one can predict the outcome of the communication because it lives and breathes in God. God's love is not predictable because it invariably raises a person up, takes him out of himself. Prayer is therefore not a means of self-discipline, a practical solution, a way to achieve self-mastery or mastery of the world. If this were the case God would indeed be all-too-practical, defined merely by human need and sin itself. But God's love is not a weakness that plaintively stands in need of those who should be saved, but it is the mercy to everyone who needs to be saved (283). God's communicative presence offends,

disorients, raises up; it makes the soul long. For Kierkegaard, Truth has come into the world that a person might have life and have it to the full. God is not for use but the end and beginning of all life.

This means that a person can only know God in prayer, in God's self-communication, not *through* God's works. While God is *ömanifestö* in nature and is *öknown* in his works, *ö* in prayer God *öis* known as he has revealed himself, *ö* that is, *öas* he wants to be known *ö* (291). *ö*When God had created everything, he looked at it and behold, *ö*it was all very good,*ö* and every one of his works seems to bear the appendage: *Praise, thank, worship the Creatorö* (291, emphasis original). But beauty is also a temptation. A person is tempted to see beauty as an immediate, non-relational moment, removed from Life, from ultimate purpose. This idolatry turns to despair because it renders nature purposeless, immediate, something for private pleasure *here and now*. This privatization of nature is the temptation. But as personal, God's intimate presence demands prayerful humility in the communicative whole. *ö*See, this is the greatness of God about which we should speak particularly in the holy places, because here we do indeed know God in a different way, more intimately [*nærmere*]¹¹⁴ if one may say so [*om man saa tør sige*],¹¹⁵ than out there, where he surely is manifest, is known in his works, whereas here he is known as he has revealed himself as he wants to be known by the Christian *ö* (290-291). In prayerful and worshipful silence a person learns God *öas* he wants to be known. *ö* God reveals himself, not as we want him to be revealed (i.e. immediately according to egoistic desires) but as *öhe* wants to be known. *ö* The revelation

¹¹⁴ Literally, closer.

¹¹⁵ The Danish *tør* (dare) tells us that we are speaking of a kind of intimacy close to, or easily confused with, sacrilegious impertinence.

is a true communication, an education. The works of nature are ðsignsö of God ðbecause the works themselves are the signsö (291). But the signs of the Communion do not speak to a person in the same way. In their humility they direct a person's attention towards the mystery of ðGod's greatness in showing mercy.ö They are therefore ðindeed the sacramentö (291). Nature evokes astonishment but the mystery of God's mercy offends, so that ðappended to his [God's] greatness in showing mercy is: *Blessed is he who is not offended*ö (291, emphasis original). God's mercy offends human pride because it fails to distinguish between friend and enemy, strong and weak. Even in intimacy or precisely in intimacy, the presence reveals itself as immeasurably different from human expectations. The gulf here is between God's mercy and human understanding. ðWhen it comes to describing our relation to the Deity, this human language is certainly second-rate and half-trueö (286). A person must admit, Kierkegaard says, that ðlanguage seems to burst and break in order to describe God's greatness in showing mercyö (292).

But God's immeasurable goodness is not Other in a way that causes the sinner to become enclosed within himself (as Kierkegaard puts it in the fourth discourse [280]). Self-enclosure is actually a *response* to God's goodness; it is the face that hides itself in shame. This temptation of self-enclosure is an ðanxiety that wants to frighten me away from him. . . ö (280). But the very cause for self-condemnation is God's love moving in the opposite direction towards the person and opening him up. Both self-condemnation and grace exist in an active relationship with divine goodness. Self-condemnation (self-enclosure) moves away from God *in response* to God's goodness; longing moves towards God *in response* to God's goodness. In this sense, as Kierkegaard says, the very love that

causes the soul to shrink back from God (into self-enclosure) is also a person's salvation. The sacraments speak to this movement. The sacraments are set apart as holy and *remain* holy in relationship to God. Only in the refusal to set bread and wine apart as something in themselves (in the refusal of *self-enclosure*) can they become set apart as sacred, the binding of thing to God. The bread is set apart, made sacred in relationship to divine love. The apparent triviality of the bread is a reminder of God's unceasing outpouring of love. This sign only exists in communication, only insofar as it stands with the one who stands by his word. Self-enclosure is a false existence, for Kierkegaard. The true life is a loving openness to God. For Kierkegaard, this means that a person cannot know God by ascending up to God, but rather by lowering his gaze in humility. "Neither does a human being come closer and closer to God by lifting up his head higher and higher, but inversely by casting himself down ever more deeply in worship" (292). For Kierkegaard, a person knows God precisely in the refusal to enclose being. Being in God is being open to God's communicative activity. In this sense, the connection between sacrament and God is not an impersonal, imminent, natural force connecting all life to God. The connection between sacrament and God is love. The connection happens dialogically, only in *sacramental activity*, in actually "casting" oneself "down even more deeply in worship."

Here the paradoxical expression, the comparison that is no comparison at all, provides the point of departure for a person's orientation in grace. Kierkegaard says that the best way to compare God's loving mercy with human mercy is *not* to "compare God to the noblest, the purest, the most reconciling, the most loving person who has ever

livedö but with the self-condemning heart (292). But what is greatness according to human understanding? For a human being ögreatness of heart is to master oneself in love [Kjerlighed]ö (292). That is, the great heart is the heart that struggles to master itself for the sake of others. However, for Kierkegaard, the heart that struggles to master itself is also the heart that condemns itself, even unto death, as we have seen. It is therefore ambiguous how we are to understand Kierkegaard when he now equates love with self-mastery. Is the human understanding of greatness perhaps flawed from the beginning? Is the heart that loves greatly also the heart that condemns itself greatly? That Kierkegaard does not want to compare God's greatness with the ordinary human understanding of greatness is noteworthy. Certainly this must be because he thinks human greatness is an illusion, that human greatness in self-mastery is indeed onto death. Kierkegaard is concerned with the heart that condemns itself because that heart is, in a very real sense, closer to truth (than the apparently great heart). It is closer to needing God aright, as Kierkegaard puts it in the first upbuilding discourse examined in chapter three. öWhat a strange comparison! All human purity, all human mercy is not good enough for comparison; but a repenting heart that condemns itselfö with this is compared God's greatness in showing mercy, except that God's greatness is even greater: as deep as this heart can lower itself, and yet never itself deep enough, so infinitely elevated, or infinitely more elevated, is God's greatness in showing mercy! See language seems to burst and break in order to describe God's greatness in showing mercyö (292). Kierkegaard uses plenty of positive symbols throughout the discourses (love, care, concern, etc.) to help narrate the personal relationship with God. However, just as the glory of nature can

distract a person from the relational meaning of nature (as gift from God), there is a sense in which the positive symbol can do the same. Positive symbols are appropriate if they admit their own inadequacy, if they are a response to God's love (which always bursts and breaks language, which always exceeds every idolatrous attempt to contain truth in word). However, the paradoxical expression in its very negativity, in its sacramental humility, openly admits its own poverty. Let us note why this is the case. It is poor not because God is unknowable but because language is trying to express a living, personal relationship, God's way of seeing a person, God's way of opening up the heart that condemns itself.

It limps, this comparison – a human being always does after wrestling with God. It is far-fetched, this comparison – indeed is, because it was found by God-fearingly rejecting all human likeness. If a human being does not dare to make for himself any image of God, then surely he does not dare to imagine that the human could be a direct comparison. Let no one be in a hurry in seeking, let no one be too hasty in wanting to have found a comparison for God's greatness in showing mercy. Every mouth is to be stopped; everyone is to beat his breast – because there is only one comparison that is any at all, a troubled heart that condemns itself. (293)

The comparison is "far-fetched," says Kierkegaard, because it is God-fearing. It speaks truth only "after wrestling with God" or only after actually "casting" oneself "down even more deeply in worship" (292, emphasis added). The paradoxical expression is an expression of contrition in *response* to God's grace. It fails to contain God ontologically (in a chain of being rising upwards) because it points to a communicative relationship: God's love of the sinner, a love immeasurably greater than a person's capacity for self-mastery or for self-condemnation. "You do not reach the possibility of comparison by the ladder of direct likeness: great greater, greatest; it is possibly only inversely" (292). We

must compare this with the ladder of the fourth discourse: the life of Christ, which is both retrogression and ascent. Christ ascends in his descent, in his communicative openness with the Father's love. Likewise, the paradoxical word reveals God's mercy because it longs to ascend by descending; in humility it longs to become open to God.

And if it is a ton of guilt that rests upon you, take comfort, writes Kierkegaard: the one who on his own initiative [*af sig selv*]¹¹⁶ (something that did not arise in any human heart) showed mercy upon the world, he is great! God's mercy is his own; it did not arise in the human heart. But this is precisely the blessing: that God is Word and *can* give *of himself*. Or from the human point of view, the blessing is that God's mercy did not arise in any human heart, that God fails to satisfy human needs, indeed, that God fails to satisfy the heart that condemns itself -- in condemning itself. Do not torture yourself, remember that woman, that there was no one who condemned her, and bear in mind that this same thing can be expressed also in another way: Christ was present. Precisely because he was present, there was no one who condemned her (294). The goal of the Communion service is indeed to *be* with Christ for *his sake*. Here God reveals his active, self-giving love. The gift is himself, this love-relationship; and the blessing is this of himself which exceeds the glory of nature and the human capacity for self-condemnation. The second to last sentence of the discourse reads: Out there the stars proclaim your majesty, and the perfection of everything proclaims your greatness, but in here it is the imperfect, it is sinners who praise your even greater greatness! (296). This

¹¹⁶ The Danish reads literally: . . . he who gives of himself. . . . The phrase has a double meaning in Danish. *Af sig selv* means both of his own accord and of himself, that is, out of his very self. Indeed God's mercy is freely given in love and therefore also of his very self, of his loving concern. In this sense, God gives himself in giving his gifts.

surely evokes Kant's starry sky/inner law comparison. But the entire discourse is precisely a critique of Kantian inwardness, which is great in self-mastery but weak in its loveless and merciless self-scrutiny. For Kierkegaard, there is no way to postulate a solution to this self-condemnation. God's love is greater precisely because it did not arise in any heart, in any merciless heart -- great in self-condemnation.

4.

The last of the seven discourses is on Luke 24:51 (‘‘And it happened, as he blessed them, he was parted from them’’). At first the discourse seems to be about what happens after the Communion service, after we part from Christ and go out into the world (297). Kierkegaard asks, does Christ continue to bless us in our worldly activities? How are we to live out there in the world? How is God relevant *there*? But Kierkegaard concludes that worldly success is no evidence for God's blessings. ‘‘No, the blessing is the good in itself; it is infinitely more glorious and blessed than all success’’ (279). The discourse then begins to reverse course. What is important, Kierkegaard says, is not how we go out into the world, but how we enter into communion with God (280). That Kierkegaard speaks again of entering into communion with Christ in a discourse about parting from Christ, surely suggests (once again) that the communion with Christ is daily life. Even in ‘‘parting’’ from Christ we remain in Christ in prayer. ‘‘You partake not only of the bread and wine as blessed, but when you partake of the bread and the wine you partake of the blessing, and this is really the supper. Only he who instituted this supper, only he can prepare it’’ because at the Communion table he is the blessing’’ (300). Christ

is the blessing. Only in communicating with one who is personally present does a person receive the blessing. The blessing is therefore not a charm for good luck to help us succeed in the *apparently* real world. A human undertaking may well succeed or fail with or without God's blessing. The one who asks for divine assistance so that his undertaking will succeed, humanly speaking . . . does not pray worthily (297). But the one who prays worthily asks that "God will bless his praying so that it might be or become the right praying!" Right praying is an orientation in the good itself, in him who is the blessing; it is not a means to an end, a tool for a person's use.

For this reason: "You receive Holy Communion in order to meet him, *for whom you long more every time you are parted from him*" (298, emphasis added). A person participates in the supper in order to "meet him." But the *more* a person "meet[s] him," Kierkegaard says, the more he longs for him, he who is the blessing. The encounter does not satisfy longing. It is the encounter itself that evokes longing. The end of longing is an eternal beginning, an eternal encounter and renewal in communicative relationship. The practice of prayer, the discipline of contemplation, owes nothing to a person's will-power. The more a person prays, the weaker he becomes and the more he longs for God. At the Communion table a person is "entirely in need." "At the Communion table," Kierkegaard tells his readers, it is you who are far from God in sin, "you who dared *not* step forward"; but "it is someone else who paid the debt, someone else who accomplished the reconciliation, someone else who brought you close to God, someone else who suffered and died to restore everything, someone else who steps forward for you" (299, emphasis added). This stepping forward is the opposite of worldly success. It is a becoming

nothing before Godö (298), a becoming more and more in need of God's mercy. For this reason, the bread and wine are really the supper because they were prepared by him who is the blessing. No measure of efficacy can judge the supper successful or unsuccessful. The supper is prepared personally and is therefore good in itself. But it is not only the gifts that are blessed no, the supper itself is the blessingö (300).

The discourse here defines success spiritually-pedagogically. Prayer is an education in God, good for its own sake. For Kierkegaard, therefore, God's real presence is communicative, not affective (that is, God communicates himself; he does not simply cause a vague or arbitrary feeling in a person unrelated to the personal whole, the whole of his loving care). God's self-revelation, in this sense, is not an anarchic, violent imposition, an immediate and overwhelming sensation, something like an impulse or blind feeling. If this were the case, the revelation would be a moment without history, without promise. There would be no way of even narrating the experience symbolically. The experience would leave no trace of itself, no history, no way of life. For Kierkegaard, God does indeed burst human expectations, breathe spirit into word, into vessel, into sign and signifier. But God gives a whole, not a momentary event. The whole is God himself. The one who gives, gives himself; he stands by his word. Kierkegaard's symbols point to a relational event, not a temporary overwhelming feeling. Kierkegaard's meditational passages on divine love try to orient the reader in the promise of the relational whole, although, as he also reminds us, this prayerful orientation in God himself is the work of a lifetime, stretching into eternity. But a person is able to take this journey into God because God has already given himself, given forth a way of life. In

this sense prayer is participatory; but the participatory aspect is not a radically creative gathering of strength, a will-power, a willing uninformed by the good. It is essentially a loving response to God's self-revelation.

Christ ascends and the clouds hide him; but the blessing abides (296). According to appearances Christ is a disappearing vision lost in the clouds. Christ departs this specific time and place. But this parting looks forward with expectation. The disciples who are left behind long to live in God's Word -- which abides. They long for this eternal communion because they have already begun to live it in Christ. But the longing continues because Christ is not a thing for possession. To follow Christ means to live an unfinished life. The life of prayer is therefore forever a *gang* towards the Father. Christ exemplifies this movement, the Way. There is no triumphalism in being a Christian, for Kierkegaard, because Christ is not a doctrine but the perfection of human longing; Christ is utter humility, truly God and truly human in communicative relationship. In clinging to Christ a person opens up to God's Word, begins to experience what it means to be loved by God. In God a person begins to see herself in God's seeing, as Augustine puts it. The unfinished aspect of life in God is God's *eternally unfinished* seeing. The ego experiences God's seeing as a perpetually open wound of love. In God the cosmos no longer revolves around the ego, around the struggle for self-mastery. Longing grips the soul and the person become less and less self-centered, less and less an ego. Again and again the ego pulls itself together, tries to sustain itself. But God's real presence is eternally disruptive; the soul cannot forget God and it cannot help but ache for healing ó from the wounds of God's love.

5.

The Communion discourses as a whole begin with a meditation on the first disruption of introverted self-scrutiny. A person experiences this disruption as an itch (as Augustine calls it) or a mood. But the itch is a dim vision of the soul's estrangement from God. Next, the discourses move to a meditation on the cause of this vision, God's self-communication. The clearer God's presence manifests itself, the more a person begins to shrink back. Christ invites but the introverted soul begins to condemn itself even as it longs for healing. Here we gain clarity about the nature of the dark night of the senses and the soul. God is the disorienting source of the darkness. The divine invitation dis-integrates the person. The person begins to long for God but the ego struggles for survival, struggles to condemn itself, struggles to enclose itself within itself. As Augustine puts it in God's voice: "I am the food of the mature; grow then, and you will eat me. You will not change me into yourself like bodily food: you will be changed into me" (VII.10.16). For Kierkegaard, God is not the solution to existential restlessness but the very cause. God is an unending disruption of self-satisfaction, the unending "you will be changed into me." The sacramental stance before God appears like utter humiliation to the world. What is this, the world says, but a death-wish, a violence against the self? But for Kierkegaard, this dying to the world is unto new life in God. As Augustine writes, the soul "longs to be, and loves to rest in what it loves" (IV.10.15). The restful intimacy of love is also *being*, a way of living in the eternally un-satisfying God-relationship. In God, the soul begins to see the blessing of being in need, as Kierkegaard puts it the upbuilding discourses. Here a person begins to hunger *because* he eats and



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burn *because* of God's healing touch. The soul prays to God: *ōI tasted you, and I hunger
and thirst;/ you touched, and I burned for your peace [X.27.38].*

CONCLUSION

An identifiable spiritual narrative now begins to emerge from this reading of the upbuilding discourses and the Communion discourses. The person dissatisfied with worldly conquest turns inward and strives for self-mastery. This struggle creates a self, a person. Macrocosmically (as we saw in Schelling), this understanding of struggle is what allows us to attribute personality to the universe. The person who wants to participate in the universal whole strives to imitate the struggle microcosmically. But Kierkegaard shows how this struggle culminates in exhaustion and resignation. To live as such, he says, is to live a life of ceaseless judgement (self against self), to "cleave" to oneself, to maintain a disgust-identity, as I put it. With Augustine, Kierkegaard says that the good is not that which the soul can hover over in judgement, but the good it can "cleave to" in love.¹¹⁷

What is the solution to exhaustion? The natural solution to spiritual exhaustion is spiritual death. The person exhausted by struggle wants to die even as he wants to preserve his own identity. But the identity is not something over and above the struggle itself. The identity is the struggle for self-mastery itself. The identity is: the ego that condemns itself. Here we expect Kierkegaard to introduce God as the solution. But God cannot help a person preserve his identity. God cannot help a person *become himself* in this sense. What would this "self" be? Would it be the self that condemns itself or the self that wants to die? As Augustine shows, a person's very self (in itself) is no real "native land." It is rather a "great enigma" (IV.4.9). But like Augustine, Kierkegaard

¹¹⁷ *The Trinity, op. cit.*, VIII: 4.

traces a narrative essentially and mercifully unrelated to introversion and self-mastery. God gives rise to an utterly different existential problem. God courts the soul and the soul begins to long for resurrection, for life in God. The soul begins to know itself as it is known by God. This relational movement is essentially purgative. The person begins to *lose* himself, become *less* of a self. In the light of God's love the soul falls into disorienting darkness. Pulled towards God but tied to itself, the self begins to ache. This inarticulate mood is the beginning of life in God. The healing comes when the soul begins to turn toward the *source* of its discontentment. This source is God, the soul's true lover, who is immeasurably greater than the heart that condemns itself.

That God shares (in some measure) his inner life, the Spirit, the eternal communion between the Father and the Son, is the miracle of grace, for Kierkegaard. Grace here is God's seeing through a person's eyes, as Augustine puts it. This seeing is a perpetually disruptive vision. It is a way of knowing in God, who knows a person better than he knows himself. The Kantian readings explored above cannot properly articulate this movement. For the moralist who strives to integrate the ego, this understanding of longing is nothing but a suffering. Longing wounds and opens up the self enclosed within self, obsessed with its own imperfections, limitations and guilt. The ego *defined* by this exhausting struggle cannot but experience grace as a loss of identity. Here the person dismisses the longing as a mere itch and "let[s] it die unused as a barren mood" (*Christian Discourses*, 254). The longing is stillborn and goes to waste. But for Kierkegaard, there is wisdom in longing. The heart that aches is beginning to *need* God aright, beginning to see the blessing of being in need. Only the heart that protects itself from this aching fails

to find God. The heart that encloses itself within itself, cannot live in the one who
cannot enclose himself within himself.

I have argued that prayer is a way of life for Kierkegaard. There are a host of
practical questions that this understanding raises, however. Are there not countless things
in life that distract from God? What is the significance of all that is mundane in life?
And what elements of life would we include in this category of the "mundane"? Is family
life or political life a mere distraction from God? I have not been able to deal properly
with the social implications of Kierkegaard's understanding of longing in this thesis. To
acknowledge this limitation is perhaps a good way to conclude, because it raises again the
prospects of interpreting Kierkegaard anthropologically. That is, we might ask: what if
God's grace is really a way of "erasing" human nature, as I put it in chapter one. What if
grace is just a Gnostic violence against everything mundane, everything visible and
corporal?

In *Works of Love* Kierkegaard says that human beings need to love and be loved,
that love is "deeply. . . rooted in human nature."¹¹⁸ This is anthropological language.
Kierkegaard has no problem with this kind of language. However, we need to ask what
this "need" means concretely? Let us say that human beings have an essential need to
share their lives with others. The question still remains, share in what? In order for me to
have a conversation with another person we both have to share a language. How else
can I communicate myself and be understood? Without this shared conversational spirit,
communication would be impossible. Surely good friendships share in good

¹¹⁸Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 155.

conversations and bad friendships share in bad conversations. In this sense, conversational partners are always already oriented towards *sharable* goods, goods that transcend both partners -- even before a particular conversation begins. This pursuit of the good (in good friendships) is to some extent the responsibility of each individual. Both partners are responsible for interpreting and articulating the meaning of sharable goods. Every person I meet is indeed always already longing for some good or striving for some bad (or as Kierkegaard and Augustine hold, always already longing for God, even if this longing goes unrecognized, suppressed as a mere itch). When I look into the face of another person I do not just see a person looking back at me; I see a person with vision, a person who is already looking beyond me, as it were. His vision, his desire for some good or some evil (or indeed his longing for the good itself) cannot make itself known immediately in the fact of the encounter. In order for a person to share himself with me, he must also share his longings with me. But the person I encounter cannot articulate this vision immediately. Even if he tried to share himself like this, I would still have to participate in his vision of the good in some measure -- participate in the spirit of his word, not merely the letter. However, this is possible only if his word is not a private possession but a longing for the transcendent good, the good that allows for or calls for shared participation. Neither partner in conversation can exhaust this good; the good calls for unending participation. In this sense, loving another person can only mean *sharing* in a vision of the highest good or God. As Kierkegaard writes in *Works of Love*, "However beautiful a relationship of love has been between two people or among many, however, complete all their desire and all their bliss have been for themselves in mutual sacrifice

and devotion, even though everyone has praised this relationship – if God and the relationship with God have been omitted, then this, in the Christian sense, has not been love but a mutually enchanting defraudation of love. *To love God is to love oneself truly; to help another person to love God is to love another person; to be helped by another person to love God is to be loved.*¹¹⁹

For Kierkegaard, therefore, to say that human beings need love says very little. Social cooperation is not good for its own sake. It is essentially *not* my task (as a friend or neighbour) to *integrate* other people into my own life. Ethically speaking, the ultimate aim here is not cohesion or cooperation in itself. Indeed, we can think of instances when persons cooperate grudgingly, with violence in their hearts, a violence simmering beneath the surface, slowly eating away at their souls. A mere political compromise, a mere *modus vivendi*, cannot deal with this kind of hatred, even if backed up with the threat of punishment. This is why Kierkegaard in his ethical writings is concerned with a way of *life* shared with others. He is concerned with the goals for which people *live* their lives, not just the evil they can *avoid* cooperatively.

What is the sharable good for Kierkegaard? What is this spiritual “commonwealth” (as Augustine puts it) that allows for participation and not privatization? It is the Communion meal to which all have been invited. For Kierkegaard, the invitation to the meal has *already* gone out; God is *already* loving a church into being, a fellowship that transcends every form of nativism, racism, and sexism. Every means of exclusion bears false witness to God, in this sense. As

¹¹⁹Ibid., 107. Emphasis original.

Kierkegaard puts it in *Works of Love*, “But Christian love, which gives everything away, for that very reason has nothing to give away, not one moment, not one promise.”¹²⁰ In God there is no “mine” or “yours.” Indeed, a person’s very enemy has been invited to the Communion meal. In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard deals with what it means to live a life so attentive to God’s unconditional love that one begins to see God’s love of the enemy and turn a blind eye to hatred in the enemy’s eyes. The ethical question here is: *Since* God is always already loving a spiritual fellowship into being, how then do we respond to this love? Theology, in this sense, is essentially interpretive. The question becomes: *How* is this? *What* manner of love is this? This is why I have addressed the question of longing in Kierkegaard first. If loving another person means sharing in God, for Kierkegaard, then we have to articulate (however inadequately) what it means to live in God first. This orientation in God’s love for us is essentially a work of longing itself. It is a work that belongs to no one; all belong to it. For Kierkegaard, the church is a community devoted to the Communion meal prepared personally by Christ. However, no particular church can prepare this meal. Christ has already set the table. In the light of eternity, there is nothing I can do to hinder my enemy from joining me at the table.

What does it mean to help another person live in God? This is a question I have been unable to deal with in this thesis. We are talking here about the love that “has nothing to give away” because it “gives everything away.” It is misleading to focus merely on the negative aspect (the “nothing to give away”). If the gift is real, there has to be a real communicative interaction between gift-giver and receiver. There actually has

¹²⁰Ibid., 98.

to be a real moment of dialogue, not just an ironic silence. Indeed, why does Kierkegaard give the gift of speech, address himself to a congregation or a community of readers? Why give witness to God? This is a question that confronts Kierkegaard's Johannes de Silentio in *Fear and Trembling*. On the one hand, Johannes says, giving witness is incalculably difficult. "The true knight of faith is a witness, never the teacher. . . . He who desires only to be a witness confesses thereby that no man, not even the most unimportant man, needs another's participation or is to be devalued by it in order to raise another's value. But since he himself did not obtain at a bargain price what he obtained, he does not sell it at bargain price, either."¹²¹ On the other hand, Johannes says, the knight of faith must "speak . . . out of respect" for the "greatness" of faith "so that it is not forgotten out of fear of harm. . . ."¹²² The same kind of problematic is at issue in the gospels when Christ tells his followers to hide their good deeds, in one instance, and let their light shine out before others, in another instance. In *Works of Love* Kierkegaard concludes that giving witness to love is, indeed, a work of love itself.¹²³ Again, how this unfolds in daily life is not an issue I can deal with properly in this thesis. Here I simply wish to note that, for Kierkegaard, it is possible to give witness to God. (For Kierkegaard, even nature gives witness, as noted in chapter two. Visible and audible things participate in God in that God gives himself in giving his gifts. The status of creation is not at issue in Kierkegaard. At issue is God's personal love, the self-giving whole that transcends every particular gift). To give witness, to speak of God with

¹²¹ *Fear and Trembling*., trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 80-81.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 75

¹²³ *Op.cit.*, 359-374.

another person might seem utterly superfluous. If God transcends language, surely silence is the only way to honour God. But for Kierkegaard, God does allow the soul to participate in a divine language, the language of love. True, human language cannot adequately articulate this divine love; this language is utterly different from the language of the marketplace (the communicative currency that mediates competitive power struggles) and from the language of psychological introspection (the language of self-mastery). Nevertheless, for Kierkegaard, the symbols we use to speak of God's self-communication do not point to something unconscious, blind or inarticulate. The symbols point to a self-giving, personal communication, immeasurably articulate. The symbols are not merely arbitrary. They are a humble response to real experiences that lend themselves to this language. True, Kierkegaard's words were handed down from the Church Fathers; but these words never did (and still do not) contain God. The words seem to burst and break in the spirit of God's Word. They would remain inarticulate were it not for Kierkegaard's (and the reader's) willingness to participate in this spirit. The truthful word is humble enough to point beyond itself, beyond every idol, everything containable in grammar, syntax, paragraphs and books, beyond every liturgy and every church. For Kierkegaard, human words fail *because* they are responsible to God's immeasurably articulate Word. God speaks but the speaking is an instruction and this is the suffering. The word is a hymn of praise, full of life, yet utterly in need. It fumbles, hesitates again and again. But this long-suffering is the beginning of perfection itself, eternal life in God. For Kierkegaard, longing is a dying to self, a way of living selflessly in God's love. The longing for God is not a mere imperfection but eternal life itself; it is



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a never-ending approach, an eternal longing to see God again and again, like the writer "who is never finished with something but 'stirs the waters of language' whenever he begins, so that to him the most ordinary expression comes into existence with newborn originality" (*Postscript*, 455).

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