INWARDNESS IN THE WORLD:
A KIERKEGAARDIAN CONTEMPLATIVE ECOLOGY

by

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Bachelor of Arts and Science, McMaster University, 2019

THESIS
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS
in
RELIGIOUS STUDIES

MCMASTER UNIVERSITY
MAY 2024

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores Kierkegaard's phenomenology of self-God-world relations in the context of the perceptual blind spots that make western subjectivity capable of neglecting the environment. Specifically, I argue that Kierkegaard's phenomenology of faith underscores the importance of contemplative "inwardness" for developing forms of subjectivity capable of responding to other-than-human forms of address, such as those issuing from the land and other-than-human-beings. Through a juxtaposition of readings from *Fear and Trembling, Training in Christianity,* and *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, I show that Kierkegaard's phenomenology of faith can be read as a "contemplative ecology", that is, as an existential phenomenology attuned to how inward and outward landscapes interact, making him in some sense an "ecological" thinker and his texts helpful contemplative guides for navigating the changes of mind and heart necessary for the "self" to recognize itself embedded in the world. I introduce and conclude the questioning of this thesis through phenomenological vignettes intended to include the reader in the perceptual queries motivating this research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is the result of a circuitous journey involving various combinations of inwardness and outwardness, many more years than I had planned for, and the promptings of farm animals, trees, and other friends. I owe innumerable thanks to the people I consistently relied on along the way. I am grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Travis Kroeker, for his generosity of spirit, his support, and the steadiness of his responses to my frantic emails. I am also grateful to the other members of my committee, Dr. Zdravko Planinc and Dr. Dana Hollander, for their encouragement and insightful comments and questions. Thank you to my friends and colleagues in the Religious Studies department, Rachel Matheson, Mark Novak and Marcus Evans, for the joys of companionship in questioning over the years, our post-writing beers, long walks and donuts. Thank you to my friends and mentors Brian Walsh and Sylvia Keesmaat for welcoming me onto their farm and into their world and hearts. I am still exploring the seeds of inspiration that you planted in me along with tomatoes, potatoes and flowers. Thank you to my parents and grandparents for the unconditional love they nurture me in, and that is the true ground in which I grow. Thank you especially for your trust in the seemingly strange decisions I have made, and for your spiritual wisdom and guidance. Thank you to one of my very best friends Avery for your warmth of heart and the generosity of your praise that kept me going when things felt dark. Thank you to my partners in life Jess and Balie for giving a new name to love and family, and for knowing my questions and project better sometimes than I did myself. The endless hours of conversation and laughter that animate our lives together gurgle under each of the sentences written here. Thank you, finally, to the beings and lands and to the traditional stewards of the territories I lived and worked on: to the lands of the Mississauga and Haudenosaunee nations, and the unceeded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh nations.

PROLOGUE

I.

I lived and worked on a small farm that practiced permaculture—a form of agriculture that aims to build sustainable gardens and ecosystems, keeping in mind the ways different communities of plants and animals can beneficially interact. The balance of these various communities is under the care of the gardener, who sees themselves as a facilitator of their flourishing. The relationship is understood to be reciprocal: a well maintained ecosystem facilitates the gardener's flourishing, and the flourishing of the gardener's own, human, community.

I learned many things on the farm.

> *Once I was mowing the grass. Don't mow over there! Sylvia yelled across the garden. Leave that grass for the snakes!*

> *Once I was cultivating a garden bed, getting ready to plant it. I had cultivated it once already but I wanted to do it again, deeper, to make all the soil loose. Don't disturb the micro-organisms! Sylvia said. Give them time to resettle the topsoil.*

> *Once I tried to tidy up the gardens around the house. I wanted to give the bushes shapes, to make room between the plants. The margins are not ours to keep, Sylvia said. Creatures live in the hidden places!*

Everything that lived had a place to live and it was my job as a gardener to think about this before anything else. Sometimes I was allowed to disturb a home to make room for something else to live, but there was so much discretion involved in this act. I started to see acutely and painfully how often I imposed myself on the world around me. What made me want to mow all the grass, over-cultivate the bed, tidy up the gardens? The farm was teeming with life, and as I made the trek from my cabin at the far edge of the garden to the main house in the mornings I felt how thoughtless my feet were: for the first time in my life I felt that every footfall was a knock on a door that had the right to refuse me. Knock…knock…I am here as a guest, all you dark, dark earthly creatures. I will think of you first, I will, just let me know you.

> *Once we were planting seeds in the greenhouse and Sylvia dropped everything to look at a butterfly. Serve and observe, Sylvia said, in equal parts. We stopped all our work for the afternoon to look at butterflies.*

> *Sylvia grew tomato seedlings in the greenhouse in May. In the evenings it got too cold so we would bring them all to the side of the greenhouse with the wood stove. In the mornings we would lay them out again in the main greenhouse. It's good to walk them, Sylvia said, it strengthens their stems. When it got warm enough that we didn't need to walk them, we visited the seedlings in the morning and brushed their tops with our hands. They like that, Sylvia said.*

The pigs arrived in May. There were three of them and they were very small. We had built them a small hut with a small pen. There was grass in the pen for them to eat and hide in. We would expand the pen as they grew. When they arrived, one of them escaped. He ran through our farm, into the neighbours farm, through the field, through the forest. We called him Odysseus, "skilled in many ways of contending." I would sit in the grass with them, watching. In June they were a little larger and let me scratch their backs. Odysseus was reluctant but liked it. In July they were bigger still and flopped on their backs for a belly rub when I arrived. Odysseus was first in line. He has character, I realized.

Once Sylvia was planting flowers in the vegetable garden. I had learned that everything she planted had a purpose. Some flowers draw bugs away from the vegetables. Are those for the bugs? I asked. Yes, she said, but they are also to keep my gardeners happy.

As one of the keepers of the many lives on the farm it was my job to learn from them what they needed and when. But it was only when Sylvia told me that she was planting the flowers to keep me happy that I realized that I too was a creature. We were orchestrating as harmonious a cohabitation as possible, of which we, as the orchestrators, were as fundamental a part as all the other communities. That I, as a gardener, was a species of creature that needed tending to as well, that needed flowers to keep up its spirits, was a humbling realization. All of this, all of this that I'm helping to orchestrate, is orchestrating me too. The whole thing works only if I present my needs to the table just as much as I offer to interpret the needs of the beings around me. I began to see that my role was not so much that of an orchestrator, as it was that of a partner in dialogue. I

would work for the communities of creatures in my care and let them also work for me. The question of course was what a fair exchange looked like.

> *The cows arrived mid-May. There were five of them and they were all a year old. They ran out of the trailer into the field and started galloping and kicking. They are happy to have the open space, said Sylvia. There were ten acres of pasture for them to graze on over the summer, divided into strips. Every day we would move the electric fence three meters over. This meant that every day the cows got a fresh length of field three meters wide to eat. If you give them the whole pasture straight away, said Sylvia, they will find their favourite patches and stay there for the whole summer. This means the manure will also stay in their favourite patches, leaving the rest of the field unfertilized. Rotational grazing, as I learned it was called, harnessed the fertilizing power of the cows for our benefit. They got a strip of fresh grass a day, we got an evenly fertilized field. We are putting them to work for us, said Sylvia.*

> *By the end of the summer, the pigs who were big now and still rolling over for belly rubs, pinching my feet in the process and sometimes knocking me over, went to the slaughter house. They will have only had two bad days in their life, said Sylvia, the day they got here and the day they left.*

The question of course was what a fair exchange looked like.

And there were other questions. I wondered what it meant to be a partner in dialogue with something that spoke a different language. How was I supposed to learn to interpret it? How could I know that I wasn't projecting my idea of what it needed onto it? I wondered how the non-human world saw me. How did I exist for trees for instance? Did they care about me? Were they even trying to communicate with me? And why, I wondered, was I formulating all of these questions through such a strong sense of an "I" standing opposite the natural world. Had I not felt that I was part of it all? What was the relationship between my hyperaware sense of self and the world that seemed to exist outside of it? Could I learn from farming something about what it meant to have a sense of oneself as an individual?

II.

I got a job at another farm. It grew micro-greens in trays under artificial light in a warehouse. We harvested the trays as soon as the greens got to be a couple inches tall. All the nutrients of the seed and the taste of the future plant are condensed in those few inches. Micro-greens are nutrient dense, says the website, they are healthy and we deliver them to your door in an eco-friendly way: by bike! Inside the warehouse we changed into a different set of clothes to avoid contaminating the trays with outside bugs. The only creatures allowed in the farm other than the workers and the greens were insects specially imported in small packages, released onto individual trays. The trays were in one section of the warehouse, the people harvesting the trays were in another section of the warehouse. The people who harvested did not help with the growing, and the different rooms were walled off to manage the temperature.

I had to wear gloves to harvest the greens. What do these plants feel like? Do they like it when I rub their tops like this? Do they need to be walked? My boss lived on an island and managed the farm by text. Have you finished harvesting the sunflowers yet? read almost every text he sent.

I got a promotion. Harvest room efficiency manager. I had to teach people how to harvest fast. Tips and tricks for speedy harvesting and packing. I didn't know anything about the plants but I knew how to cut them. How fast was Mark harvesting shiso today? said the text. He was very slow, I said, but he cuts beautifully.

I started delivering the greens to restaurants across the city. I had a trailer and I liked biking down the alleyways and backroads. The hidden places of the city—what kind of life hides in these margins? The only restaurants that can afford micro-greens as garnishes are upscale. They receive deliveries through the back doors in the alleys. Here are your pea shoots, I said. Could you spare some change? said a man sitting on the street. That's who lives in the hidden margins of the city. I had no cash and had given away my last pea shoots. Have you finished deliveries yet? said the text.

On the micro-green farm I learned how to sanitize knives and tell people what to do. I learned how to bike uphill with a trailer. I forgot how to see the lives of the creatures I was caring for because I was not caring for any creatures. The closest I got to remembering that I was in dialogue with the world was when I entered the alleyways and saw that I had nothing to offer the people

who lived there. I had no idea what they needed from me, I had no time to live with them to find out.

I got another job as a landscaper. I wanted to spend more time outside. The landscaping company had aspirations to build homesteads, and design sustainable gardens along permaculture principles. But it was a small company and most of the business we got was tending to existing gardens, doing whatever labour the homeowner wanted us to do.

I learned many things as a landscaper.

> *Once we arrived at a property that was lush with plants. It was spring and they had erupted into life, overflowing from their beds, growing into each other. It was beautiful. What is there to do here, I asked. Separate the plants! yelled Neal from across the yard.*
>
> *Once we were in a neighbourhood where all the lawns had straight edges and the bushes had strict shapes. The yard we were working in had unhealthy bushes that needed to grow out to catch more light. What are we doing here, I asked. She wants us to give them shapes, said Neal. When we left there were shapes and straight edges.*
>
> *Once I had to cultivate the soil between the plants. I am disturbing the microorganisms, I said. Don't worry about that, said Neal. They want it to look fresh. There were no bugs anywhere.*

Once I had to rake leaves off a yard of AstroTurf. More and more people have artificial grass in their yards, said Neal. It takes less work to maintain. I lifted up a strip of it once, he continued, and there were piles and piles of dead worms underneath it, fried by the heat of the rubber.

None of us felt good about the work we were doing. All my co-workers had degrees in sustainability and knew there would be consequences to doing the bidding of the homeowners without consulting the plants. Sometimes people took our advice, but more often they felt that if a plant died they could just replace it. I wondered what it was that Sylvia saw when she looked into the natural world that made her so sensitive to its bearing on her, and her bearing on it. Why don't the people putting down AstroTurf think of the worms? I also forget about the worms.

I wondered: does how we treat the non-human world reveal something to us about our sense of self? Who do we think we are when we leave grass for snakes to hide in, or when we separate plants from each other to give them shapes? Is there a certain kind of self we need to become in order to feel ourselves addressed by other living beings? At base, are we alone in our individuality or are we tethered to other individuals? If we are tethered, what tethers us and do we have a role in tethering or untethering ourselves? When I lived on the farm, every day was an exercise in opening myself up to an address that came from beyond me in a language I wouldn't immediately understand. When I worked at the micro-green farm and as a landscaper, the only voice was my boss's and the homeowner's, and their directions were clear. Sylvia's farm was in the countryside, and the micro-green farm and landscaping jobs were in the city, but the rural-urban distinction is incidental: not all rural farms let the non-human world speak, and not all natural

places in a city are mute. We have every way of silencing the largest swaths of rural landscape through mono-culture and other forms of industrial agriculture, and every way of listening to the plants we live with in a city. What I was wondering was what idea and experience of human self-hood underpinned the different ways I had experienced relating to and treating "nature."

III.

Sylvia was a Biblical scholar and her husband, Brian, a theologian. I had heard that their farming practice was developed in response to a Biblically-informed worldview. I was curious what this meant. I had grown up immersed in the practices and sensibilities of two Christian traditions: Calvinist Protestantism and Eastern Orthodoxy. My spiritual experiences and reflections circled around a largely immaterial understanding of the route to God, and I had a vague sense of the goal of the spiritual life being the collapsing of the self into an undifferentiated union with God. It was unclear to me what tradition I had picked up these ideas from, and whether this was really a livable interpretation of the Christian teachings. I had become especially curious about what it meant to live a "spiritual life" in a material world, whether there was a way of interpreting "spir-it" in a way that was generous to matter. I was also puzzled by the phenomenon of the "I" that I carried around with me wherever I went. I could not imagine giving it up and remaining in any way an interesting person to be in a meaningful relationship with. Was there any way that my "I" could be squeezed into a relation with God? Did I have to dissolve?

I had been working through these questions with the help of the writings of Soren Kierkegaard. Brian and Sylvia's farm seemed like a good place to go to see another kind of response to my

questions: I imagined there had to be a generous interpretation of matter in relation to spirit playing out for farming to be their response to the Christian worldview, and I wondered what understanding of selfhood underpinned it.

> *The human vocation is to be gardeners, said Sylvia, literally and metaphorically. We are called to serve and observe the creation. We live in a world of animals, insects, fish, birds, rivers, trees and plants, abundant and diverse, created by a God who delights in all that has come into being. We were meant to live eternally as naked vegetarians.*

Kierkegaard was worried that people were spending too much time comparing themselves to each other. The more meaningful measure was when each person stood to be examined as an individual before God and eternity, a movement that began with an inward turn. I was wondering how complicit Kierkegaard was in the movement towards an atomized conception and experience of selfhood. Kierkegaard seemed to be advocating for such a degree of inwardness and solitude in his account of the human relation to God that the world appeared cold, incidental to the movement of coming into contact with God. Kierkegaard made me feel homeless in the world of living things, made me feel like the creatures I was caring for on the farm had no bearing whatsoever on the movement I had to make inwardly to seek the Kingdom of God.

I didn't know what to make of the difference between the inward and the outward formulations of the movement that looked for contact with God. There seemed to be important implications for how it related the human being to nature.

Seek God's Kingdom first, said Kierkegaard, God's Kingdom which is within you. The world of the visible perishes and sinks in decay, seeking God's Kingdom begins by letting it perish. Seek first the eternal, and the temporal will be added to you. Out in the field with the lilies and the birds, you will learn that God isolated the human being, while the rest of nature He let live in crowds. It is through your isolation that you make the move to touch God.

I wondered what Kierkegaard would do on a farm. In the inwardness occasioned in him by the lilies in the field and the birds of the air, would he forget to feed the pigs? What did he see when he looked outside? I came to see that what he was concerned about was the idea that the non-human world participated only in a temporal mode of being, that there was nothing that would be preserved of it in eternity. Where I had seen gardens teeming with life, did he see their slow trickle into death? The incommensurability of eternity and spirit with temporality and matter? There was a timelessness about our work on the farm that was strange because every day we saw the marks of time in the growth of the plants and animals. The timelessness may have come from the thought that we would be gardeners in eternity, that the decay of nature could go on forever, and so could the life that came of it. Kierkegaard made me suspicious of being too comfortable. Was it dangerous to start seeing the temporal and the eternal as commensurable?

Kierkegaard was diagnosing problems in the way human individuality was manifesting itself in his society—19th century Denmark —and the relation between human individuality and God. Conscious of myself as a 21st century North American individual, inheriting a tradition of Western liberal and neoliberal individualism in both its secular and religious formulations, I felt di-

rectly addressed by his texts and had a vested interest in figuring out what do to about my sense of self. How often did I live in a crowd and how often did I stand apart? When I stood apart was it in a way that was open to relation with other people, other beings, or was I closing myself off from contact? Was contact with God to be sought in my relation with the world, or myself? I wanted to learn from him how to see in myself first, and in the world around me by extension, the different expressions of the human capacity to relate or to close itself off. Before my experience on the farm I was curious to understand what he saw as rightly ordered relationality and the movements he sketched out to access it, in the human sphere. Since living on the farm, I became most urgently preoccupied with the implications of his accounts of relationality on how we relate ourselves to the non-human world. This is perhaps because for the first time on the farm I became conscious of being addressed by an other-than-human being. What happened that I suddenly felt myself beholden to an animal, a plant? What is the link between how we relate ourselves to ourselves, to other people, to God, and to the "natural" world? Is there a similar movement that links them all?

This question is particularly urgent today given the anthropogenic climactic changes we are experiencing, and the resulting collapse of ecosystems globally. Are we capable of hearing what is happening to the other-than-human beings suffering at our hands? What has made it possible for us to so neglect the impact of industrialization, colonialism and consumer capitalism on the land and our "natural" surroundings? Is there a way to identify and shift our perception to include the wellbeing of other-than-human beings in our considerations of our own? There has been a surge of scholars and concerned community members re-examining dominant cosmologies, attempting to identify the roots of world-denying ways of thinking, and the tools that may help us navigate

and redress the “inward” and “outward” challenges of climate change in the 21st century. The field of “Religion and Ecology” that emerged through a series of conferences at Harvard in the 90s, and has grown into a global interfaith discipline since, is a testament to how important scholars of religion are also recognizing this project to be. This thesis is an attempt to bring Kierkegaard into the conversation, specifically to bring his Christian existential phenomenology of the “self” as it is invited into the “inwardness” of faith, into dialogue with voices in environmental phenomenology questioning the ecological implications of the atomized boundaries of the modern western “self”.

The task of the next section will be to situate Kierkegaard in this conversation, asking whether we have the grounds for reading him as a relevant thinker for environmental ethics in the context of climate change. To this end I will introduce the work of an important thinker in environmental phenomenology, David Abram. In *The Spell of the Sensuous*, he argues that contemporary ecological collapse comes from the fact that the secular western self does not have anything “other” than its own forms of address and judgement in relation to which to understand itself. He proposes to reawaken a sensuous engagement with the “otherness” of the more-than-human world and for the self to thereby recognize itself in relation to agencies and forms of speech other than its own, to develop forms of perception capable of hearing and responding to non-human beings. I will show through a survey of three works of secondary literature that Kierkegaard is interested in the same critique of western subjectivity as Abram, and that the phenomenologies of “faith”, “inwardness” and “the single individual” he develops as focal points of where the self experiences and interprets the address from an “Other” ultimately show him to be a relational thinker invested in what it means to be a self embedded in the sensuous world. This context and

groundwork laid, I will move into a close reading of Kierkegaard focussed around the following two central questions: how does Kierkegaard interpret the relation between the human and non-human created world in the context of the "single individual's" God-relation? And what is the significance of his emphasis on "inwardness" in the context of apparently "outward" dialogue between human and non-human beings? The texts I will be working with are *Fear and Trembling*, for its exposition of the relationship the Knight of Faith has to finitude; *Training in Christianity*, for its analysis of the difference in the way the self responds to Christ's invitation vs the invitation of "the world"; and the discourse on the lilies of the field and the birds of the air from *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits,* for the discussion of the role of non-human creation in the self's discovery of inwardness. I will show that faith for Kierkegaard puts the self into a relation of dispossessive receptivity towards the world, linking "inwardness" to "outwardness" through a transfigured capacity to interpret the finite world in light of the abundant and suffering love that sustains it—to receive its gifts, and respond to its suffering through a relinquishment of the possessive desire that characterizes the insecurity of finite existence unaware of its eternal counterpart. This is not a theological innovation on the part of Kierkegaard, nor is it new for me to draw this out of his text. What is significant is the invitation Kierkegaard's texts issue to practice this form of subjectivity, and that this invitation may in fact prove welcome and pertinent in the context of our contemporary environmental struggles. The aim of my project is to highlight this relevance through a juxtaposition of my reading of Kierkegaard with questions having to do with climate change. The concluding chapter will bring two more voices to the table: Douglas Christie and Tim Lilburn. Both are contemporary writers thinking about the role of subjectivity and inwardness in a 21st century North American settler's relation to the environment. I hope,

with their help, to offer Kierkegaard up as a contemplative guide through the forests and beings of finitude.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

I. The Spell of the Sensuous

The Spell of the Sensuous[1] is a classic of interdisciplinary environmental philosophy. Published first in 1996 it quickly became a standard text for a variety of fields, ranging from environmental studies to the performing arts and theology (277). The argument of the book is simple and its reception telling: there is a perceptual problem in western culture preventing those of us inheriting its modes of thought from perceiving our sensuous surroundings clearly, if at all. The thrust of Abram's project is to phenomenologically undo in his reader the modern West's assumption that other animals and the land lack an awareness of their own (265). This long-standing commitment of dominant western thought and culture, he suspects, was "less a product of careful and judicious reasoning than of a strange inability to clearly perceive other animals—a real inability to clearly see, or focus upon, anything outside the realm of human technology, or to hear as meaningful anything other than human speech" (27).

Evidently this resonated in 1996, with public and academic engagement of the roots of the ecological crisis already well underway. Abram's work was a contribution to a line of thinking that sought to identify in European intellectual and cultural history the origins of a socially and politically sanctioned neglect for the natural world. Which apparatuses were at play? What motivated them? While the focus of much historical and philosophical work was on the role Plato's "theory of the forms" played in the western sensorial imagination, or the otherworldly interpretations of

[1] Abram, David. *The Spell of the Sensuous*. (Toronto: Penguin Random House Canada Limited, 1996).

the God of Judaeo-Christian tradition that informed much thought and spiritual practice aimed at turning away from the changing material world towards an absolute beyond, Abram focussed on the effects of what both Greek and Judaeo-Christian traditions shared, that is, alphabetic literacy (95). His concern was with how the western sensorial perception of the non-human world changed with the advent of the alphabet. Abram's contention is that perception is inherently animistic, that barring technological mediation, human sensorial awareness does not necessarily distinguish sharply between things that are animate and inanimate. "Perception, experientially considered, is an ongoing dynamic wherein the sensing body finds itself drawn into and interactive participating exchange—a kind of nonverbal conversation—with the things that surround," Abram writes. "From within the depths of this dynamic, surrounding things are encountered not as inert or mechanically determined objects, but as material agencies—as active beings with whom we find our own lives entangled" (278). To an animist sensibility, all things speak, though not necessarily in words. If at base human perception is capable of engaging and accommodating the "otherness" of the sensuous world reciprocally and dialogically, how have technologies like the alphabet affected this capacity? In the case of the West, is there a connection between the alphabet and our "perceptual problem", our "strange inability to clearly see anything outside the realm of human technology or speech" (27)?

The Spell of the Sensuous is a phenomenological genealogy on the tails of this question. Roughly, Abram's story is the following: The abstraction and reflexivity made possible by alphabetic writing technologies occluded the sensuous source of much of human thought and self-understanding (79). Though experientially dubious, the phenomenon of the written word made an unchanging absolute beyond the sensuous world imaginable, conceptually plausible (95). Shifting

attention from an engagement with the polyphony of surroundings to a more predictable set of symbols opened an avenue for reflexivity informed more by static and abstracted self-representation than encounter with the always surprising mirroring of a "more-than-human" agent (112). The western "I" became conceived, and experienced, as inhabiting a private interior realm looking out onto an exterior which it did not feel connected to, or imagine it participated in (257). Combined, these events lent themselves to a collective amnesia concerning, or willful ignorance of, where in the world we find ourselves.

Alphabetic technology and its logics were necessary but not sufficient causes of the West's dissociation from its surroundings (280). There have been countless efforts, after all, to activate in writing an engagement with the mystery of where we are. *The Spell of the Sensuous* is an example of this, enacting in its poetics its own profound respect for the sensuous and more-than-human world and the languages it presents itself in by, among other things, evoking constantly and vividly an awareness of the sensuous world in its readers (264). It is the horrifically alienating consequences of a supposedly private, and exclusively human, interiority that is really at stake for Abram. His hope is that bringing attention to the technologies that shape our perception at the most basic level can help shift our awareness outside of ourselves, towards the "interiority" inherent in the world: "As we become conscious of the unseen depths that surround us, the inwardness or interiority that we have come to associate with the personal psyche begins to be encountered in the world at large: we feel ourselves enveloped, immersed, caught up within the sensuous world. This breathing landscape is no longer just a passive backdrop against which human history unfolds, but a potentized field of intelligence in which our actions participate" (260). In a time of rapid ecological deterioration, Abram calls for a subjective attunement to the

sensuous world as a way of remembering not just where, but who we are: it is only in contact and conviviality with what is not human that we understand what it is to be human (22). This sensuous and relational anthropology carries with it an axis along which to develop an awareness of self that is different from that of the literate and self-enclosed psyche. The focus against which the "I" develops becomes a mysterious and agential "Other" at work in the tangible world at large (28).

This idea raises many questions, not least of which concerns the "content" of the "Otherness" that grants us our humanness. The twenty years following the first publication of this book saw the proliferation of digital technologies, global internet connectivity, and the phenomenon of AI personal assistants activated by voice command. How did these technologies affect our sensorial engagement with the world, and what does the desire to speak to our cars, fridges, homes and hear them speak back to us reveal about the kind of contact we are yearning for? "Is it not obvious," Abram writes in his 2016 afterword, "that this massive trend toward ubiquitous computing, presumably impelled by the aim for ever-greater convenience and efficiency, is more deeply and tacitly driven by a collective impulse to re-create, somehow, the experience of living in a world wherein everything is alive, awake, and aware?" (282). As much as we may debate the nature of AI consciousness, do these technologies and the way we program them do much more than reflect ourselves back to us in our own terms and languages? It seems that in our attempts to reanimate the world technologically, we are still only speaking to ourselves (281). The intimacy we crave, Abram thinks, can only come from being in communion with forms of sentience that are entirely different from our own, and from experiencing the wonder of the possibility of this exchange: "the complex intelligence of an old-growth forest dank with mushrooms and bracket

fungi, humming with insects and haunted by owls—it's the wild, more-than-human otherness of these powers that makes any attentive relation with such beings a genuine form of magic, a trancelike negotiation between outrageously divergent world" (283).

The question of the human relation to non-human "Otherness" has a long philosophical and theological history. I have engaged *The Spell of the Sensuous* here as a way to open this question in the context of contemporary environmental phenomenology, in particular the modes of phenomenological questioning attuned to the sensuous dimensions of this relation. I am interested in the specificities of this "Otherness" and the spiritual-moral dimensions of the movement of awareness looking for contact and intimacy, here and now, with its agency. What are the dispositional shifts that accompany the perceptual shift we need to heal our vision of the world, and our place in it, in a 21st century environmental context? What role does the western category of "the self" play in this healing? In theological terms, is there a meaningful difference between a relation to the non-human "Otherness" of God, and the non-human sensuous "Otherness" of land and created beings, phenomenologically speaking? What does an environmental phenomenology of the category of "faith" look like, in dialogue with Abram's sense that what we need most urgently is the capacity to open to other-than-human forms of address? How does the self-God-world relation of specifically Christian theology illuminate or stand in contrast to the kind of sensuous phenomenology of non-human "Otherness" Abram is conducting?

II. Religion and Ecology

The idea that we need to individually develop a closer personal relationship to land is a growing perspective in contemporary environmental organizing. Much of this is informed by Indigenous voices advocating for a decolonization of the North American relation to place by, among other things, re-awakening people to their relatedness to their surroundings, and the ethics inherent in our co-dependence on other-than-human beings. See for example the recent commitment of the Sierra Club BC, a branch of the environmental non-profit organization Sierra Club Canada, to support Indigenous governance principles in their environmental conservation and educational campaigns by partnering with the Indigenous Law Research Unit[2]. The Indigenous Law Research Unit (ILRU), housed at the University of Victoria, is an academic research unit dedicated to revitalizing Indigenous laws. One of the sources of Indigenous law are the oral histories and stories documenting lessons drawn from human interactions with Other-than-human beings, who all have lessons to teach their human kin about how to live in sustainable relation to the land and its various biotic and abiotic communities[3]. As part of the Sierra Club BC's commitment to supporting Indigenous protocol, the organization has been partnering with local Indigenous leaders, inviting members of the public into ceremonial events to provide settlers with an opportunity to learn from Indigenous relational understandings of place and Other-than-human kin[4]. This partnership is an example of Indigenous and ally environmental activism informed by the idea that what the environmental movement needs is to re-educate western settler *perceptions* of the environment, awakening people to deeper experiences of relationship with Other-than-human beings.

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[2] "Better Recognizing Indigenous Legal Orders: A Reflection on Our Time Spent with the Indigenous Law Research Unit." Sierra Club BC, June 7, 2023. https://sierraclub.bc.ca/better-recognizing-indigenous-legal-orders-a-reflection-on-our-time-spent-with-the-indigenous-law-research-unit/.

[3] See the resources available on ILRU's website: https://ilru.ca/.

[4] See for example the account of the Water Ceremony the Tsleil-Waututh Nation hosted alongside the Sierra Club BC in 2023: "Paddling Together to Stop TMX." Sierra Club BC, June 2023. https://sierraclub.bc.ca/paddling-together-to-stop-tmx/.

The sense that the western sensibility needs to discover within itself the possibility of reciprocity with the "natural" world, or at least the possibility of some kind of dialogue, has thus become an important tack of secular environmentalism. In positioning the guiding questions of my project in this context, my aim is to inquire into whether the Christian idiom illuminates anything about relating to the "Otherness" of land and non-human sentience in a 21st century environmental context, and, reciprocally, whether the attunement to the explicitly sensuous dimensions of "Otherness" among thinkers like Abram, and the alliance of Indigenous and non-Indigenous present-day environmental activists, illuminates anything about the Christian approach to thinking about the "Otherness" of God.

Thinking about how religious categories might contribute to environmental thought more broadly is the project of "Religion and Ecology", a field of research that emerged in the 90's out of a series of conferences at Harvard and has grown into a global multi-religious discipline since[5]. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grimm have spearheaded the work in North America, creating the Yale forum on Religion and Ecology in 2006, a research centre that encourages the retrieval and re-imagination of religious thought and practice informed by questions of environmental justice[6]. Important contributions to this effort from the western Christian tradition have been made by thinkers like Sallie McFague, Mark Wallace, Catherine Keller and Douglas Christie, among many others. In *A New Climate for Christology: Kenosis, Climate Change, and Befriending Na-*

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[5] Tucker, Mary Evelyn, and John A. Grim. "Introduction: The Emerging Alliance of World Religions and Ecology." *Daedalus* 130, no. 4 (2001): 1–22. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20027715.

[6] "Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology," Yale School of the Environment, accessed April 2024, https://fore.yale.edu.

ture[7] for example*,* McFague interprets the kenotic incarnation of God in Christ as an ecological teaching: that "life" comes from losing one's life is witnessed to in the way any ecosystem functions—the self-sacrificial Gospel message is continuous with how the biological world works and further readings in this vein might help link the implications of Christ's teachings with the ecological issues of today. In *When God was a Bird*[8], Mark Wallace argues for an avian interpretation of the third person of the Trinity, based on the Gospel accounts of the Spirit's incarnation as a dove during the Transfiguration. This allows him to see birds, and by extension all created Other-than-human beings, as incarnations of God and thus worthy of the utmost respect and reverence, especially on the part of confessing Christians. Both of these approaches take various aspects of Christian incarnational thought as the basis for a Christian environmental ethics and practice. Another different, though intimately related, approach to western Christian environmental thought is informed by the mystical/contemplative tradition. In *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement*[9] for example, Catherine Keller links Christian negative theology with elements of 20th century continental philosophy and physics to argue for a Christian ontology of "planetary entanglement", a relational and dispossessive understanding of human and Other-than-human togetherness that exceeds anything we can know or manage, but that ultimately means that nothing is impossible—a hopeful ontology for an era of environmental change. Douglas Christie is also interested in the tools of the Christian negative and contempla-

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[7] McFague, Sallie. *A New Climate for Christology: Kenosis, Climate Change, and Befriending Nature*. (1517 Media, 2021).

[8] Wallace, Mark I. *When God was a Bird: Christianity, Animism, and the Re-Enchantment of the World*. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019).

[9] Keller, Catherine. *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

tive tradition for re-imagining relational ontology and spiritual practice in the 21st century. In *The Insurmountable Darkness of Love: Mysticism, Loss, and the Common Life*[10], he shows how Christian apophatic thought, well versed in "unknowing" and "darkness", might help us navigate the challenges of loss and uncertainty specific to the 21st century. He points out the relational character of loss, and how intimately each individual experience of darkness is bound up with "the common life", across time and space, linking today's challenges with communities of people who have experienced loss in the past. In the context of climate-change related loss, spiritual practices from previous generations can be retrieved and adapted to help navigate the kinds of dispositional shifts and supports we need to build and live into our common life today.

It is in the context of projects of retrieval and re-imagination such as these that the questions guiding this thesis have been conceived. While McFague and Wallace helpfully argue for the continuity of Christian incarnational theology with the principles of ecology, and Keller and Christie highlight the environmental implications of Christian negative theology and its resultant relational ontology, I would like to focus on the "paradoxical" relationship of incarnational and mystical Christianity to the world, and what the ecological implications are of ontological, and physo-spiritual accounts of discontinuity. Kierkegaard is a natural choice of partner in dialogue in this regard, given his sensitivity to the paradoxical nature of Christian thought.

While it is not evident that Kierkegaard was particularly concerned with the environment, or a particularly sensuous thinker in the terms set out by Abram, his whole oeuvre can be read as a

[10] Christie, Douglas E. *The Insurmountable Darkness of Love: Mysticism, Loss, and the Common Life*. (New York (N.Y.): Oxford university press, 2022).

visceral and fiery response to systems of thought operating in his day that he saw to be enclosing human subjectivity in upon itself, perpetuating human self-understanding in reference only to its own forms of judgement. This epistemic anthropocentrism is what he saw to be the main problem with dominant forms of Hegelianism, Romanticism, and State Lutheranism (or "Christendom"), against which many of his texts wage a polemic warfare. The open ended existential phenomenology of human subjectivity he developed in response to this testifies to his relevance for thinking through, and activating, an open relation to the world. He was deeply concerned with articulating a relation to forms of address that come from beyond our habitual and understandable forms of representation, that require of us faith, inwardness in relation to something other than ourselves, and resistance to any forms of spiritual or epistemological triumphalism. Kierkegaard's works thus stand as an examples of western reflexivity in a Christian register, working to undermine the dispositions Abram is also critiquing.

III. Toward a Kierkegaardian Environmentalism

Before turning to Kierkegaard's texts, I would like to highlight three book-length studies addressing various aspects of the question of Kierkegaard's engagement with the Otherness of God, human self-understanding, and the created non-human world at large that have informed my reading.

In *Kierkegaard and the Self Before God: Anatomy of the Abyss*[11], Simon D. Podmore is interested in Kierkegaard's emphasis on the Otherness of God (the "infinite, radical, qualitative difference" between humanity and God) and what this means for human self-knowledge (xi). In what sense does being in relation to this Otherness inform our sense of self? Podmore argues that Kierkegaard's cartography of despair and emphasis on the distancing effect of sin ultimately allows him to highlight the infinite, radical qualitative difference of divine *forgiveness*. The Dane's melancholy and despair is only half the story. The longer one stays in the dark infinity of the Otherness before whom one stands reading Kierkegaard, "the more one's eyes become accustomed to its darkness and the more one may begin to discern a *beyond* to the fear and trembling of apparent divine abandonment. There is a mystery in this abyss, and the great *mysterium* of the abyss is divine forgiveness" (xii). Read in this light, Kierkegaard's works become a piercing study of self-perception, as he urges in his readers the "autopsy of faith" that sees and constitutes the self on the grounds of divine forgiveness: "The self's own self-searching gaze is lost in the swarming darkness of the abyss; and so the self must see itself *through the gaze of the Other:* it becomes known to itself relationally, through the forgiving gaze of the divine" (xiii). The dark infinite Otherness of God before which the self endeavours to become itself is thus the condition of its becoming so long as it perceives and can accomplish the "metanoia" of receiving the intimacy of forgiveness through the distance.

The question of self-knowledge has a long history, and it is not clear that its trajectory does not reveal it to be a futile or narcissistic pursuit. On Podmore's reading, Kierkegaard's writings on the self highlight precisely the failures of self-knowledge in modern Western theology, philoso-

[11] Podmore, Simon D. *Kierkegaard and the Self Before God: Anatomy of the Abyss. (*Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2011).

phy and literature (xiv). As a modern writer, Kierkegaard's idiom for inquiring into the mystery of self-understanding is that of the "self" but, Podmore thinks, his theological anthropology in the end is apophatic—the self cannot come to know itself "naturally" or through its own means —thus unveiling a cataphatic counterpart: it is only "before God", recognized as infinite forgiveness, that one truly sees oneself (xiv). What Kierkegaard does for the question of self-knowledge in its modern theological register is to conspicuously refuse to eliminate it as a question. "Despite the numerous dangers of self-delusion," Podmore writes, "Kierkegaard's writings leave the reader with the impression that it is not necessarily a mere modern hubris to wish to become a self…In fact, it is a divine gift, an obligation of eternity and anxious freedom to become oneself…The error of non-relational modes of self-knowledge lies in the solipsistic or even demonic attempt to take hold of and define oneself through the sheer exertion of self-will" (xv). To read Kierkegaard's "self" as an a-relational singularity is to misidentify his illustration of the pitfalls of the modern approach to selfhood for his own anthropology, which ultimately shows the self to be empty or inauthentic unless it finds itself relationally *before God*.

Podmore's book convincingly backs up the two points I've sketched briefly here: that the "content" of Otherness, or how exactly one interprets its gaze, is significant for self-knowledge; and that Kierkegaard's modulation of the modern idiom of selfhood is thoroughly relational. What does this mean in the context of everyday life "in the world"?

An elaboration of Kierkegaardian selfhood in a similar register to Podmore, but which also addresses how the question of self-knowledge plays out in Kierkegaard's phenomenology of everyday, created, creaturely existence, is the subject of a book by David Kangas, *Errant Affirmations:*

On the Philosophical Meaning of Kierkegaard's Religious Discourses[12]. Kangas' focus is on Kierkegaard's "religious" texts (also characterized as "edifying," "occasional," "godly," "Christian" discourses). His argument is that these discourses function to open up a space beyond the terms normalized by Descartes and speculative idealism, especially around the question of subjectivity, by approaching the question phenomenologically: "Kierkegaard develops his concepts *starting from* an originary experience with being, an experience inaccessible to, because occluded by, normalized modes of thought" (2). As critical phenomenologies of concepts inherited from Descartes, Kierkegaard's discourses aim at an "inversion of thought and speech," pointing their reader to a "deeper" reality underlying their everyday forms of thought and perception that they affirm unconditionally (2). The discourses do not argue or contribute to any programmatic moral or theological knowledge, rather, Kierkegaard considers them "superfluous". Their superfluity functions as a radical affirmation of the "surplus" of being as the measure of human existence, rather than lack or want (5). The discourses are "edifying" insofar as the reader allows him or herself to be moved by the text into the full force of its affirmation: "the edifying discourse does not instruct; instead, it expands and marks out this prior attunement of the reader to the surplus of being; it elicits it, brings this forward against the dominant reading of surplus as lack" (4). The reader of the Kierkegaardian discourse must already be somewhat attuned to this. Each discourse is addressed to "that singular one…*my* reader" who Kangas interprets to be one who has recognized to some degree the superfluity of being, "the one who has been singularized by force of existence itself" (4). The point of Kierkegaard's discourses on Kangas' reading is thus to awaken readers to the gratuity of everyday created existence and to affirm it.

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[12] Kangas, David J. *Errant Affirmations: On the Philosophical Meaning of Kierkegaard's Religious Discourses*. (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).

The implications of this view for interpreting the meaning and possibility of self-knowledge are significant. For Kangas, Kierkegaard's religious discourses are aimed at critiquing representational thinking, in particular the idealist privileging of the human individual's capacity to consciously represent reality and build and master projects around of it. "In its modern mode, representational thinking takes the power of consciousness to achieve presence to itself, to get a grip on itself, as fundamental. In a word, it takes consciousness as its own origin, as the measure of itself and its 'other'" (7). For Kierkegaard, this view fundamentally misinterprets the *being* of the human being. His discourses repeatedly try to demystify the modern project of self-positing and self-overcoming by showing phenomenologically that the self is first of all entrapped in itself, incapable of asserting any kind of power or mastery over the most fundamental terms of being: "The edifying discourses bring thinking back to an origin that cannot be mastered and to an ultimate situation of in-capability that defines human reality" (7). To recognize surplus of being that meets the incapacity of the human being is what it means to know oneself "before God". The recurring motif of the choice between God and Mammon, Kangas thinks, is not in the end for Kierkegaard a choice between a transcendent onto-theological God and an immanent "world" that the self has to deliberate on and make on its own. The either/or is rather a movement concerning the fundamental attunement of the human being: "To relate to God, to assume one's existence 'before God,' to assert that God exists, is inseparable from—and indeed identical to—a confrontation with what fundamentally and essentially determines one's own being. Kierkegaard's discourses thus articulate the relation to God *as* the relation to that in one's self whereby the self is exposed to what it can neither posit nor master—to its own incapability" (9). On Kangas' reading, Kierkegaard's phenomenology of becoming a self before God is intimately

linked to recognizing one's limitations and finitude in the context of an affirmation of the abundance and gratuity of created existence.

Reading Kierkegaard in line with Kangas opens the room for us to see in his texts an exploration of subjectivity in the context of finitude, not as an evasion of it. The relational self is relational "before God" in the context of created existence in the world, which reveals to it its dependence on something other than its own power to sustain itself. What does this mean for how Kierkegaard thinks about coming to self-knowledge in relation to other creatures?

In *Exercises in New Creation from Paul to Kierkegaard*[13], Dickinson argues that rooting the ecological crisis in the "otherworldly" ethic of Platonic Christianity may be fair, but this genealogy often misses the fact that it is the hermeneutical principles brought to the texts that yielded an earth-fleeing cosmology, not necessarily the reasoning internal to them. "This cosmology," he writes, "often comes from an operation of interpretation that seeks to peel away the layers of address in the text—its complex contents and constitutive calls—to find a system or doctrine abstracted from life" (18). The aim of his book is to demonstrate that a mode of interpretation attending specifically to the address and exercises enacted by selected texts of Christian philosophical theology reveals a deeply earth-bound care for communities and creation, and a counter-cultural set of practices that have radical ecological implications (18). This kind of reading highlights the cares a text is trying to address, and the just and unjust practices it represents or illuminates. Dickinson's premise is that "practices of reading and writing that cultivate patience, attention, sympathy, and compassion, that illuminate the false pieties and hidden cruelty of our cul-

[13] Dickinson, T Wilson. *Exercises in New Creation from Paul to Kierkegaard*. (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

tures, that strengthen just relationships and communities, could contribute to the transformation of our environments" (3). This is a hermeneutic of the cross, or a "Christology from below", that begins with the earth, with the exercises, relationships, and texts that inform a messianic way of life seeking to renew creation. Following the "wisdom of the cross", a reading that attends to the address and reception of texts in the context of the worldly, creaturely life they speak to, draws out the renewal they are working towards, emphasizing the "exercises and experiments that show the foolishness of the dominant forms of life of their time" and the way they "also cultivate alternative ways of acting and relating" (4). Along with Paul, Augustine, Luther and Derrida, Kierkegaard is a case study for Dickinson in "creaturely writing" that shapes selves embedded in and caring for human and non-human creation.

For Dickinson, Kierkegaard's works are direct responses to the logics, power structures, and habits of thought informing people's preoccupations and their experience of material life in Copenhagen in the 1840s. "Kierkegaard sought to disrupt the manner in which writing, education, and wisdom had been misappropriated, abstracted, compartmentalized, and instrumentalized for the powers of a misguided social order", Dickinson writes, a social order with practices and habits of subjectivity that alienated people from each other and themselves (192). His target was the cultural apparatus of knowledge as information, abstracted from relationships and experience, which cultivated indifferent and dispassionate forms of relating to truth and life. This turned the primary form of subjectivity into one of observation rather than participation: the Copenhagener's gaze measured the self and others in reference only to external, observable markers of comparison (194). In response Kierkegaard wrote texts that addressed the reader directly, challenging them to discover within themselves an individual "self" from which to recog-

nize alienating effects of the culture they inhabited and perpetuated, inviting them to replace the observer's comparing gaze with a gaze drawn from an active experience of life and love. In his texts, Dickinson writes, Kierkegaard "pursues practices of reading and writing that foster action and care…He seeks slower exercises both that frustrate expectations of ease and that help us to perceive the slow violence that is polluting our selves and cities" (196). It is in response to the self as dispassionate observer that Kierkegaard develops his highly personal and concerned existential theology. The fact that one cannot observe God directly in creation reveals precisely that dispassionate observation and calculation is not the way to know God. This is the pedagogy of creatures and creation Kierkegaard's texts invite his readers into: that one cannot meet God in the world except through an intimately intertwined relationship with creation, and care for its particularities. "This emphasis on concern and care brings into relationship what the observer and his object sought to separate," writes Dickinson. "It also underlines the activity of the knower, and the significance that this activity has for the self. To 'become aware and capable of seeing God' in creation, then, the actions and desires of the self are knotted into the fabric of God's good earth" (239). The self and its creaturely capacity to be concerned with the particularities of its existence thus becomes a crucial locus for knowing God in the world, inextricable from a social and political calling to *care*.

While it is not a scholarly consensus that Kierkegaard is relevant for environmental ethics, the baseline contention of my project, following in the footsteps of Podmore, Kangas and Dickinson, is that there is a solid ground for reading Kierkegaard as an earthly thinker, sympathetic with the cause of becoming more attuned to one's surrounding, though without jettisoning inwardness. What makes him interesting as an interlocutor in response to Abram's critique of the west's liter-

ate self-obsessed reflexivity is that Kierkegaard develops a way to be attuned to the world, one's own inwardness, and the Otherness of God from within this tradition. In what follows, I will build on the secondary source groundwork I have laid out here to draw out Kierkegaard's phenomenology of faith in relation to the sensuous world at large. I will draw out the way he modulates the inward and outward dynamics of selfhood engaged in acts of faith, and attempt to point out the "sensuous" implications of this phenomenology. My goal is to perform both an ecological reading of Kierkegaard's self, and see whether a "sensuous" response to his address to the reader is possible. What, indeed, would Kierkegaard's role be on a farm?

CHAPTER 2: KIERKEGAARD'S PHENOMENOLOGY OF FAITH

I. FEAR AND TREMBLING

My exposition of *Fear and Trembling*[14] will be limited to the specific movement of faith the pseudonym Johannes de Silentio discovers in Abraham's journey to sacrifice Isaac. Any engagement with Kierkegaard's texts, however, requires an acknowledgment of the authorial voice, because its subjective position informs much of the way the argument develops. A few brief comments to this end are necessary. The pseudonym of *Fear and Trembling* is the most foregrounded authorial character of the three texts we will be working with. He introduces himself in the Preface, and throughout the work makes reference to the passionate quest that informs his obsession with Abraham. From the Preface we learn that de Silentio does not consider himself a philosopher. In his context, this means carving a space for himself that is not bound by the terms set by Hegelian systematic philosophy. He writes: "The present author is by no means a philosopher. He is in a poetic and refined way a supplementary clerk who neither writes the system nor gives promises of the system, who neither exhausts himself on the system nor binds himself to the system. He writes because to him it is a luxury that is all the more pleasant and apparent the fewer there are who buy and read what he writes" (7). This sets up the tone of a through-running critique of Hegel's systematic approach to thinking through, and writing about, faith, de Silentio's topic. His underlying purpose throughout the work is to critique the idea he thinks characterizes his age, namely that it is possible to "go further" than faith. His task in *Fear and Trembling* is to present faith in a way that reveals it as the "highest" thing a human being can hope to achieve,

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[14] Kierkegaard, Soren. *Fear and Trembling.* Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983).

and to highlight the mischaracterizations of faith that let people imagine there is such a thing as going "beyond" it. In the Preface de Silentio writes: "In our age, everyone is unwilling to stop with faith but goes further. It perhaps would be rash to ask where they are going, whereas it is a sign of urbanity and culture for me to assume that everyone has faith, since otherwise it certainly would be odd to speak of going further" (7). In the Epilogue he picks up this thought: "The highest passion in a person is faith, and here no generation begins at any other point than where the previous one did. Each generation begins all over again; the next generation advances no further than the previous one" (122). That faith cannot be passed down from generation to generation is an important anti-Hegelian theme for de Silentio, against which he develops the idea of the singular Knight of Faith who is alone, silent, and unrecognizable as he learns to make the movements of faith. It is this vision of faith that de Silentio discovers in Abraham's story, and he tacitly positions himself as a poet speaking to its honour (32). This raises the question of what it means to speak about faith, a central preoccupation of our author: "Who speaks to the honour of this passion?" he writes, "Philosophy goes further. Theology sits all rouged and powdered in the window and courts its favour, offers its charms to philosophy" (32). In response to this question, de Silentio launches into a sketch of the paradoxical nature of Abraham's faith which he repeatedly claims to be amazed by, but unable to replicate: "Abraham I cannot understand; in a certain sense I can learn nothing from him except to be amazed…For my part, I presumably can describe the movements of faith, but I cannot make them" (37). This gestures to us as readers what de Silentio takes to be the scope and limits of his account: he is not a systematic philosopher, but rather is writing as a passionate admirer of the movement of faith. He cannot make this move himself, however, and is thus speaking from the outside, as an observer. The irony of this is that ultimately de Silentio comes to the conclusion that the movement of faith cannot be observed. He

deduces its contours from the story of Abraham, but cannot recognize it playing out in anyone around him. He takes this as a sign of the paradoxical relationship faith has with finitude, that its hallmark is to be so secure in finitude that no incommensurability, no indication that faith has to do with eternity, is visible to an outward eye. I will develop the significance of this in detail in what follows, and pick up on its significance in relation to how the author of *Training in Christianity* modulates the paradox of faith in relation to the world in the next section.

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In the Preliminary Expectoration Johannes de Silentio introduces his interpretation of the movement of faith Abraham makes in his journey to sacrifice Isaac. His starting point is to emphatically urge his readers to recognize the terror of the discernment Abraham, and anyone seriously trying to learn from Abraham, has to make: is Abraham off to murder Isaac, or to sacrifice him? The first is the ethical read of the situation, the second is the religious (30). The question this raises for de Silentio is what kind of knowledge is operating in the religious, how does this discernment work? This is important for his task of figuring out how to think and speak about Abraham. To this end he distinguishes between the laws operating in the "external and visible world" and the laws operating in the "world of the spirit." This distinction will be important for the interpretation that follows. Here all we need to see is that de Silentio suggests that there are different epistemologies at play, and different ways that the external world and the world of the spirit make demands on a person. In the external world, "the law of indifference" reigns. It doesn't matter who a person is, "everything belongs to the possessor" (27)—i.e., what one has in life, knowledge, power, possessions, is not necessarily a result of personal effort. In the world of the spirit,

however, there is a direct link between becoming a certain kind of person and what one then possesses. The point de Silentio seems to be making here is that Abraham cannot be approached apart from a certain subjective tuning that requires personal effort. One cannot "possess" knowledge of Abraham apart from entering the story subjectively. He writes: "There is a knowledge that presumptuously wants to introduce into the world of spirit the same law of indifference under which the external world sighs. It believes that it is enough to know what is great—no other work is needed. But for this reason it does not get bread; it perishes of hunger while everything changes to gold" (27-28). In the case of Abraham, it is not enough to *know* that he is great. This is not a meaningful piece of information apart from the movement it has the potential to trigger in a person. de Silentio then models for the reader the kind of terror he thinks the story ought to elicit: "Thinking about Abraham is another matter, however; then I am shattered. I am constantly aware of the prodigious paradox that is the content of Abraham's life, I am constantly repelled, and, despite all its passion, my thought cannot penetrate it, cannot get ahead by a hairsbreadth. I stretch every muscle to get a perspective, and at the very same instant I become paralyzed" (33). It is in this state of terror and amazement that the paradoxical character of Abraham's faith becomes visible, and its call becomes felt. At every descriptive turn that follows, de Silentio confesses that he is unable to make the movement himself. The confessional dimension of de Silentio's account serves on the one hand to model the subjective implications of "knowing" Abraham, and on the other hand of alerting the reader to the possibility of there being other ways of speaking of, and discerning, the movements of faith, from the perspective of someone who is/was making them for instance.

What de Silentio comes to see from his amazed and terrified perspective is that "faith is convinced that God is concerned about the smallest things" and, as a consequence of this, is capable of making a movement that resigns everything it holds dear and in the next breath to joyfully receive it back again, as though it hadn't just given it up (34). This is the double movement of faith de Silentio spends the rest of his book exploring, but the kernel of his discovery he confesses early: "The moment I mounted the horse, I would have said to myself: Now all is lost, God demands Isaac, I sacrifice him and along with him all my joy…What was the easiest for Abraham would have been difficult for me—once again to be happy in Isaac!" (35) The immense challenge of faith is to have the courage to receive again with the same joy and security something one has given up. This is an absurd movement because it depends on relinquishing a relation to one's life and its possessions that is based on a predictable calculation, while at the same time maintaining an openness to life not being totally absurd and to a certain extent responsive to what one desires from it even though it remains mysterious. de Silentio illustrates his point: "Abraham had faith. He did not have faith that he would be blessed in a future life but that he would be blessed here in the world. God could give him a new Isaac, could restore to life the one sacrificed. He had faith by virtue of the absurd, for all human calculation ceased long ago…To be able to lose one's understanding and along with it everything finite, for which it is the stockbroker, and then to win the very same finitude again by virtue of the absurd—this appalls me" (36). What he gestures to here is that faith involves a particular relation to finitude in which finitude is not relinquished even while one relinquishes "possessive knowledge" of it. In order to highlight this, de Silentio characterizes the double movement of faith more clearly as first the movement of infinity, and then the movement of finitude—the first championed by the Knight of Infinite Resignation, the first and second together by the Knight of Faith.

The movement of infinity is one de Silentio is familiar with—it is from the perspective of self-admittedly being capable of making this movement that he speaks, and that he sees the absurdity and difficulty of the movement that reclaims finitude (28). He illustrates the movement of infinity in the following way. A young man falls in love with a young woman out of his league. He assures himself that it is true love, proceeds to risk everything in pursuing it, and realizes that there is no way that he can be united with the woman he loves. The movement of infinity is an attempt to deal with this situation. While some people might distract themselves from their love until they forget it, the knight of infinite resignation holds on to it, holds on to the pain of unfulfilled love and desire, and translates this particular, finite experience into eternal terms: "His love for that princess would become for him the expression of an eternal love…which true enough denied the fulfillment but nevertheless did reconcile him once more in the eternal consciousness of its validity in an eternal form that no actuality can take away from him" (43). Translating the particularity of his love for this woman into eternal terms removes the knight from having to relate to her in the world, here and now. He doesn't need her anymore to love her. The knight of infinite resignation thus reconciles himself to finitude by renouncing it: "He has grasped the deep secret that even in loving another person one ought to be sufficient to oneself. He is no longer finitely concerned about what the princess does, and precisely this proves that he has made the movement infinitely" (44). Resignation is a kind of reconciliation to finitude in the sense that it gives the knight the peace and rest of being untouchable, spiritually or emotionally, by the events and desires of being involved in the world.

de Silentio does not oppose the movement of infinity to the movement of faith. Instead, he sees the translation of particular love and desire into infinite terms as the first step the Knight of Faith must make, because "only in infinite resignation do I become conscious of my eternal validity, and only then can one speak of grasping existence by virtue of faith" (46). The security of understanding oneself in relation to eternity, of awakening to an eternal consciousness which de Silentio later calls one's love for God (48), opens the way to a relation to finitude that is impossible without reference to a different magnitude of being. de Silentio picks up his story of the man in love with a woman out of his league, now imagining him as a Knight of Faith. That man makes the same movement of resignation. This is a philosophical move, and within the realm of the understanding it is reasonable: the situation is such that it is impossible for the man to be united with the woman in the finite world. It makes sense to give up all finite expressions of this love, and to keep the eternal ones, because it is not unreasonable that finite expressions of love have their infinite counterparts. The movement of faith begins when the man says: "Nevertheless I have faith that I will get her—that is, by virtue of the absurd, by virtue of the fact that for God all things are possible" (46). The absurdity of this move is precisely that the knight of faith understands that what he wants is impossible in the finite world, but he nevertheless has some sort of strength that prevents him from renouncing his particular love and desire, and as such his relation to the world in which it operates. The movement of faith is a movement that reclaims a relation to finitude that is not premised on the terms of the understanding. de Silentio writes, "It takes a purely human courage to renounce the whole temporal realm in order to gain eternity…But it takes a paradoxical and humble courage to grasp the whole temporal realm now by virtue of the absurd, and this is the courage of faith" (49). The movement of faith thus brings together the eternal and temporal through a relation to finitude that is not governed by the understanding.

How does this relation express itself in the world? de Silentio is on a quest to find a Knight of Faith to admire in his own generation but discovers that the Knight is invisible precisely because of the way his relation to finitude expresses itself (or rather doesn't express itself).

In order to highlight this de Silentio imagines an encounter with a knight of faith. His description is vivid: "I move closer to him, watch his slightest movement to see if it reveals a bit of heterogeneous optical telegraphy from the infinite, a glance, a facial expression, a gesture, a sadness, a smile that would betray the infinite in its heterogeneity with the finite. No! I examine his figure from top to toe to see if there may not be a crack through which the infinite would peek. No! He is solid all the way through. His stance? It is vigorous, belongs entirely to finitude…No heavenly gaze or any sign of the incommensurable betrays him" (39). Nothing about the knight of faith shows him to be other than totally absorbed in the finite world he inhabits. Yet, by de Silentio's imaginative reckonings, this man is doing everything he does "by virtue of the absurd" (40). He is secure in his relation to finitude despite being in constant contact with infinity, and so, de Silentio imagines, constantly conscious of how fleeting everything in this world is. What is striking is that having made the movement of infinity, having found a measure against which to judge finitude, the knight does not give up being enmeshed in the world, does not give up his loves and desires, but somehow manages "this security that makes him delight in it as if finitude were the surest thing of all" (41). The knight of infinite resignation on the other hand is instantly recognizable, his "walk is light and bold" (38), bolstered by the confidence that nothing in the finite world can touch him or shake his infinite worth. If the knight of infinite resignation were a ballet dancer, de Silentio says, he would fly up into a pose and on his way down waver as he touched the ground. This wavering betrays him as an alien in this world. The knight of faith on the other

hand, would come down from his pose without wavering. The marvel of faith is that the knight is able “to change the leap into life into walking, absolutely to express the sublime in the pedestrian” (41).

That the knight of faith is unrecognizable is significant to de Silentio because it suggests to him, as we have seen, that to have faith does not mean to be aloof from finite happenings and desires, but also that the individual knight’s relation to infinity, or to God, is incommensurable with the forms of communication that finitude deals in. This ensures the privacy of the knight’s relation to God, while at the same time giving him room to be in a meaningful relation of love and desire with the world. de Silentio elaborates on this in the three Problemata that follow the Preliminary Expectoration. His mode shifts here from confessional imaginings of the Knight of Faith to a dialectical study of Abraham. I will focus on the first two. In Problema I, de Silentio draws out the difference between faith and “the ethical,” and the implications of this difference for the individual. He characterizes the ethical as “the universal,” as that which applies to everyone at all times, working as the highest standard against which to measure a human being. Any difference, or incommensurability, between the single individual and the ethical standard flags the individual as being in the wrong. In relation to the universal, the task of the individual human being is thus to “express himself in this, to annul his singularity in order to become the universal. As soon as the single individual asserts himself in his singularity before the universal, he sins, and only by acknowledging this can he be reconciled again with the universal” (54). All language, any attempt at communication, belongs to the universal because it seeks to be understood, and understanding occurs when the particular experience of an individual is measured against a higher, commonly held, i.e. universal, standard. Faith, on the other hand, names the situation in which the single

individual finds himself higher than the universal: “Faith is namely this paradox that the single individual is higher than the universal—yet, please note, in such a way that the movement repeats itself, so that after having been in the universal he as the single individual isolates himself as higher than the universal” (55). In faith, the individual finds himself in an “absolute relation to the absolute” (56), meaning that no commonly held expression of the absolute mediates the relation. Faith thus cannot express itself because that move would require reference to the universal: “This position cannot be mediated, for all mediation takes place only by virtue of the universal; it is and remains for all eternity a paradox, impervious to thought” (56). Abraham thus cannot speak his faith, nor can he be understood. In Problema II, de Silentio adds to this that faith and the ethical differ on their judgements of interiority. While the ethical move is to express all interiority into exteriority so as to be fully transparent to the universal measure, the movement of faith is towards interiority: “The paradox of faith is that there is an interiority that is incommensurable with exteriority, an interiority that is not identical, please note, with the first but is an new interiority” (69). This interiority is not even communicable to another individual in the same state. The movement of faith cannot be shared directly, it has to be made by the individual alone: “The one knight of faith cannot help the other at all,” (71) “…The knight of faith has simply and solely himself, and therein lies the dreadfulness” (78). Though the knight of faith cannot express his faith in direct speech, Abraham’s actions nevertheless witness to it, and herein lies the significance of the knight’s silence for de Silentio: the knight of faith is a witness to the movements of faith without presuming to teach anyone how to make them (80).

II. TRAINING IN CHRISTIANITY

In the discussion of *Fear and Trembling* we saw that to de Silentio, the amazed and terrified observer, the crux of the faith witnessed to by Abraham is a double movement that relinquishes finitude and returns to it again in an earnest posture of desire and receptivity, ready to receive it all again directly from God. This movement is made internally and individually, and cannot be measured against any verbalizable, commonly understood, ethical standard. Above all it requires a relinquishment of the understanding, "the stockbroker of the finite," so as to make room for faith, which relates to finitude "on the strength of the absurd." There is a tension in de Silentio's account over whether the Knight of Faith is recognizable or not: evidently something of faith is perceptible in the finite world given that the premise of de Silentio's account is that Abraham is its paramount witness. But de Silentio struggles to say that he would be able to recognize a living knight of faith, though his imagination of the encounter is vivid. This could be in part because of de Silentio's subjectivity as a self-admitted knight of infinite resignation. Perhaps from a different position knights of faith are in plain sight. The main point the tension underscores however is that faith is not directly communicable. It depends on a particular vision, and receptivity. The personal combination de Silentio confesses allows him to recognize the movements in an imagined projection of the state of Abraham's soul during his journey up Mount Moriah, but does not allow him to make the movements himself.

This sets up the question: what, if anything, mediates or invites faith? If faith in *Fear and Trembling* is characterized as a particularly ordered movement of relation between the individual, God, and the world with its own epistemological parameters (it is *not* premised on "understand-

ing," but on love for the world preserved by the strength of the absurd, evidently a completely different way of knowing than systematic philosophical theology), does the non-human material world have a part to play? In *Fear and Trembling*, finitude is set up as the element in which faith plays itself out. It is a fundamental part of the double movement but it comes at the end, as a gift that the knight of faith receives joyfully. It is unclear where the invitation to the faith relation is coming from. The witness of Abraham? What would it take for de Silentio to make the movement himself? We will turn now to *Training in Christianity*[15] for a different voice speaking to how the invitation to faith is issued, what the obstacle is, and the details of recognizing and responding to the invitation. We will pay close attention to the role of "the world" and how the author modulates the question of its incommensurability with faith.

A brief note on the author, as before, is due. *Training in Christianity* is written by the voice of the pseudonym Anti-Climacus, and "edited" by Kierkegaard. We hear little of personal relevance from Anti-Climacus about himself throughout the work. He writes with a fairly strong "I" but it is expository, not confessional. He occasionally addresses the reader directly, asking him or her to consider seriously what he is saying in moving lyrical passages, or harsher exhortations, but this is not the dominant form of address. This distinguishes *Training in Christianity* from some of Kierkegaard's eponymous works, like our next work *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits,* addressed intimately to the single individual, "You, my reader." An Editor's Preface in Kierkegaard's voice warns the reader that "the requirement for being a Christian is strained by the pseudonym to the highest pitch of ideality." Kierkegaard seems to be justifying the author's writing an exposition of the requirement of Christianity without at any point confessing himself

[15] Kierkegaard, Soren. *Training in Christianity.* Translated by Walter Lowrie. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1944).

to be falling short of it, a potentially off-putting posture. He writes: “The requirement ought to be uttered, plainly set forth, and heard. There must be no abatement of the requirement, not to speak of the suppression of it—instead of making admission and acknowledgement on one’s own behalf” (7). Kierkegaard then apparently models the earnestness with which he thinks the contents of the work ought to be received by a confession of his own: “The requirement must be heard; and I understand what is said as addressed solely to me” (7). Kierkegaard is thus ostensibly writing to himself in this work, giving his readers a look into his extended “note to self,” which they may or may not choose to receive in that way as well. This is an ironic comment to make, however, given Anti-Climacus’ recurring critique of Christendom throughout the work. The aim of *Training in Christianity* seems less to be about upbuilding Kierkegaard than “try[ing] again to introduce Christianity into Christendom” (39), a task with somewhat wider ramifications. Indeed, Anti-Climacus develops his exposition of Christianity in direct opposition to what he takes to be the central misinterpretation of Established Christendom, that is, the absence of the categories of “the paradox” and “the offence.” He writes: “By degrees…all pith and vigour was distilled out of Christianity; the tension of the paradox was relaxed, one became a Christian without noticing it, and without in the least noticing the possibility of offence” (38). The paradox of the Incarnation and the offensiveness of Christ’s invitation to suffer in his likeness are crucial to encounter in the process of becoming a Christian, according to Anti-Climacus. The paradoxical and offensive character of “the requirement” is precisely what ensures an existential, rather than cognitive, approach to Christianity—it is Christianity’s “weapon of defence against ‘speculative comprehension’” (104). The Christianity taught in Christendom is not Christianity at all, so long as it leaves out just how incommensurable Christ’s measure is with the measure of “the world.”
Kierkegaard’s posture in relation to Anti-Climacus’ critique is a way of indicating that he is not

omitting himself from reprobation, that judgement passed on the existential status of Christendom cannot be non-confessional. What are we to make of Anti-Climacus speaking non-confessionally then? This tension allows for a certain distance from the text that perhaps Kierkegaard thought would give his readers the space to be re-introduced to the intensity of "the Christian requirement."

The substance of *Training in Christianity* is a three part meditation on the invitation Christ issues to relation with him, the paradox inherent in the Inviter and his indirect manner of communicating, and the phenomenology of the self that forms in relation to being offended and attracted by Christ. For the purposes of our investigation, I will focus my exposition on selected sections in order to bring out the significance of Anti-Climacus' emphasis on the paradox, the offence and indirect communication for imagining the relation between the self, God and the world. My aim in this discussion is to show the difference Anti-Climacus identifies between Christ's summons, and the summons of "the world"—namely, that Christ draws through a paradox, and in so doing preserves the freedom of the human person, requiring them to become a self through a choice, while "the world" draws the human person to itself immediately, without presenting a choice, thereby bypassing the requirement for the person drawn to become a self. We will examine what he means by the paradox, the self, and the world and what these categories have to say about how Anti-Climacus thinks about the phenomenal, material world.

Anti-Climacus most clearly identifies the difference between Christ's summons to the human and the world's summons in the second discourse of Part III of *Training in Christianity*. Christ's summons is an invitation from a *self* to another human to become a *self*. The world's summons

on the other hand is empty of *self*hood, and is rather a social conformity, so becoming in relation to its invitation leaves the human being empty as well. Part III of *Training in Christianity* is a seven-discourse meditation on the theme of John 12:32, "And I, if I be lifted up from the Earth, will draw all unto Myself." In the second discourse, Anti-Climacus focusses on what it means that Christ *draws* all *unto himself*. His aim in this discourse is to identify the relation between Christ's summons and the category of the "self." There are many things that "draw us" to themselves, he begins by observing, things like "pleasure with its seducing power, the manifold with its confusing distractions, the moment with its deceptive importance, and bustle with its vain toil, and frivolity's careless squandering of time, and melancholy's gloomy brooding" (157). How are these attractions distinguished from the way Christ "draws all"? For something to draw to it*self,* he reflects, it has to be a self in the first place. "The sensuous, the worldly, the momentary, the manifold" is nothing in itself, because a self is a "duplication, it is freedom" (159). Anti-Climacus thus conceives of a self as having agency—a self is a category of being, capable of making a choice, of mediating its becoming, and it is along this axis that he interprets Christ's invitation. Christ is drawing to him*self*, and the nature of what he is drawing to himself is also a *self*. The "worldly" is deceptive because its mode of attraction does not require that the human be drawn to it as a *self*, it does not require a choice on behalf of the person. It draws immediately. Christ's summons, on the other hand, addresses the human self by presenting it with a choice, that is, the summons involves the human self in the response: "The real meaning of truly drawing to oneself is, first to help it to become truly its own self, so as then to draw it to oneself, or it means to help it to become its own self with and by the drawing of it to oneself" (159). The point here is that Christ's invitation is one that the human self must become in relation to—it prompts a process of transformation that brings the self into itself *before* that self can then, as a self-inhabiting being,

be drawn to Christ. “Christ is composite,” Anti-Climacus writes, “though one and the same, He is the humbled one and the exalted” and it is from this doubleness that he draws the human being to Himself (160). The choice presented to the human being is not between the humility of Christ or his exultation, but between choosing the “unity of two contraries” or not (161). This is not at all a straightforward choice, and the significant point for our inquiry is Anti-Climacus’ comment that “There is nothing, no power of nature, nothing in all the world that can thus draw to itself through a doubleness; only spirit can do that, and can thus in turn draw spirit unto itself” (160). Christ’s is a unique invitation that prompts a becoming unavailable in relation to other kinds of “invitation” or attractive forces. Now, what more specifically is the nature of Christ’s invitation, and how does Anti-Climacus describe the human response?

We started with the second discourse of Part III because it is the most succinct discussion of the idea that becoming a self in relation to the doubleness of Christ’s invitation is the first step in responding to it. We will turn now to the first two parts of *Training in Christianity* which are Anti-Climacus’ exposition of the invitation-response dialectic. We will pay specific attention to the offensiveness of Christ’s paradoxical invitation, and what the nature of the self that emerges in response to it is. Anti-Climacus characterizes Christ’s invitation first and foremost as an invitation issued to the sufferer in need of help. It is thus an invitation to a movement of receptivity. The paradox and offensiveness of Christ’s invitation lie in the fact that he himself is a paradoxical being, Man and God, and that his judgement of what the human sufferer needs is incommensurable with “the world’s” judgement—i.e. that the root of human suffering is sin, a mis-relation between God and the human that requires “turning about”, rather than the more obvious “worldly” afflictions. The immediate human response to Christ’s invitation that is essential to recognize

and that has been tellingly obscured in "Established Christendom" is to be offended and to turn away. The task of becoming a Christian is recognizing this immediate response and working through it, overcoming the offence through a movement of faith that chooses to move towards the paradox, recognizing in it a standard of judgement incommensurable with "the world," open to receiving a different form of judgement.

In Part I of *Training in Christianity*, Anti-Climacus sets up the invitation-response dialectic that structures his meditations with a lyrical reflection on what characterizes the invitation issued by Christ. This reflection is based on Matthew 11:28: "Come hither to me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, I will give you rest." The first point Anti-Climacus makes is that the invitation offers help without waiting for the person in need of help to ask for it. The invitation makes the first move: "He Himself it is that seeks them that stand in need of help; it is He Himself that goes about and, calling them, almost beseeching them, says, 'Come hither!'" (11) Second, that the invitation is addressed to "all," but must be heard by each person as an individual. To this end, he writes, the invitation goes into the four quarters of the world, and calls aloud "wherever there is a parting of the ways," that is, wherever each person as an individual has veered down his own path: "Where there is a path so solitary that only one knows it, one single person, or no one at all, so that there is only one footprint, that of the luckless man who fled along that path with his misery…Even there the invitation penetrates" (16). Third, that the invitation, though addressed to all, is addressed specifically to all *sufferers:* "Him who has ceased to seek and to sorrow He does not invite," Anti-Climacus writes. The significance of this characterization for our purposes is that the initial invitation to relation issued by God to the individual human being is structured as an invitation for the individual to allow herself to be helped. It is an invitation to a movement of

receptivity. The work of responding to the invitation is left in the hands of the individual, though Anti-Climacus exhorts that the individual "turn about, turn about!" and "Fear not the toilsome path of conversion" (19). We will examine his phenomenology of the "turn" towards the invitation after first passing through the obstacle inherent in the call.

Immediately following his preliminary sketch of the invitation, Anti-Climacus introduces the obstacle. This theme, introduced in Part I of the book and elaborated in more detail as "the offence" in Part II is the central argument of *Training in Christianity*. It serves first of all to highlight the difference Anti-Climacus sees between the requirement of Christianity at its "highest pitch of ideality" and the way Christianity is understood and taught in Established Christendom, and secondly to set up his interpretation of the movement of conversion, and the relation of Christianity to the world.

Halt! Anti-Climacus says, and describes what he sees: "Instead of getting a sight, as one might expect, of an interminable throng of such as labour and are heavy laden following the invitation, you behold in fact a sight which is exactly the opposite: an interminable throng of men who turn backward in flight and shudder" (25). What causes people to flee from the Inviter and his Invitation? The Inviter himself is the obstacle. The first dimension of the obstacle is that Christ was a definite historical person, and uttered his invitation as God when he lived as a human, in a particular time and place. If one could prove from the historical consequences of Christ's life that he was indeed God, there would be no obstacle. But this is impossible: "If God exists," Anti-Climacus reasons, "and consequently is distinguished by an infinite difference of quality from all that it means to be a man, then neither can I nor anybody else, by beginning with the assumption that

He was a man, arrive in all eternity at the conclusion, 'therefore it was God'" (31). What this points to is the paradoxical nature of Christ himself, "which history can never digest or convert into a common syllogism" (33), signalling that historical knowledge is the wrong epistemological category through which to approach him. Instead, "one must either believe on Him or be offended" (36). The obstacle in this first formulation is the offensiveness of a human being speaking as God. The second dimension of the obstacle is the way the Inviter, as a man, expressed compassion and interpreted the root of human suffering. When does human compassion ever deem it appropriate "to make oneself literally one with the most miserable"? asks Anti-Climacus (63). There is an abandon with which the Inviter expressed compassion throughout his life which is insane by human reckoning. Furthermore, the Inviter interpreted the root of human suffering not as poverty or ill-health but sin and, Anti-Climacus writes, "humanly speaking, there is actually something shocking, something at which one might become so embittered that he would have an inclination to kill the man—at the thought of bidding the poor, and sick, and suffering to come to Him, and then to be able to do nothing for them but only to promise them forgiveness of sins" (64). The significance of this discussion for us is Anti-Climacus' introduction of the category of faith in contrast to knowledge, where faith demands a process of overcoming offence while knowledge is one of dialectical reasoning. He also introduces here the difference between the Inviter's measure and the human measure. I will elaborate on both of these more in what follows.

In Part II Anti-Climacus launches into a detailed exposition of Biblical passages having to do the offence. His recurring theme is Matthew 11:6: "Blessed is he whosoever is not offended in me." The first half of Part II is an elaboration on the two categories of offence we touched on in Part I, that is, offence at Christ as "the unity of God and an individual man," and Christ's actions as a

man coming into conflict with human judgement (84-85). We are concerned here with Anti-Climacus' concluding discussion of Part II where he identifies the heart of the offence being Christ's indirect communication. By setting up the possibility of offence, indirect communication in turn sets up the invitation to faith.

As the God-Man, Christ is a "sign of contradiction," Anti-Climacus writes (125). The God-Man is a sign in the sense that he is both what he immediately appears to be and something else besides, and a sign of contradiction because what he is besides Man is the "Other" of Man, namely God. Being a sign of contradiction is a form of indirect communication which has "the intent of making the receiver independently active" (125). The receiver must in the first instance recognize the sign as such, and in the case of the God-Man recognize the contradiction. This process of recognition is not immediate: the "sign of contradiction" communicates by drawing attention to himself, through miracles for instance, and once he has the attention of the receiver, presents the contradiction that he who speaks as a Man is also God. Caught by the contradiction, the receiver has to choose whether he believes the contradiction or not. What is revealed by the indirect communication of the "sign of contradiction" is first and foremost the state of the receiver's heart, that is, whether he is ready to believe or not: "This only the sign of contradiction can do: it draws attention to itself, and then it presents a contradiction…A contradiction placed directly in front of a man—if only one can get him to look upon it—is a mirror; while he is judging, what dwells within him must be revealed…The contradiction puts before him a choice, and while he is choosing, he himself is revealed" (126). This contradiction, communicated indirectly as a sign that reveals a person to themselves, is the heart of the potential offence in the meeting of an individual man with the God-Man, because the contradiction reveals "at every instant the yawning

gulf between the individual and the God-Man, across which only faith can reach" (139). Faith is thus a form of receptivity: it is a response to indirect communication, halted by the obstacle of the contradiction and brought to the point of making a decision. It is not immanent, and the communication is not a doctrine, in contrast to what Anti-Climacus says "modern philosophy" would have people believe (140). "Established Christendom" operates in direct communication, in league with modern philosophy, and direct communication "employ(s) enticement and warning and threatening—and then gradually and quite unobserved the transition is brought about little by little, to the point of accepting it, of regarding oneself as convinced by it, of being of the opinion, etc." (140).

What comes of this for the purposes of our investigation is the idea that Christ communicates his invitation to relation differently from what Anti-Climacus characterizes as "the world," which draws the human being away from becoming a self. How does Anti-Climacus understand the relation between Christianity and "the world"? In the last chapter of Part I of *Training in Christianity*, Anti-Climacus discusses the idea that Christ's invitation is to *contemporaneousness* with him, that is, to a process of transformation into likeness with God. "Christianity did not come into the world…as an admirable example of the gentle art of consolation—but as *the absolute,*" he writes (66). "In all moments of laxness, sluggishness, dullness, when the sensuous nature of man predominates, Christianity seems madness, since it is incommensurable with any finite wherefore. What is the use of it, then? The answer is: Hold thy peace! It is the absolute! And so it *must* be represented, viz. in such a way as to make it appear madness in the eyes of the sensuous man" (66). Anti-Climacus uses "sensuous" here in close conjunction with "the finite," and "the world," as a category of judgement. The judgement informed by sensuous, finite experience sees

the absolute as incommensurable with itself. What must be overcome of "the world" in order to participate in contemporaneousness with Christ is thus not materiality itself but the judgement that results from participating in it. Christ's invitation, through the paradox and the offence, is to a form of judgement that is able to enter into a contemporaneous relation with Christ, that is, a process of becoming that recognizes the invitation intimately and inwardly addressed. "If thou canst not prevail upon thyself to become a Christian in the situation of contemporaneousness with Him, or if He in the situation of contemporaneousness cannot move thee and draw thee to Himself—then thou wilt never become a Christian" (68). Does material reality participate meaningfully in this process of becoming?

III. UPBUILDING DISCOURSES IN VARIOUS SPIRITS: THE LILIES IN THE FIELD AND THE BIRDS OF THE AIR

We will now take up the question of what Kierkegaard thinks the role the material world plays in human becoming in relation to God with reference to one of his eponymous works, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*[16]. We have been examining this question so far as a question of how Kierkegaard's pseudonyms imagine an appropriately ordered relation to the world, and we have seen a fairly continuous picture emerge. In *Fear and Trembling*, the material world, under the guise of "finitude," is related to by the Knight of Faith "by virtue of the absurd." As we saw, by this movement he relinquishes what he understands of finite reality and desires from it, without, however, becoming detached from it. He achieves this through the double movement of faith

[16] Kierkegaard, Soren. *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits.* Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009).

that is characterized as a letting go of a possessive desire in relation to finitude, and replaced with a receptive desire, epitomized by the story of God's request that Abraham sacrifice his son Isaac. How Abraham makes this movement is left unclear in *Fear and Trembling*, but the movement itself Climacus identifies as paradoxical. In *Training in Christianity*, we took a closer look at the movement of faith to see how Anti-Climacus understands the link between human selfhood and the process of becoming that is faith. Anti-Climacus' account in *Training in Christianity* does not deal explicitly with material reality, except in a discussion of the relation of Christianity to "the world," which rather than being an explicitly material category, is instead the category of human judgement that is informed by the human experience of finitude. The movement of faith described in *Training in Christianity*, much like the one described in *Fear and Trembling*, involves a relinquishing of the judgement borne of "the world," of "sensuous man," in favour instead of a relation with Christ, the "sign of contradiction", who invites the human sufferer to receive help by first requiring that they become a "self" by choosing to not be offended by the paradox, the indirect communication, of the suffering God-Man. What we took from Anti-Climacus' account is the idea that the human self becomes most truly itself only through a process of responding to the invitation of Christ who uniquely invites through the doubleness that requires the human self to let go of "worldly" forms of judgement. The question we go to *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* with now is: does non-human material reality play a meaningful role in the human process of becoming in response to Christ's invitation to contemporaneousness with Him? We will turn specifically to Part II of the book, "What we Learn from the Lilies in the Field and From the Birds of the Air," where Kierkegaard devotes three discourses to discussing the relation between the human being, nature, and the Kingdom of God. We will encounter here again the category of the single individual who discovers himself this time through the mirroring effect of

nature, the idea that the non-human natural world is a witness to the Creator that teaches humans their respective role in the world, and finally the idea that the Kingdom of God is to be sought *first* internally, once more a posture of letting go of the finite world to be ready to receive it again as a gift from God. We will be paying special attention to how Kierkegaard imagines nature communicates with the single individual and whether the self that develops in response to this communication parallels the self that develops in response to the paradoxical invitation of the God-Man in *Training in Christianity*.

But first a few comments on the authorial voice. Unlike either of the two works we discussed previously, each of the three collections of discourses that make up *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* is addressed to "that single individual." This is an intimate address, but the intimacy is not one that Kierkegaard imagines forging between himself and the reader. In a journal entry referenced in the supplement to the book he writes: "…he seeks stillness, he does not read for my sake or for the world's sake—but for his own sake, he reads in such a way that he does not seek my acquaintance but avoids it— then he is *my* reader" (367). Kierkegaard's conceit here is that the text is written in such a way that "*his* reader," not anyone who happens to pick up the book, but someone specific, "*that* single individual," might enter the work and appropriate it, therein finding a guide to becoming intimate with themselves. In the Preface to Part Two he claims to this end that this collection of discourses "is without the *authority* of the teacher, a *superfluidity, insignificant* like the lily and the bird" (157). This is a telling remark given that in the prayer of the Preface, the superfluidity and insignificance of the lily and the bird do not preclude them from being teachers, and in fact, as we'll see as we move on in the text, come to characterize them as teachers. What gives them authority is that, according to Kierkegaard's reading of the

Gospel passage that structures Part Two (Matthew 6:24-34), they are "divinely appointed" teachers (157). Kierkegaard thus seems to be trying to preclude himself from being read as divinely appointed to speak to the upbuilding of the single individual, without however giving up on his role in this task altogether. Though as an eponymous work this is supposedly Kierkegaard speaking "directly," he evinces here nevertheless a highly mediated relation to his reader. This underscores the question we took up in its various modulations in both *Fear and Trembling* and *Training in Christianity*, namely Kierkegaard's constant preoccupation with what it means to communicate faith, or the God-relation, and what kind of human self-becoming is involved in the process of giving and receiving the communication. This question will inform my exegesis of Part Two of *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits,* in conjunction with the question we have been pursuing all along, namely: how does the material world participate in the human-God relation?

The three discourses that make up Part II of *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* are an extended meditation on Matthew 6:24-34, through which Kierkegaard makes the following three main arguments: first that nature is an aid to inwardness, revealing the human being to themselves as a single individual, dependent on God; second, that nature witnesses to God and thereby invites the human being to assume the uniquely human task of worshipping God; finally, that nature cannot be related to directly by the human being—it must be left to perish as the human seeks the Kingdom of God *first* inwardly, and only then receives the finite, visible world again *in addition* to the God-relation, as a gift of God. The premise underlying Kierkegaard's three discourses is that nature participates in relating the human being to God. It has this capacity, however, only insofar as the human being is not deluded, or "lull[ed] to sleep" by the finite world,

that is, approaches nature as a seeker, looking for the Kingdom of God (209). Nature thus has the capacity to hide, or reveal, the God-relation to the human being. Whether it issues an invitation depends on how the human being approaches it. This is in stark contrast to Anti-Climacus' characterization of Christ's invitation to the human being which stands, always, as an absolute challenge that the human can chose to live in relation to or turn away from. While Christ's invitation attracts and repels, it does not delude; and while it requests the human being's response, this response does not alter the invitation. There are parallels to how Anti-Climacus and Kierkegaard sketch the different invitations however: both Christ and the "divinely appointed teachers" address themselves to the single individual in distress, the sufferer or the worrier (note: not the observer, or even the passionate admirer of *Fear and Trembling*). Both invite a turning towards "the self," or "inwardness," which becomes the locus of the human's God-relation insofar as the individual effects a turn towards it, which means that "the self" or "inwardness" are not immediately loci of relationality, but only become so as a response to an invitation. And both invitations require a process of discernment on behalf of the person invited. The difference is that the paradox is constitutive of Christ's communication, whereas the paradox that nature, or finitude, must be released and received again, is revealed only to the seeker of the Kingdom of God. This latter picture is complicated, however, by the fact that Kierkegaard characterizes nature as teaching the human being to recognize themselves as a seeker.

In the first discourse Kierkegaard contrasts how the human being experiences themselves in the company of "the lily in the field and the bird of the air" in contrast to other people, and what this reveals to them about being human. He begins with the person addressed by the Gospel passage, the worrier: "In every line of this solicitous Gospel it is clear that the words are being spoken not

to the healthy, not to the strong, not to the happy, but to the worried; it is clear that the message is itself doing what it says God does: it takes upon itself the worried and has solicitude for them—in the right way" (160). This sets up Kierkegaard's inquiry into the Gospel's normative reference of the worrier to nature. The first thing of note is that the lilies in the field and the birds of the air are silent. They do not offer the worrier reasons to stop worrying, or prompt the kind of comparison that makes the worrier self-conscious, although they are instrumental in opening the worrier onto a new kind of self-awareness. They are there in a way that no human being can be present with another: in the presence of the lilies in the field and the birds of the air the worrier can forget himself. This can happen, however, only if the worrier "properly" looks at them: "if the person in distress actually gives his attention to the lilies and the birds and their life and forgets himself in contemplation of them and their life, while in his absorption in them he, unnoticed, by himself learns something about himself—unnoticed, since there is indeed sheer silence, no one present. The worried person is free of any and all co-knowledge, except God's, his own—and the lilies" (162). In properly considering the lily and the bird, calmly and with wonder, the worrier alone in his silence discovers the presence of God and the lilies (164). It is significant that this comes as a result of stepping out of the co-knowledge of other human beings that Kierkegaard here characterizes as antithetical to self-forgetting, and so antithetical to self-recognizing. The co-knowledge of God and the lilies acts as a mirror to the worrier who begins to observe the lily with wonder, and gradually begins to recognize himself in the lily: "The lily cannot speak, but simply because it cannot speak, simply because there is utter silence out there and no one is present, simply for this reason the worried one, if he speaks and if he speaks with the lily, is in the situation of speaking with himself" (165). Speaking with himself about the beauty and glory of the lily, he recognizes himself, the only human among the lilies, as a human being just as

beautiful and glorious. With the same calm attentiveness, the worrier observes the bird of the air that is dependent every day on its environment to survive. In this mood he realizes that the bird lives without worrying about the future, and lives without trying to be independent of its daily task of receiving from the world its sustenance. From the bird he learns: "to be contented with being a human being, with being the humble one, the created being who can no more support himself than create himself" (177). The movement Kierkegaard sketches in this discourse is the movement the worrier is invited to make by the Gospel passage into nature, which Kierkegaard interprets as a movement away from self-knowledge that is constituted with reference to other human beings, towards a self-knowledge constituted with reference to other created beings. With this identification, the worrier recognizes himself as wonderful and glorious as a human being, and utterly dependent on God.

In the next discourse, Kierkegaard discusses what is specifically glorious about the human being among other beings. He begins with a comment on the movements the Gospel invites the worrier to make in relation to nature. The first movement is to leave human society, "out into the field, into surroundings that will weave him into the great common life, that will win him for the great fellowship of existence" (183). The next movement is to look downward at the lily and upward at the bird. These movement are intended to divert the worrier from staring at his worry. What is significant for us here is Kierkegaard's characterization of the effect that what the worrier sees has on him, i.e. how nature does its communicative work once the worrier moves to look at it. Nature, looked at properly, is "a *godly diversion*, which does not, like the empty and worldly diversion, incite impatience and nourish the worry, but diverts, calms, and persuades the more devoutly one gives oneself over to it" (184). Out in the field "the persuasion mounts with every in-

stant; more and more movingly it steals the temporal from you; with every moment you continue to contemplate it, that which ought to be forgotten sinks deeper and deeper into oblivion" (185). "True, there is no one who is calling you, no invitation is heard…and yet, watch out, make haste, lest by standing still for a moment you perhaps discover in the undulating waves the persuasion of uniformity" (186). Inflected no doubt with irony directed at Romantic sublimity, these passages suggest something of a gradual, unnoticed form of persuasion that "calms," and "steals" the worrier away from his worries. This is in direct contrast to the kind of communication that characterizes Christ as paradox, who requires the sufferer to choose whether to be offended or not before receiving help. The point here is that nature, as godly diversion, has the capacity to "cause the fixedly staring eyes to move" (186). What the worrier is led to discover in this second discourse is that nature witnesses to God and the uniquely human response is to worship (193).

In the third discourse Kierkegaard discusses the decay the worrier inevitably discovers in nature. The mood shifts and the worrier wonders why he has been led out to be diverted from his worries by something fleeting (204). This allows Kierkegaard to introduce into this discourse the tension between eternity and temporality, God and the world that the worrier discovers is playing itself out in his innermost being and he must make a choice (205-206). The choice he must make is to give up everything and this he learns from the lily in the field and the bird of the air who do not have anything except what they receive: "he should give up everything…Only when the human being, although he works and spins, is just like the lily, which does not work or spin, only when the human being, although he sows and reaps and gathers into barns, is just like the bird, which does not sow and reap and gather into bars—only then does he not serve mammon" (208). The worrier discovers from being led into nature and discovering there the comfort of being a crea-

ture, the specific task of worship, and the reality of death, to *begin* with seeking God's Kingdom which is within him. This movement is a result of recognizing in his despair over death that he is seeking something other than it. "Seek *first* God's kingdom. This is the sequence, but it is also the sequence of inversion, because that which first offers itself to a person is everything that is visible and corruptible, which tempts and draws him, yes, will entrap him in such a way that he begins last, or perhaps never, to seek God's kingdom. But the proper beginning begins with seeking God's kingdom first; thus it begins expressly by letting a world perish. What a difficult beginning!" (209) Once he lets the world perish, the rest is added: "But if a person seeks God's kingdom first—'*then all these things will be added to him*.' They will be *added* to him, since there is only one thing that is to be *sought*: God's kingdom" (212). In relation to finitude the human being must *begin* by letting it go on the faith that he will receive it in addition to what he finds by letting it go.

CHAPTER 3: TOWARDS A KIERKEGAARDIAN CONTEMPLATIVE ECOLOGY

It is clear in *Fear and Trembling* that finitude is worth something for Kierkegaard in the way he has de Silentio contrast the glorious and epic heroism of resignation and relinquishment with the humility of loving and hoping for the world despite the pain and disappointment that comes with it. This text is an intervention—formally and in its content—on the question of the difference between faith and the graspable knowledge supposedly "beyond" it, on the question of the relationship between everyday ethics and the requirements of faith, on the kind of subjectivity that participates in (or is created by) faith in contrast to ethics (the "single individual" subjectivity vs the "universal" subjectivity), and on the vacuity of the kind of "faith" being instructed in Christendom. The form of the text is a series of "tunings", a eulogy, a series of dialectical problematics, an epilogue all recounted from the contrived perspective of an admirer standing in the universal, the ethical, incapable, he thinks, of making the movement of faith. This set-up contributes to the through-line argument that faith is a matter of subjectivity, a dynamic and lyrical response to an interpolation, a movement. It is not graspable or necessarily *perceivable* by an onlooker or even by a person of faith—this is Abraham's silence, and the indistinguishability of the Knight of Faith from the Tax Collector. Faith's relation to subjectivity is ultimately a mystery in this text.

It is significant then that what is perceivable, to someone capable of the movement of infinite resignation, is precisely the Knight of Faith's concern for the specifics of his life, his desires and loves, having, as the story of Abraham shows, first given them all up. How can Abraham receive anything again once he has been asked to give up the most important thing in his life? What kind of love is capable of this kind of receptivity? Who is Abraham that this was possible for him?

How do you love a world that you have lost? How can you love what you have been given knowing that at any minute it can be taken away? de Silentio's ultimate concern then is with loss being the condition of life in the finite world. His genius is to set this problematic up in the context of Hegelian philosophy, which presumes a final knowledge of the world, a teleology of spirit in which the world and the loves specific to individuals, are left behind in its sweeping, infinitely resigned universalism. Leaving a respectful shroud of mystery around the mechanics of Abraham's faith (one would almost expect a "how to.." account from de Silentio given the probing intensity of his analysis of Abraham's state of mind on the way up Mt. Moriah), he praises as higher than any philosophy promising to definitively and systematically explain the world, the capacity instead to engage and handle loss and dispossession.

He indirectly points out the shortcomings of Hegel's phenomenology by emphasizing finitude as the determining characteristic of life in the world. Any philosophy or practice of subjectivity that presumes to know anything definitively, or control the world, is delusional. It has not accurately read the sacrificial nature of living under finite conditions. Faith is that quality of mind and body, that perception and attunement, which de Silentio, as a good Kierkegaardian, calls "the single individual", capable of not abandoning love for the world once it becomes clear that this love will be devastating. Not only will this love bring you to sacrifice what is most important to you, it will make it impossible to engage in direct communication with anyone regarding your motivations, or to offer any explanation of itself in the terms of everyday "universal" ethics. There is something amazing and inconceivable about this to de Silentio, who for all his imaginative projections, can't bear to make the move himself and stands apparently aloof from "reduplicating" the draw he feels to Abraham. Perhaps, however, he is as much a mystery to himself as Abraham

is, and as he writes he makes exactly the leap he so admires. Who doesn't feel on some level that in *Fear and Trembling* de Silentio succeeds in expressing the sublime in the pedestrian?

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We focused on *Training in Christianity* to bring out Kierkegaard's explicitly Christian vision, the cruciform subjectivity he's interested in, and the substance of what he is trying to re-introduce into Christendom. The drama of this text takes place primarily between the humiliated Christ, the sufferers he is trying to reach and the followers he is calling for. This in contrast to the triumphant Christ, who Kierkegaard thinks has been too readily co-opted by Christendom in order to justify an apathetic version of Christian faith that suspiciously values the same things as the Danish State. Christ triumphs, it is true, but this is not the meaning of faith in the context of finitude, "the world," because, says Kierkegaard, finitude is the medium in which Divine love manifests itself as suffering. Christ triumphant is true of eternity, but in the context of finitude his "triumph" cannot be known except for contemporaneousness, that is, a willingness to suffer-with, Christ in his humiliation. This is the meaning of following Christ in this world, and it is followers, not aloof admirers, that Christ came looking for.

What in the world would possess anyone to want to do this, though? The inquiry into how drastically opposed Christian faith is, in reality, to the bourgeois comforts of State Christianity, and the means by which someone might find themselves moved to respond favourably to Christ's invitation, is the basis of Kierkegaard's phenomenology of subjectivity in this text. He introduces at the outset of his investigation Christ's invitation which "fares forth", "halting at the parting of the

ways" in search of sufferers that he can help. This is an important point in Kierkegaard's theology: Christ's invitation goes out first, he is the one offering help to anyone who needs it, which ultimately is every human being. The invitation doesn't reach those who don't already understand themselves to be suffering, however, and this is where the human response comes in. Christ's invitation is such that the help he offers doesn't appear to everyday human (State Christian…) understanding as help: one is met by "the obstacle" or the paradox—that receiving help from Christ requires one sacrifice oneself, specifically any progress one has made according to "worldly" or dominant systems of social value and begin to see oneself against the measure of Divine love.

Christ invites a person in such a way that they become a "self" through the response, Kierkegaard writes. This is not the case with other forms of "invitation", which lure a person into "belief" or "doctrine" without them having to make a conscious decision to sacrifice anything. Mimesis of Christ, which is the substance of the invitation, is such a difficult calling, is inherently an "obstacle", that it takes a transfiguration and a turning of a person's whole subjectivity to even begin to accept the task. Think of many other forms of mimesis that occur seamlessly in our socialized lives—the values we accidentally take up in order to survive in whatever cultural-political system we live in. When the sufferer accepts being gazed at, being helped by and measured by Divine love, they begin to see themselves as a "sinner", as falling short of the capacity to receive and stand in Divine love, as in need of reconciliation with this suffering and vulnerable love, of forgiveness. The recognition of "sin" moves the person to understand the substance of the help Christ is offering, and see it as liberating, as much as it demands deep change of heart.

This recognition is what opens a person to receive and begin to desire to return the love, and it is love of Christ ultimately that moves one to suffer in his likeness.

The movement is therefore from suffering outside of Divine love, to suffering with it. This, in the context of finitude, is what it means to become contemporary with Christ, to bring him into time, to reduplicate Divine love in one's own time and place. What does all this have to say about Kierkegaard's vision of Cruciform subjectivity in relation to finitude? It's a form of relating to the world that is uninterested in "winning" by the terms set out by human cultural institutions, capable of the humility of being wrong, of being humiliated, not trying to escape suffering, but recognizing amid all of these experiences a companionship with something beyond or other than finitude. The recognition of this companionship is the beginning of a capacity for conviviality with the beings we share finitude with, the recognition of an accompaniment that does not invite one to be removed from the sufferings inherent in finite life, but to live into them in a way that builds into one's own life and the lives of those one is surrounded by, an image and practice of vulnerable love.

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The Discourse on the Lilies of the Field and the Birds of the Air in *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* deals most explicitly with "nature". What is interesting about it as a piece on "nature," though, is that Kierkegaard is not primarily trying to pinpoint the ontological status of creation, or to reenact a Romantic exodus from industrial life where the human individual triumphantly finds themselves, which would have been common at the time (no less than our own).

Rather, the whole drama of the piece takes place on the level of human self-understanding in dialogue with creation, where nature, with the help of the Gospel, takes the human worrier in as a student, teaching and guiding their perception to ultimately discover their specific role in the world as a human creature.

The tuning that takes place throughout this piece is between the worrier's gaze and their inner disposition towards what they see, the form their attachments to their self-understanding in relation to the world "outside" them take. As they learn to harmonize with creation, the worrier identifies what appears to be a human-specific trait: the painful meeting of temporality and eternity in their consciousness, the awareness in the midst of the apparent abundance of life, of death. Whether or not this awareness is actually human-specific is not at issue here. The function this discovery serves in Kierkegaard's account is to invite the calmed worrier to reckon with the fleeting character of their solid surroundings and their own body. No longer "staring fixedly" at their worry, the worrier led out into nature by the Gospel, and taught to understand themselves in the context of an other-than-human creation, is now invited to see that the anxiety that was driving their worry in the "endless world of human comparisons" is present while they are in nature too. It concerns precisely the fact of finitude and the way human consciousness comprehends it, the fact that loss and death is inherent to life, at least to sensuous life as we know it, and the anxiety this provokes.

The command of the Gospel, which Kierkegaard points out is also issued to the contemplative through a tuned vision of nature (via seeing nature's "obedience" and imitating it), is to "seek *first* the Kingdom of God, which is within you". As in *Fear and Trembling*, the mechanics and

precise meaning of this inward turn remain mysterious for Kierkegaard, but the next verse brings out for him the implications of the commandment: “and the *rest* shall be *added* unto to you”. Seeking first the Kingdom of God names a movement capable of recognizing everything a person thought of as constituting their life as “the rest”, as an “addition” to the most important thing which they *already have*. The quality of this possession however is *dispossessive*. At the heart of their being, of their “withinness”, is a constitutive Kingdom belonging to the Creator. The dispositional shift the Gospel and nature teach in relation to a revealed anxiety in the face of finitude is a contemplative receptivity—the seeking of a mysterious darkness out of which pours forth a free abundance. This inward dispossessive identity grounds the human being in their shared identity with the lilies and the birds who live their lives in full dependence on things beyond their control, but in the specifically human way marked by the recognition and naming of the sustaining abundance of the Creator in worship. The resilience of this inwardness in the face of worry or anxiety lies precisely in its acceptance that loss is somehow a feature of the Creator’s abundance in finite life as we know it. Looking inward for the Kingdom of God does not mean turning away from the finite world, but reconfiguring one’s relationship to it, ultimately turning back outwards from the relinquishing inward movement with a transfigured capacity to receive the world as gift.

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We began this exploration with the idea in *The Spell of the Sensuous* that western literate subjectivity is pathologically self-enclosed, and that this somehow needs to break for any kind of adequate response to climate change to be possible. The problem at the heart of the environmental crisis is perceptual: in the west, we live in a culture lacking the tools to teach and support gen-

uine human self-understanding in relation to the sensuous world, in relation to sustained forms of address coming from other-than-human beings, who have demands and ways of knowing of their own. We are perceptually closed to the demands of the non-human world, even as it shouts for our attention. On Abram's account, what needs to happen is a massive shift in attention, particularly from the human to the "other" than human. We invited Kierkegaard into this conversation on the grounds that he was also concerned in his day with cultural and intellectual technologies of self-enclosure, and, we thought, had a rigorous anatomy of what went on in the "self" struggling to open to the "Otherness" of God. While his analysis takes place in a theological register and so differs in meaningful ways from Abram's, Kierkegaard's method, like Abram's, is phenomenological and on this level the differences in the interpretations the two take from their observations of human life in the world are revealing. We set up the question of whether a relation to the "otherness" of other-than-human beings (Abram's prescription) differed meaningfully in phenomenological terms from a relation to the "Otherness" of God (Kierkegaard's subject and potentially his idiom for thinking through a sensuous engagement of the world), and bracketed it in order to look at Kierkegaard's phenomenology of faith in relation to the world. We saw that faith, characterized in different terms and through different characters and dramatic studies in the three texts we interpreted, is ultimately for Kierkegaard a capacity to receive and respond to something that appears "incommensurable" with the world as one conventionally knows it. It is a movement, variously characterized as the double movement, a paradox, the consciousness of eternity in time. Significantly, these moments of incursion of the "Other" demand a response: Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac, the self's turning towards the Inviter ready to suffer in His likeness, the worrier's fixedly staring eyes venturing to move to discover in his inwardness the Kingdom of God, and in each case mark a profound subjective shift in the person.

Kierkegaard's phenomenology of faith is a profound analysis of the attunement of self required for the incommensurable address, and response, to be possible. It links, as I have hoped to show, "inwardness" with "outwardness".

What does this contribute to the conversation we began with Abram and the brief mention of the environmental activists who invite us to pay attention to our subjective relationships to place and land, both in an effort to address the perceptual roots of our neglect of the environment, both referencing the importance of a human relation to non-human "otherness"? Kierkegaard brings in a sophisticated cartography of the openings and closings that permit or disrupt any meaningful relation to otherness, and the Christian categories he works in introduce the weight of "sin," or the incapacity to be open to address, and its possible forgiveness for human self-understanding to be able to include relation to any Other. His analysis of the Knight of Faith in contrast to the Knight of Infinite Resignation highlights that the capacity to be open to an other-than-human address is a quasi superhuman accomplishment, beyond which one can go "no further", and that its mechanics are mysterious, likely obscured to the person experiencing this encounter themselves. His discussion of the "paradox" of the address of the God-man is an honest appraisal of the human desire for security and power, and how much a genuine openness to otherness disrupts this, crucifies it even. Finally Kierkegaard's emphasis on a very particular form of inwardness, one that is discovered in response to a particular "Otherness," ie. the forgiving and loving gaze of a divine Other, brings into clear focus how important the psycho-spiritual dynamics of one's self-relation are. Does a relation to otherness not grounded in a sense of love and forgiveness bigger than anything a human can hope to accomplish on their own reach deep enough into the weight of pain we carry around to sustain itself? It is not that this relation is impossible with land or other crea-

tures, but that, if we hear Kierkegaard, it takes a very specific kind of tuning. It takes recognizing the lily and the bird not just as "others" but as "divinely appointed teachers," and, in Kierkegaard's Christian vision, divinely appointed teachers teaching the vulnerable and suffering love witnessed to by Christ in the Gospels.

The question of how to interpret inwardness in relation to land, place, and other than human beings in the context of climate change, especially in a North American colonial context, has received attention from two recent thinkers, Douglas Christie and Tim Lilburn[17]. Their work shows that the genre of inquiry we have been engaging can be read as a type of "contemplative ecology," an engagement of the question of environmental embeddedness with an inquiry into how inward and outward landscapes interact. Both thinkers are informed by the Christian spiritual tradition, and both are interested in translating the implications of various spiritual phenomenologies of inwardness to help us navigate 21st century human-earth relations. I hope by this final gesture to open avenues for further engagement with Kierkegaard on the questions these thinkers raise. Their attempts to revitalize western spiritual traditions given the history of ecological and spiritual trauma western Christianity has been in part responsible for in North America poses important questions for our study of Kierkegaard. If, as I have hoped to show, Kierkegaard's phenomenology of faith is an attempt to link human existence meaningfully to finitude, to this world, as well as to that which appears to us as Other (otherworldly, or just mysteriously incommensurable with habitual forms of perception), does this phenomenology have resources or implications for the project of settler allyship with the decolonization of North American land relations and meaningful settler "homecoming" in North America?

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[17] See especially Christie, *Blue Sapphire of the Mind*, and Lilburn, *Numinous Seditions*.

Douglas Christie first coined the term "contemplative ecology" in his book *Blue Sapphire of the Mind*[18], where he argues that in the context of 21st century climate change we need to cultivate particular forms of attention capable of meaningfully connecting the self to the broader environment. "However one understands the precise focus of this awareness," he writes, "the question of what it is to become aware of oneself as alive in the living world and how to cultivate this awareness for the sake of that world remains one of the most pressing spiritual concerns of our time" (6). Christie identifies a two-pronged moment in contemporary culture: the movement among religious communities to retrieve ideas and practices from their traditions that identify affinities between humans and the natural world, and the recognition on the part of environmental thinkers and activists that a full understanding of ecology requires the integration of spiritual thought and practice. Other terms have been used to describe these phenomena, "the greening of religion" and "spiritual ecology" for instance (4). Christie's project in this book is to contribute to the work of an ecologically attuned religious retrieval in the register of a spiritually sensitive ecology by focusing on how contemplative spiritual traditions might help reshape how we imagine and live in the natural world. Throughout this work he pursues the relationship between practices of attention, specifically those developed by the 4th century Christian Egyptian desert monks, and their effects on practitioners' consciousness of the surrounding world.

In the Christian monastic tradition, contemplation was understood as a practice of heightened perception, the primary aim being the vision of God. Sight is a recurring metaphor in the texts, as

[18] Christie, Douglas E. *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind: Notes for a Contemplative Ecology*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

are other sensory modes: listening to the voice of the Spirit, feeling the erotic touch of the Divine, tasting God's presence, smelling the fragrance of the Holy One. Paradoxically, Christie writes, these sensory metaphors express the attempt at perceiving something that seems to transcend anything known in the physical world. This language provides a way of linking the perception of transcendence with everyday sensual experience, allowing one to "attend to the most simple and mundane elements of existence and to see them as filled with significance, as sacred" (6). For the monks, noticing the particularity of one's sensory experience was part of the cultivation of a way of seeing that opened on to the recognition of one's participation in a much larger, sacred, whole. Contemplative practice was a way of developing a deep and encompassing way of seeing by which one's fractured consciousness of the world could be healed, rippling out into one's community in the form of a steady, attentive presence "responsive to the lives of other beings and capable of helping to reknit the torn fabric of existence" (7). Contemplative attention is thus a kind of perception attuned, and capable of responding to, both the seen and unseen aspects of one's embodied life in the world, in a way that was understood as having communal and cosmic implications (8). While Kierkegaard's texts are not explicitly "environmental", his metaphors, and the arenas in which his contemplative projects takes place, are vividly sensual. The brief Biblical account of Abraham's journey up Mount Moriah turns into a drawn out though experiment imagining Abraham's condition as he ascends the mountain. The three day trip and the mountain are not incidental to de Silentio, but clues to understanding Abraham's experience, and where his attention is directed. Likewise, we spend the whole Discourse on the Lilies and the Birds watching where the worrier turns their attention—outward into the lilies and the birds, the surroundings? Inward into anxiety, inward into the Kingdom of God? What does the worrier see? Christ's invitation "faring forth" is conspicuously mobile—it *moves* towards sufferers, dynami-

cally siding with them. We might say with Christie that Kierkegaard's sensory metaphors aim precisely at linking the perception of transcendence with everyday sensual experience, and he thus performs, at least in the texts we looked at, a kind of "contemplative ecology."

The naming and practice of this kind of attention is of course not limited to the Christian contemplative heritage. It takes shape in many spiritual traditions, and is becoming increasingly important to poets and naturalists for the link contemplative discourse creates between the world and one's inner experience of it. "Such language can reveal the world," Christie writes, "can open human consciousness to a new way of perceiving and being in the world" (10). The question arising among contemporary writers interested in the spiritual significance of the world is whether we can learn to perceive and respond to our rapidly degrading world as sacred, and whether a change in perception might lead to a different way of inhabiting our environment. This line of thought is leading many people to revisit their fundamental anthropological assumptions: who are we in relation to the natural world, and how does self-understanding influence how we conduct ourselves? (15) Christie situates his retrieval of the Christian contemplative tradition in the multi-faceted context of thinkers from different religious traditions, and also from contemporary forms of spirituality employing non traditional religious symbols and ideas. "What can it mean," he asks, "to retrieve a common sense of the natural world as sacred? Can we discover and learn to stand in a vision of the world that takes seriously the diversity of experience while also recognizing the real places of convergence and commonality?" (15) His contention is that contemplative spirituality, premised as it is on practices of attentive listening and self-understanding rooted in dialogue with a larger whole, can help bridge the many different expressions of reverence for the natural world emerging today. He writes from an ethic of openness and cu-

riosity to other traditions, informed by the convivial needs of our historical moment: “from within the particular tradition of contemplative practice that is my focus in this book, I look outward toward other, kindred forms of spiritual practice” Christie writes, “seeking useful points of correspondence between and among them that can help us learn how to imagine and tend to the larger whole” (16). What would it look like to read Kierkegaard alongside contemplative thinkers from other traditions, with this project of retrieval in mind? This was in part the aim of reading Kierkegaard alongside David Abram, to highlight the different ways sensuously attuned contemplative thinkers address the question of how human perception responds to the “otherness” of created beings, in contrast to the “Otherness” of God.

Contemplative attention is fleeting and takes time to cultivate. Few of our dominant cultural and political institutions foster or make room for this kind of work, or recognize the implication of contemplative dispositions for the health and wellbeing of community life. There is thus an aspect of contemplative spirituality that stands as a critique of prevalent social, cultural, and economic values. The retrieval of contemplative traditions, Christie believes, is not only critical for informing deeper practices of perception and self-understanding in relation to the natural world, but for setting the grounds for a wide-ranging social-political-ecological critique. This work can serve to “enliven our own efforts to articulate an alternative vision and way of living that honours the integrity of the living world and our own spiritual lives” (23). The task of retrieval is inevitably participatory, highlighting the ways our inner lives and capacities of perception are shaped, and limited, by dominant cultural forms of attention that obscure our embeddedness in the wider world. “One does not stand aloof from such work,” Christie comments, “but enters in, often deeply” (23). To this end, Christie’s argument throughout the book develops alongside

probing examinations of his own changing perceptions of his environment, especially the significance of place for his self-perception. The "imaginative reweaving of self and living world" that can occur in places that occupy particular significance to us can help open people "not only to the fragility and vulnerability of the world, but also to how profoundly it lives in us and matters to us" (24). This sensitivity and care for the world is both what motivates and is fostered by contemplative practices, and what can ultimately help us come to know the ground of our own being (28). This sensitivity is also what I hoped to draw out in my reading of Kierkegaard's phenomenology of faith in relation to the sensuous, finite world at large. Whether other Kierkegaardian texts can be read in this way remains to be seen. Much more work could also be done to draw out further the implications of Kierkegaard's phenomenology for habitual forms of spiritual practice, and as critiques of habituated forms of attention that lend themselves to alienation from the conditions of one's existence.

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Tim Lilburn is a poet and essayist concerned with articulating the complexity of a settler relationship to land in North America, and the inward practices of attention that might help redress the sense of homelessness settler culture perpetuates, especially in the context of colonization and climate change. "We need broad, unaccustomed insight into how to live in a new inconceivable sadness," he writes in "Interiority and Climate Change", the second chapter of *Numinous Seditions*[19]: "There is a deeper rooting that is possible and we need to seek it out" (11). *Numinous Seditions* is a collection of essays reaching towards different facets of Western philosophi-

[19] Lilburn, Tim. *Numinous Seditions: Interiority and Climate Change*. (Edmonton, Canada: University of Alberta Press, 2023).

cal and spiritual traditions in search of interior dispositional practices that Lilburn thinks may help identify and respond to the challenge climate change poses to North American subjectivity. "How may our inner lives be shaped so that we can go on and, in a sense, thrive in these disarming times?" he asks, "What are our ways of interior perduring?" (viii) Central to the challenge is that we are experiencing now, and for the foreseeable future, irrevocable loss. Proposed changes and avenues of hope that do not address this fail to recognize that the practices of living we need today are, at root, ways of being capable of inhabiting loss. Where to look for these kinds of practices? As a European settler in North America, Lilburn is first concerned with interrogating the western tradition he comes from. Is there in the history of western philosophical and spiritual thought a lost memory to be vivified, "patterns of possible endurance, imagination, virtue and formational practice that previously have functioned within disaster and which may serve as emergent contemplative models in the era of global warming"? (10) He finds examples of such practices in the ancient Platonic and Neo-Platonic traditions, and in their peregrinations through the Western mystical traditions.

One such example is the practice of dialectic. Philosophical conversation in Plato's texts is not the abstract, propositional world-building it is often made out to be, but "a series of intensive readings of particular selves", a "theurgy of clarifying thought" (12). It is a method of conversation that aims at identifying the desires that animate the self brought to the conversation, at bringing that longing forward and directing it to reach for deeper truths about reality. It is "divine work" that can bring about a radical transformation of the self (162). The cultivation of philosophical eros through a retrieval of dialectical practices can help redress the "dazed, mourning, and driveless" sense we are increasingly having when we hear news of climate-related loss. This

may help us to be "reconstituted interiorly," Lilburn writes, "and fed back into the world." (12) The retrieval of dialectic and its education of desire, read as a contemplative practice relevant for addressing the anxieties of climate change, is a hermeneutical move it would be worth trying on Kierkegaard. What kind of practice is Abraham undergoing as he makes the "double-movement" of faith for instance, relinquishing his desire for Isaac without resigning himself entirely to eternity? How is the attention of the Knight of Faith kept so close to the particulars of his life, so animated by his desire for a good meal, all the while seeing the eternal context against which finitude plays itself out? Is it significant that de Silentio does not find in the end *how* it is that Abraham has faith? What does his (Abraham's and de Silentio's) silence on this front say about the complexity of attention, of what it means to devise contemplative practices? Is some of de Silentio's reticence to name exactly what happens in faith worth bringing into the conversation on the kinds of contemplative tools we might try retrieving from the western contemplative tradition?

Another example of dispositional guidance Lilburn draws on comes from the story of Abraham feeding the angels in Genesis 18. At that point in the story Abraham has been told he will be the progenitor of nations, though he is old and childless. He has received a new name. He is estranged from himself and confused. Three strangers approach one day and something prompts Abraham to welcome them into his home, to offer to feed them. They accept, and having eaten tell him that his wife Sarah will have a child. On Lilburn's reading, this is an account of a "mind visiting from without" and the question is where one finds the grace to offer it hospitality. "The angel appears when one's way seems doomed; the being announces a counter-position of hyperbolic, peculiar plenitude and escape…a wild wind of fresh gestalts…Without connoisseurship, an initial response to an approach of such a savouring, discerning, capacious intelligence is to ig-

nore or drive it off" (20). Spiritual direction inspired by this account aims at training the capacity and courage to welcome these fleeting gusts of inspiration that seemingly come from beyond us, and do not reveal their gifts until we have stood to welcome them. For Bonaventure, the 13th century Franciscan, the practice of discerning and recognizing the beauty in particular things was a form of this kind of hospitality. The mind, or imagination, capable of this has undergone an "epistemological therapy" which has created "a 'door' in identity…a *peregrinatio* from one's regular, atomic, ambitioned, realist state to the limitless expansion of imaginative grasp which is the warm breast of divinity and full self" (22). The cultivation of such inner discernment and welcome lends itself to unpredictable and novel forms of behaviour, which, in the context of the stupor of thought and action in the face of loss, may offer new ideas and the audacity to act on them. For Lilburn, a retrieval of Western wisdom traditions and contemplative philosophies also means a widening of language to include names for currently "lost regions within North American subjectivity" (18), an awakening of a broader range of interior senses. He calls too, for settlers to learn Indigenous languages, and the names these languages have given to specific places and the beings living there. Calling out in the language made by a particular place to a being dwelling there may awaken a sustaining intimacy and dynamism, inviting "more of the warmth and ingenuity and sustenance of the world, as well as unvisited parts of ourselves, into our consciousness" (18). As language deepens, we may find it accompanied by "a non-triumphal expansion of self" which "will stretch our love…as it broadens our grief," he writes. This is the aim of contemplative pedagogies in the context of climate change—to deepen and widen human subjectivity to include and welcome longing, angels, the more-than-human beings of the earth, beauty and grief, in a way that lends itself to renewed forms of action and politics. "This dynamism

feels like justice—this new intimacy is the correct basis of behaviour in relations with other beings—and it is truth; I sense it will clarify us, even as it saddens us more" (18).

Lilburn's readings of these texts and practices for a phenomenology of how human attention responds to incursions into what is otherwise habitual and predictable daily life parallels the way we read Kierkegaard's phenomenology of faith in the three texts we took up. I hoped to show in each case that Kierkegaard's phenomenology is particularly attuned to these kinds encounters, to inspirations that seemingly come from "beyond us," their paradoxical, incommensurable nature, and to tracking what it means to be able to receive and respond to their invitation. What it means to "welcome" both the invitation to sacrifice Isaac and receive him again intact, to "welcome" the invitation to suffer in the likeness of Christ humiliated, to "welcome" the invitation to divert one's attention from worry, letting go of what one knows of finitude, only to be able to "welcome" it all again as "the rest," given in addition to the Kingdom of God. Does the posture of dispossessive receptivity Kierkegaard gestures to in his texts in practice lend itself to unpredictable and novel forms of behaviour? It seems so, given the *metanoia* of each of his characters. What would a Kierkegaardian contemplative pedagogy look like? Would it involve "welcoming" Indigenous languages? It seems so, though perhaps he would caution against being too certain that a deepened and widened human subjectivity necessarily lends itself to renewed forms of action and politics. Without the facets of subjectivity capable of opening to and receiving the forgiving gaze of Divine love, the widened forms of subjectivity one discovers through new languages may be just as limiting.

Lilburn's retrieval of ancient practices and anthropologies has informed the questioning we have been engaging in with Kierkegaard. I have hoped to show that Kierkegaard may be taken up as a figure alongside other western contemplatives with something to contribute to the conversation regarding the relationship of the self to the world at large, in line with the kinds of projects contemporary environmental thinkers retrieving tools from spiritual, phenomenological, and contemplative traditions are undertaking.

EPILOGUE

In the Fall I moved from the farm in Southwestern Ontario to the Pacific Northwest. This change in geography, informed by the sense of being addressed by the plants and pigs in the summer, marked the beginning of a more conscious exercise in placefulness, a mindful attunement to where I was and how I walked, an awareness of the affective map I was building of the new relations that were coming to constitute me. I was experiencing constantly the paradox of this awareness—that what I wanted most in allowing place to enter my body in a new way was to be brought to a point of emptiness from which I could receive the diversity of beings and languages that I was beginning to notice. Instead I was too full, clutching to the novelty, cataloguing it, collecting it. The diversity became overwhelming, I was overcome by how many different kinds of plants there were, and colours, and animals, voices, people and history, that I was related to all of this diversity in a way that I desperately wanted to name, order and possess but couldn't.

As I became more conscious of my surroundings, I started to notice also an acute and new kind of pain. A series of road trips and hikes through the interior of British Columbia and Vancouver Island revealed to me a kind of beauty I'd never experienced before: the old growth rainforests of the West Coast. I had been learning about how trees communicate with each other across species and the importance of older trees for the health of a forest. Walking amidst these ancient giants with the sense that they shared a secret language humbled me, and I sensed in them a presence I wanted to respond to. Experiencing in these forests a new kind of animacy made the devastating realization of the ongoing logging of old growth forests almost physically painful. The grief was unlike anything I'd experienced in relation to the "natural" world before, and the bare patches I'd

started to notice on mountainsides began to feel like gashes across my own body. I felt targeted by this pain, harmed and angry at the world, and also responsible for the clear cuts in a push and pull of indignation and self-implication. I wanted to yell out the anger, fight, and apologize, re-pent, ask for forgiveness.

The urgency of *what to do* in relation to the beauty and devastation I'd woken up to was an in-tense call but one that I was completely lost in how to respond to. Policy solutions, systems change, absolutely, but I was called by the spiritual-material dynamic of subjectivity that I felt was unfolding within me and there was something itching on that level that I was trying to iden-tify. Who are we, humans, who do we think we are such that we let things get to this point? Who do I think I am when I look up at the tree, at the water? Who is a tree to me? Who is water? I had no idea how to listen or respond to the growing sense of being intercepted by these different forms of being. The next summer I had a few experiences with water that started to open this up for me. I was attending a series of environmental workshops and our group had been invited to participate in a Water Ceremony organized by Sacred Trust, an organization of Indigenous lead-ers from the Tsleil-Waututh Nation who were fighting the Trans-Mountain Pipeline terminal that was being built in the inlet across from their reserve. The ceremony involved prayers and reflec-tions inviting us to recognize how much we depend on the cleanliness of the water, and paddling out on a seafaring canoe to sing prayers and make offerings of tobacco that the Elders dropped in the water just outside the barrier fencing off the building site. I hadn't experienced worship as activism before, nor had I felt so specifically human, in relation to an other-than-human being that was treated as a full being in its own right.

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What is inwardness? What is faith in the context of a changing sensuous world? In the context of the loss of biodiversity, irreversible habitat damages, monocultured plant and animal life, soil depletion? In the context of the deliberate and pervasive silencing of other-than-human speech, do we have time to turn inward? This apocalyptic unraveling unveils to our technologically enhanced ubermensch sensibilities that we are, still and forever, finite. Our surroundings are too, and falling in love with the world is, without exception, a dangerous thing to do. There is no safety in this love. No guarantee that it will all be well. That there will be old growth forests to walk through with my child. Guided by Kierkegaard, do I dare? Do I dare turn my attention from a resigned focus on eternity, from the safety of a state-sanctioned belief system that doesn't ask more of me than to observe the world and its suffering? Do I dare take my worries outside the city, outside the realm of human comparison, do I dare open myself to another measure, the silent and abundant faith I find in the presence of plant and animal life? Guided by Kierkegaard, what do I do with the full force of the recognition of endings? Can I not hide in the world, impersonal? What if I cannot bear the intimacy of inwardness? The forgiveness that waits for me, the kinship it opens me onto? The solicitude for my desires even as I venture, out of some superhuman feat of love, to sacrifice them? Who can bear this? One thing is clear however, that this is the brink I come to guided by Kierkegaard. Following the Knight of Faith I let myself wonder whether letting go of the cataloguing possessiveness that anxiously wants to hold on to each particularity of finitude may not bring the world pouring back into me, on its own mysterious terms. Following the tracks of the invitation that offers forgiveness of sins and invites compassion and willing suffering, I let myself wonder whether the clear cuts are maybe exactly where I need to

go, where I need to stand to be forgiven, gashes upon gashes. And finally, led out into open field with the worrier I let myself see, perhaps for the first time, that this is who I am: a worshipper, standing empty, rejoicing, ready to receive the abundance waiting for open channels, standing, inwardly, in this cosmic convivium of lilies, birds and forgiven, singing worriers, the Kingdom of God, in a canoe offering tobacco to the water.

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