

Kierkegaard in Light of the East: A Critical Comparison of the Philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard with Orthodox Christian Philosophy and Thought

Agust Magnusson
Marquette University

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KIERKEGAARD IN LIGHT OF THE EAST: A CRITICAL COMPARISON OF THE
PHILOSOPHY OF SØREN KIERKEGAARD TO ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN
PHILOSOPHY AND THOUGHT

by

Ágúst Ingvar Magnússon

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ABSTRACT
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Ágúst Ingvar Magnússon, B.A.

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This project presents a comparative philosophical approach to understanding key elements in the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard by juxtaposing his works with the philosophy and theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church. The primary aim of the project is to look at three key areas of Kierkegaard's philosophy that have been either underrepresented or misunderstood in the literature. These three areas are: Kierkegaard's views on sin and salvation, Kierkegaard's epistemology, and Kierkegaard's philosophy of personhood. The dissertation ends with an epilogue that briefly explores a further area where this comparative approach might provide fruitful results, namely Kierkegaard's views on collective worship. I argue that the revolutionary nature of Kierkegaard's break with prevalent views in the Western Christian traditions (Protestantism and Roman Catholicism) have not always been fully appreciated due to the fact that he is most often read through the lens of either Western Christianity or the Western philosophical traditions that he came to influence (e.g. existentialism and post-modernism). Viewing Kierkegaard in light of the Eastern Christian tradition offers a new interpretive lens that highlights the extent to which Kierkegaard aimed to break free from standard Western accounts of sin and salvation, knowledge of God, and human personhood.

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Chapter 1 – Setting the Stage: The Inscrutable Joy of the Melancholy Dane and the Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church.

Even though Kierkegaard had at least cursory knowledge of many authors from the patristic era, his knowledge of Eastern Orthodox theology and worship was extremely limited.¹ Kierkegaard only did a limited amount of traveling during his life and his cultural immersion was almost entirely limited to the social milieu of Copenhagen and (for a brief period of time) Berlin.² Even though Kierkegaard had periods in his life that were socially active he nonetheless lived a very cloistered life, in part due to his poor health.³ Kierkegaard's opportunities for exploring philosophies or religions that extended beyond his immediate world of 19th century Copenhagen were limited at best.

This project, therefore, is not based on any historical connection between Kierkegaard and Eastern Orthodoxy. It is, rather, an exercise in comparative philosophy and an attempt to forge a philosophical dialogue between Kierkegaard and the Eastern Orthodox world. There are a great many advantages to such a philosophical approach, many of which are especially apparent when one considers the difficulties inherent in interpreting Kierkegaard's works.

In the introduction to a collection of works on Kierkegaard's thought and its relation to Japanese philosophy, James Giles writes:

In comparative philosophy the philosopher attempts to loosen the grip of his or her culture by entering a new one. In doing so, the philosophical

¹ Cursory references to "the Greek Church" are found in *JP* 1, 582 / II A 269 and *JP* 5, 5089 / I A 60. All references to Kierkegaard's journals first give numbers in *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers* followed by numbers in *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer*.

² Kierkegaard's trips to Berlin took place in 1841, 1843, 1845, and 1846. See Julia Watkins, *Kierkegaard* (London and New York: Continuum, 1997), 13, n. 39.

³ See *JP* 2, 2096 / XI¹ A 268, 277; *JP* 6, 6170 / IX A 74.

traveler is presented with new ways of understanding and new ways of seeing old problems. Previously unnoticed assumptions and concerns are often thrown into stark relief simply because the newly entered culture does not make them or have them. Or perhaps the culture has contrasting assumptions and interests. All of this can serve to give insight not only into one's own and different philosophical traditions, but also into the problems being pursued.⁴

These “previously unnoticed assumptions and concerns” are the driving force of this project. As a convert to Eastern Orthodoxy who grew up in a Scandinavian country (Iceland) dominated by the kind of Evangelical Lutheranism that Kierkegaard so vehemently critiqued, I cannot help but be struck, both personally and professionally, with the myriad ways in which Kierkegaard's primary philosophical concerns and methods correspond with the spirituality and theology of the Eastern Orthodox church. I have not made it the primary goal of my project to point out exactly *why* this is the case, though I hope I have made some contribution towards uncovering some of the philosophical and theological goals and biases shared between Kierkegaard and many of the great authors of the Eastern Church. My main concern here is to illumine Kierkegaard's theology in a new light, drawing out themes and issues that may heretofore not have received the attention they deserve in the literature.

A recurring theme throughout this project is the contention that Kierkegaard's works form a cohesive, philosophical project, the primary aim of which is to provide a philosophical and spiritual alternative to two different, though deeply intertwined, strands in Western theology and thought. These are, on the one hand, the immense influence of the Enlightenment project in elevating scientific knowledge as the *sine qua non* of human knowing. The second is what Kierkegaard perceived to be fundamental issues inherent in

⁴ James Giles, *Kierkegaard and Japanese Thought*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), vii-viii.

core elements of orthodox Lutheranism. I will be returning to these themes repeatedly throughout the following chapters.

This first chapter will largely serve as an extended introduction to the project ahead. I will begin by providing a brief overview of Kierkegaard's philosophical project with an emphasis on his view of Christianity as a response to the dehumanizing effects of speculative philosophy. I will then provide a brief overview of Kierkegaard's knowledge (or lack thereof) of various facets of the Western Christian tradition with an emphasis on Kierkegaard's reading of patristic and medieval authors. This section will not include a detailed discussion of Kierkegaard's relationship to Lutheranism (or to Luther specifically) as this will be dealt with in some detail in chapter two. Next, I will offer a brief introduction of key facets of Eastern Orthodox theology and philosophy as they relate to Kierkegaard's philosophy. Finally, I give a brief overview of chapters two through four where I offer a comparative analysis of Kierkegaard's philosophy of sin and salvation, his epistemology, and his philosophy of personhood.

1.1 - Kierkegaard's Philosophical Project

Kierkegaard was without a doubt a revolutionary thinker, someone who took direct aim at the presuppositions and prejudices of his day and age. This applies equally to Kierkegaard's religious milieu as it does to the political and philosophical status quo against which he contended. Kierkegaard, along with Nietzsche, Dostoyevsky, Kafka, Pessoa, and a host of other luminaries, heralded the coming of post-modernism in our writing and thinking by critically deconstructing the failed promises of Enlightenment rationality that had reached its apotheosis with the writings of Hegel. In Johannes de

Silentio's *Fear and Trembling*, we hear Kierkegaard's scorn for the Enlightenment ideal of "progress" ring out in de Silentio's mockery of the notion of "going forward" (a favorite phrase of Bishop Primate H.L. Martensen⁵), which is juxtaposed with the philosophical terror and awe of Abraham's faith. Much like Dostoyevsky's "Underground Man," Kierkegaard took great joy in kicking down the dehumanizing edifices of modernity, the bureaucratic insistence that we all conform to formulas and systems that will keep us well-fed, well-analyzed, and well-entertained but that in turn undermine all that is profoundly human in us.

The comparison with Dostoyevsky (and his tortured protagonist) is apt because even if Kierkegaard undoubtedly prefigures the post-modern project of the 20th century in all its deconstructionist glory and despair, he nonetheless differs significantly from such later figures as Sartre, Heidegger, Deleuze, and Derrida. Kierkegaard, in railing against the notion of blind "progress," was not in any sense merely a conservative or reactionary, nor did he want to replace one notion of progress for another. He was, rather, a revolutionary in the most literal sense of the word, someone who sought to go back to the "beginning"⁶ in order to better move forward, crafting a philosophy that revolved around the axis of the human self and that sought wisdom both ancient and new that was always centered on the primary tenets of the Christian faith, namely that God had become a human being and walked among us and that our attitude towards this event constitutes *the philosophical paradox of the human condition*.

⁵ See Alastair Hannay's introduction to *Fear and Trembling* (hereafter *F&T*), 38.

⁶ Prefiguring Husserl's similar move towards seeking a ground for doing philosophy that is both radically new but also firmly situated in an ancient mode of knowing and being.

Much like Heidegger's later clarion call that we must revisit the question of being, Kierkegaard saw both philosophy and religion as having lost sight of what is primary in our search for wisdom, namely subjectivity and inwardness. Kierkegaard's critique of modernity revolves around what he, and his pseudonyms, call "speculative thinking," an anemic, systematic, supposedly objective manner of looking at reality that functions in terms of theory, systems, and science but leaves out the lived-reality of the individual human person. The "detestable falsity" of modern philosophy that Kierkegaard railed against in *Johannes Climacus* was the promise that "the System" could cure what ails us, lift our despair, and give us happiness, contentment, and peace, simply by molding us into a cog in the great *Wissenschaft* of modernity. The falsity of this premise, of course, is that this molding, this assimilation of the individual into the great herd of the "they," is what forms the very heart of our despair. Kierkegaard, therefore, found himself in a similar position to the aforementioned Johannes Climacus, whose "curious dilemma" was that "the books he knew did not satisfy him."⁷ Climacus and Kierkegaard both found themselves faced with the unhappy alternatives of either being totally consumed by their despair or to begin to think for themselves, like Socrates had done centuries before upon hearing the very strange and unsettling news brought to him from the Oracle at Delphi. This task of thinking for oneself is encapsulated for Kierkegaard in the dictum *De omnibus dubitandum est*: Doubt everything.⁸

In crafting an alternative to speculative thinking, Kierkegaard ultimately turned to Christianity as the primary influence for his philosophy of passionate inwardness. Kierkegaard had fallen away from Christianity during his student years and viewed it as

⁷ *Johannes Climacus* (hereafter *JC*), 31.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

having been engulfed entirely in the insipid spirit of the age. In a journal entry from 1835 Kierkegaard writes that “When I look at a goodly number of particular instances of the Christian life, it seems to me that Christianity, instead of pouring out strength upon them—yes, in fact, in contrast to paganism—such individuals are robbed of their manhood by Christianity and are now like the gelding compared to the stallion.”⁹

Instead of correctly diagnosing and healing the spiritual malaise of the modern human person, namely the multitudinous neuroses, anxieties and inner despair that so obviously plagued the young Kierkegaard himself, Christianity seemed instead to exacerbate them. Yet as Kierkegaard developed as a thinker and writer, he became increasingly aware that the true nature of the problem was not Christianity itself but rather the cultural and institutional instantiation of it, the anemic nature of which had simply become yet another symptom of the spiritlessness of the age. In the late 1830’s Kierkegaard underwent a conversion experience where he returned to the faith of his youth.¹⁰ On July 6, 1838 Kierkegaard received communion for the first time in years and in August of that year he writes: “I mean to labor to achieve a far more inward relation to Christianity; hitherto I have fought for its truth while in a sense standing outside it.”¹¹ A year later Kierkegaard writes: “Philosophy in relation to Christianity is like that of one who is being interrogated; face to face with his interrogator he makes up a story which coincides in all essential elements and yet is completely different.”¹²

⁹ *JP* 1, 417 / I A 96.

¹⁰ Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 118-99.

¹¹ *JP* 5, 5329 / II A 232.

¹² *JP* 3, 3274 / II A 493.

Though Kierkegaard came to see Christianity as a path towards authenticity and spiritual healing, he nonetheless became increasingly critical of Christendom, i.e., the cultural manifestations of the faith, especially in relation to the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church. In 1854, at the height of Kierkegaard's vitriol against the church, he wrote: "Now there are Christian peoples, Christian states, Christian nations everywhere—but but Christianity understands burdens as being a millionaire, possessing or seeking to possess worldly goods. God in heaven, what abysmal nonsense!"¹³

Kierkegaard saw this as being the great failure of Lutheranism, namely of turning Christianity into yet another form of "levelling" where everyone becomes a carbon copy of everyone else. Christianity, for Kierkegaard, had become a religion of mediocrity and complacency. In 1854 Kierkegaard wrote: "Luther, you do have an enormous responsibility, for when I look more closely I see ever more clearly that you toppled the Pope—and set 'the public' upon the throne. You altered the New Testament concept of 'the martyr' and taught men to win by numbers."¹⁴ Kierkegaard saw himself as being a new Luther, a reformer for the Reformation, waking Lutherans up from their dogmatic slumber in a similar way to the challenge Luther had put forth against a complacent Christianity at the Diet of Worms: "Just as Luther stepped forth with only the Bible at the Diet, so would I like to step forth with only the New Testament, take the simplest Christian maxim, and ask each individual: Have you fulfilled this even approximately—if not, do you then want to reform the Church?"¹⁵

¹³ *JP* 3, 3532 / *XI*¹ A 19.

¹⁴ *JP* 3, 2548 / *XI*¹ A 108.

¹⁵ *JP* 6, 6727 / *X*⁴ A 33.

Ultimately, Kierkegaard's three-pronged attack on Christendom, enlightenment rationality, and the alienation of the individual in modern culture, are all deeply intertwined. George Pattison has pointed out that Kierkegaard's vehement rejection of nineteenth century speculative theology, which was largely inspired by the philosophy of Hegel, was at least partly motivated by the fact that Kierkegaard understood that speculative theology opened up an intellectual pathway to a radical kind of atheism, one that had already begun to materialize in the writings of the Hegelian left.¹⁶ This was not simply an intellectual point of contention for Kierkegaard but a deeply existential one since speculative thinking and atheism ultimately find their fulfilment, according to Kierkegaard, in the experience of nihilism, a concern perhaps most profoundly expressed in *The Present Age*. This nihilism manifests itself most acutely in the experience of "the public," not only in terms of a levelling effect where the individual must conform to social mores and standards (an experience that Kierkegaard worried a great deal about but which he did not believe to be inherently bad) but primarily in terms of the dispassionate speculation that Kierkegaard saw as the central tenet of the Enlightenment project.¹⁷ This method of speculation was not only intellectually suspect, but led to an inability on the part of the existing individual to passionately engage with herself, other people, and God. The pseudonymous authorships, with their focus on the existential categories of anxiety and despair, attempt to carve out the various ways in which human beings attempt to deal with this experience of nihilism, especially given the fact that

¹⁶ George Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century: The Paradox and the Point of Contact* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 33ff.

¹⁷ For a particularly interesting take on Kierkegaard's view on "the public" see Hubert L. Dreyfus, "Kierkegaard on the Internet: Anonymity versus Commitment in the Present Age," accessed 3/19/2015, http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~hdreyfus/html/paper_kierkegaard.html. For a discussion of the different meanings of passion (*Lidenskab*) and passionlessness, especially in relation to the Christian notion of *apatheia*, see chapter 3, pp. 126-38.

religious institutions and everyday religiosity have completely failed to address the meaninglessness of modern existence.

Before moving on to Kierkegaard's understanding and appropriation of the Christian tradition, it is important to note that Kierkegaard's critiques of Christendom and speculative philosophy are not two separate philosophical strands but rather deeply intertwined elements of the same critique. It is difficult to conceive of the Enlightenment without the influence of the Protestant Reformation.¹⁸ Along with the scientific revolution, the Reformation provided Descartes with both an intellectual and existential stimulus to develop his foundationalism. As Heidegger pointed out, Descartes provides an epistemological reductionism where all of reality is understood through the same objective, scientific methodology where the world is reduced to analyzable entities. Heidegger writes: "The only genuine access to [these entities] lies in knowing, *intellectio*, in the sense of the kind of the kind of knowledge we get in mathematics and physics. Mathematical knowledge is regarded by Descartes as the one manner of apprehending entities which can always give assurance that their Being has been securely grasped."¹⁹

Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, charts the development of this particular way of understanding reality from its inception in Greek philosophy. As Jean-Luc Marion has pointed out, this manner of understanding reality was already deeply infused into the scholastic manner of doing theology, where our understanding of God is presented as a *sciencia* and the human *telos* is understood as perfect *cognition* of God (via the beatific

¹⁸ See James M. Byrne, *Religion and the Enlightenment: From Descartes to Kant* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), esp. 17ff.

¹⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Times*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1962), 128.

vision).²⁰ Later on, the individualized *sola fide* of Luther, crafted as a response to the failures of scholastic theology and Roman Catholic practices—most notably the practice of indulgences—would give way to the solipsism of the Cartesian *cogito*. Ironically, as philosophers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries began to realize the existential implications of these developments, some looked to the philosophy of Hegel as a way to overcome the confusion and despair of modernity. One of these philosophers was the influential Danish Hegelian Johan Ludvig Heiberg whose writings would be a pivotal influence on the development of Kierkegaard’s thought. Heiberg, in combatting what he saw as the onslaught of relativism and nihilism in the modern world, viewed the philosophy of Hegel as the only means by which “the contemporary chaos of thought can be overcome.”²¹

Kierkegaard, on the other hand, saw Hegel’s philosophy not as a remedy to nihilism but rather as its apotheosis. The Danish Hegelians believed that Hegel provided a way in which to make religion a central facet of the developing *Wissenschaft* of the modern world. But Kierkegaard saw this religion of the Absolute as having nothing to do with the faith of Abraham, and indeed believed it to be antithetical to the essential mystery and paradox presented in the Christian revelation of Christ’s incarnation.

All of this is to suggest that it is no coincidence that Kierkegaard’s thought echoes many of the sensibilities of Eastern philosophy, whether non-Christian or Eastern-Orthodox. Kierkegaard attempted to craft a philosophy that provided an alternative to the view that philosophical reflection must be inherently systematic and analytical. In

²⁰ Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being (2nd ed.)*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012).

²¹ Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard’s Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 53.

championing paradox and absurdity—not as irrationalism but as alternative ways of accessing wisdom—Kierkegaard moves away from the dominant epistemology of the Western world and moves closer to Eastern traditions such as Buddhism and Orthodoxy. Both of these provide epistemological frameworks that view reducing human understanding to discursive reasoning with a great deal of suspicion and instead champion the importance of immediate, experiential, relational, and even mystical knowledge.

1.2 - Kierkegaard's Relations to Christianity Reconsidered

Kierkegaard's philosophical project is inherently religious in nature, given the fact that he saw Christianity as being the most powerful and truthful answer available to the human person to combat nihilism and despair. In this section, I discuss Kierkegaard's understanding of the Christian tradition, focusing on the medieval and patristic traditions in Christianity as well as Kierkegaard's (admittedly limited) understanding of the Roman Catholic tradition. Kierkegaard's relationship to institutionalized Christianity ranged between ambivalence and hostility. His understanding of Christian doctrine and tradition was often astoundingly idiosyncratic. Kierkegaard's knowledge of the medieval and patristic traditions was lacking, at best, and his readings of important authors throughout Church history were often limited to a secondary literature that was colored by the dominant theological and philosophical prejudices of the day.

It is nonetheless clear that one of Kierkegaard's most formative influences was the writings of the Church Fathers. Kierkegaard sought spiritual comfort and solace in the patristic tradition and he viewed the patristic era in stark contrast with the anemic

Christianity of his day and age.²² That being said, Kierkegaard's knowledge of patristic Christianity was often extremely limited and in some cases he misunderstood or misread authors from the tradition.²³

If we look at Kierkegaard's relation to the patristic tradition, the figure of Augustine of Hippo immediately surfaces. Augustine was obviously a formative influence on the development of Kierkegaard's thought, though it remains an open question to what extent Kierkegaard familiarized himself with Augustine's works and to what extent these were only disseminated to him via Luther. In chapter two I will analyze in detail Kierkegaard's relation to the Augustinian heritage in Lutheranism and the way in which Kierkegaard sought to develop an account of sin that was diametrically opposed to the standard Augustinian/Lutheran account. Though Kierkegaard obviously admired Augustine a great deal and was, both knowingly and unknowingly, mired in a Christian milieu that was inherently Augustinian, he directed several scathing remarks at Augustine, going so far as to say that Augustine had done "incalculable harm" to the Christian tradition.²⁴

Kierkegaard was somewhat familiar with the writings of John Chrysostom, the fourth century bishop of Constantinople and a formative figure in the development of Eastern Orthodox theology,²⁵ primarily through the Johann Neander's monograph *Der*

²² *JP* 1, 583 / II A 750; *JP* 4, 3830 / X⁴ A 119.

²³ The Danish theological curriculum of Kierkegaard's time provided only a very limited introduction to patristic writings. See Marie Mikulová Thulstrup, "The Role of Asceticism," in *The Sources and Depths of Faith in Kierkegaard*, ed. Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulová Thulstrup (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzel, 1978), 154.

²⁴ *JP* 1, 191 / XI¹ A 436. See, Robert Puchniak, "Augustine: Kierkegaard's Tempered Admiration of Augustine," in *Kierkegaard and the Patristic and Medieval Traditions (Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, Vol. 4)*, ed. Jon Stewart (Burlington VT & Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2008), 11-16.

²⁵ Chrysostom's influence extended throughout all of Christendom. According to John McGuckin, Chrysostom's liturgy is the standard rite of the Eastern Orthodox Church and his writings on justice and

heilige Johannes Chrysostomus.²⁶ Kierkegaard's twenty two references to Chrysostom in his journals are all rather brief and touch on a variety of issues, including ecclesiology, asceticism, and soteriology.²⁷ Kierkegaard's emphasis on poverty in *Training in Christianity* and *Works of Love* may have been influenced by Chrysostom's writings on justice and almsgiving, though he makes no explicit mention of the bishop in this context.

Kierkegaard was influenced by Cyprian of Carthage's writings on martyrdom.²⁸ Of special interest is a reference to Cyprian in Kierkegaard's journals where he relates the importance of martyrdom to the Eucharist. Referring to the ongoing debate about reception of the sacraments *sub utraque specie*, Kierkegaard calls the conflict "nonsense" and claims that "the covenant has more and more been forgotten." He goes on to say: "How simply Cyprian solved the whole difficulty involved in the question as to whether or not the cup should be withheld from the laity by answering: If they are required to shed their blood for Christ's sake, we dare not deny them Christ's blood."²⁹ This passage shows that Kierkegaard viewed the sacraments as having an important significance in the Christian life. It also illustrates Kierkegaard's penchant for viewing patristic authors as boiling Christianity down to its essentials while the medieval and modern worlds become mired in abstract debates about theology and dogma.³⁰

almsgiving had a great influence on Western Christianity. See John McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology* (Louisville & London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 190.

²⁶ Leo Stan, "Chrysostom: Between the Hermitage and the City," in *Kierkegaard and the Patristic and Medieval Traditions (Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, Vol. 4)*, ed. Jon Stewart (Burlington, VT & Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2008), 53.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 52-63.

²⁸ Jack Mulder Jr., "Cyprian of Carthage: Kierkegaard, Cyprian, and the 'urgent needs of the times,'" in *Kierkegaard and the Patristic and Medieval Traditions (Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, Vol. 4)*, ed. Jon Stewart (Burlington, VT & Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2008), 67-94.

²⁹ *JP 2*, 1924 / XI¹ A 4.

³⁰ Which is not to say that Kierkegaard was not aware of the logical and theological complexity of patristic writings. Nonetheless, he saw the patristic theology as growing out of lived experience and an emphasis on the shocking reality of Christian life, e.g. *JP 2*, 1816 / XI² A 77.

Kierkegaard's knowledge of Gregory of Nyssa and Basil of Caesarea was even more limited.³¹ Joseph Ballan notes that Kierkegaard's only journal entry on Gregory is preceded by a lengthy diatribe against Martin Luther, indicating that "Kierkegaard's study of the theologians of late antiquity was motivated in part by a dissatisfaction with Reformation Christianity and the accompanying desire for a theology that remained true to the experience of the early Church."³² That being said, Kierkegaard was equally critical of writers from the patristic era as he was of his contemporaries and medieval authors. Kierkegaard's "enthusiasm for some of the statements of Gregory and Basil is tempered by the recognition of the significance of Constantine's conversion to Christianity and of the deleterious outcomes of this event for church life and theology."³³

Kierkegaard similarly did not own any texts by Irenaeus of Lyons and, according to Cappelørn, likely never read any of the original texts.³⁴ Nonetheless, Kierkegaard was likely influenced by Irenaeus' theology via the writings of Johannes Adam Möhler and the preaching and writing of N.F.S. Grundtvig. In fact, Cappelørn argues that Kierkegaard's philosophy of sin and his critique of the Augustinian/Lutheran notion of original sin, is greatly influenced by Grundtvig whose soteriology was in turn influenced by Irenaeus.³⁵ Irenaeus' arguments against the influence of Gnosticism were aimed at preserving the inherent goodness of created being and especially that of the human

³¹ Joseph Ballan, "Gregory of Nyssa: Locating the Cappadocian Father," in *Kierkegaard and the Patristic and Medieval Traditions (Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, Vol. 4)*, ed. Jon Stewart (Burlington, VT & Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2008), 95-102. See esp. 99, n. 23. Kierkegaard didn't own (nor was he likely to have ever read) any original works by either Basil or Gregory and the presentation of them provided by the secondary works at Kierkegaard's disposal is either severely lacking or astoundingly misleading.

³² *Ibid.*, 97.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, "Gudbilledlighed og syndefald: Aspekter af Grundtvigs of Kierkegaards menneskesyn på baggrund of Irenæus," *Grundtvig-Studier* (2004): 134-78.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

person, even in spite of the debilitating effects of the fall. Irenaeus' attempt at addressing the tension between the *imago dei* and the Fall was done by making a distinction between the image and likeness of God in the human person (the *imago dei* and the *similitudo dei*) and by presenting a developmental anthropology instead of the more static notion of absolute corruption that became the prevalent view in post-Reformation Christianity. As I will argue in chapter 2, Kierkegaard develops a soteriology that in many ways resembles the developmental view of the human person found in patristic writers such as Irenaeus.³⁶

Moving to the medieval era, we see that Kierkegaard's relationship with Roman Catholic Christianity is decidedly complex. Kierkegaard vehemently denied the rationalistic account of nature and essence that forms such a crucial aspect of scholastic theology.³⁷ Even though some scholars have suggested that Kierkegaard's increasingly vitriolic attacks against Lutheranism suggested that he might eventually have converted to Roman Catholicism had he not died at such a young age,³⁸ this seems unlikely at best given his repeated and varied attacks against the Roman Church. Kierkegaard nonetheless harbored an obvious fascination and admiration for the ascetical (and perhaps even liturgical) practices of Catholicism.³⁹

³⁶ See chapter 2, pp. 69-92.

³⁷ See Jack Mulder Jr., *Kierkegaard and the Catholic Tradition: Conflict and Dialogue* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 224.

³⁸ For an influential example see, Erich Przywara, *Das Geheimnis Kierkegaards* (Munich & Berlin: R. Oldenbourg, 1929), 74-113. For a staunch (if somewhat improbable) defense of Kierkegaard's allegiance to Evangelical Lutheranism, see David R. Law, "Cheap Grace and the Cost of Discipleship in Kierkegaard's 'For Self Examination,'" in *For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourself! (International Kierkegaard Commentary Series, Vol. 21)*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2002), 133ff.

³⁹ Climacus is undoubtedly the pseudonym that best conveys Kierkegaard's conflicting views on not only Catholicism per se, but also specific Catholic (and Orthodox) practices and rites such as fasting, monasticism, and confession. See *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (hereafter *CUP*), 199, 542, and 547 for examples.

In his notes on Erdmann's lectures, Kierkegaard makes a direct connection between dogmatism and religious nihilism, as well as lambasting the inherent dangers of scholasticism due to its identification of the truth as the "opposite of the I," i.e., as the purely abstract.⁴⁰ Kierkegaard's ambivalent reading of such figures as Anselm and Aquinas shows that he sometimes made a direct connection between scholastic theology and later developments in speculative thinking. Kierkegaard praised Anselm's "*credo ut intelligam*" as focusing on the primacy of belief but heavily criticized the notion that faith must find its fulfilment in intellection.⁴¹ Climacus attacks the ontological argument (albeit a conflation of Anselm's, Descartes', and Spinoza's variants) in both *Philosophical Fragments* and the *Postscript*.⁴² In his later journal entries, Kierkegaard praised Anselm's passionate religious life and the fact that his speculative works, including the ontological argument, arose from experiences of asceticism and prayer.⁴³ Kierkegaard saw subsequent abstract theology as being "Anselmian" in many ways but distinct from Anselm himself, insofar as it lacked Anselm's religious piety and passion while retaining the abstract and speculative character of his theology.⁴⁴

Kierkegaard's reading of Aquinas further influenced his negative views of the Roman Catholic tradition as a whole and scholastic theology specifically. To say that Kierkegaard "read" Aquinas is perhaps a bit generous given the fact that "Kierkegaard did not own any of Aquinas' books, most certainly he did not read any of them, and it is

⁴⁰ JP 5, 5272 / II C 40 November, 1837.

⁴¹ H.L. Martensen was, indeed, heavily influenced by Anselm, especially in *Den christelige Dogmatik*. See Lee C. Barrett, "Anselm of Canterbury: The Ambivalent Legacy of Faith Seeking Understanding," in *Kierkegaard and the Patristic and Medieval Traditions (Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, Vol. 4)*, ed. Jon Stewart (Burlington, VT & Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2008), 167-82.

⁴² *Philosophical Fragments* (hereafter *Fragments*), 39-43; CUP, 333-35.

⁴³ JP 1, 20 / X⁵ A 120; JP 3, 3615 / X⁴ A 210.

⁴⁴ Barrett, 176.

quite possible that he did not know what one of them looked like.”⁴⁵ Aquinas served as the ultimate straw-man in Danish 19th century theological circles, a view that can at least be partly attributed to Luther’s rabid critiques of Aquinas.⁴⁶ Even though Kierkegaard’s studies of Luther himself were famously limited, his view of Aquinas must undoubtedly have been influenced by Luther’s association of Thomas himself and scholasticism with the spiritual failures of Roman Catholicism.⁴⁷ In all of Kierkegaard’s writings there are only six direct references to Aquinas, bearing precious little information about Kierkegaard’s views on the *Doctor Angelicus*.⁴⁸ It is not clear that Kierkegaard made a similar distinction between the monastic life and abstract theology of Aquinas as he did with Anselm.⁴⁹ This may be due to the fact that, Luther aside, Kierkegaard’s primary exposure to Aquinas’ thought was via Martensen, who was himself critical of Aquinas but who was nonetheless obviously inspired by him in many ways and presented Aquinas as “a kind of Hegelian.”⁵⁰ Kierkegaard may therefore have primarily viewed Aquinas, and scholastic theology as a whole, as a precursor to Hegelian speculative thought, given his limited exposure to original works by scholastic authors.

⁴⁵ Benjamín Olivares Bøgeskov, “Thomas Aquinas: Kierkegaard’s View Based on Scattered and Uncertain Sources,” in *Kierkegaard and the Patristic and Medieval Traditions (Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, Vol. 4)*, ed. Jon Stewart (Burlington, VT & Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2008), 183.

⁴⁶ Luther viewed Aquinas as “The source and foundation of all heresy, error and obliteration of the Gospel.” See “... Thomas von Aquin, der born und grudsuppe aller ketzerei, iirthum und vertilgung des Evangelii...” in *Widder den newen Abgott* (1524), Bøgeskov, 188, n. 23.

⁴⁷ Bøgeskov, 188-89.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 190. It is interesting to note that one of these references is to Aquinas’ (supposed) view of indulgences, which Kierkegaard relates directly to (what he perceives as) Roman Catholic teachings on the sacrament of communion: “What was it with which the greatest thinker in the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas, used to defend ‘indulgence’? It was the doctrine of the Church as a mystical body in which we all, as in a parlor game, participate in the Church’s *fideicommissum*.”

This is a particularly striking example of Kierkegaard’s (willful?) misunderstanding of sacramental realism, i.e. associating the Eucharist in Roman Catholic theology with the institutionalism of the tradition. See *JP* 2, 1906 / X⁴ A 369; Bøgeskov, 200ff.

⁴⁹ Bøgeskov, 202.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Kierkegaard's attitude towards scholasticism and the "medieval" period of Christianity (a term that Kierkegaard often uses to refer to the Catholic Church, especially in relation to practices such as monasticism) is also represented by his reading of Peter Abelard, one of the most influential of the scholastic theologians. Kierkegaard owned Abelard's *Dialogus inter philosophu, judaeum et christianum*, and even though he does not extensively discuss Abelard's philosophy, he mentions Abelard several times in his journals.⁵¹ Similar to his views on Anselm, Kierkegaard disagreed with the objective nature of Abelard's scholastic theology but admired the existential and spiritual aspects of Abelard as a person.⁵² Kierkegaard undoubtedly sympathized with Abelard's plight since Abelard was forced to choose between his duty to the Church and his love for his pupil Heloise.⁵³

Kierkegaard's reading of the Christian tradition—whether patristic, medieval/scholastic, or modern—is always grounded in this emphasis on the existential and subjectively lived-experience of Christianity rather than offering an abstract, systematic treatise of theology. All of Kierkegaard's writings can be seen as an attack on any attempt to reduce Christianity to a theory or system, i.e., anything that might undermine its status as an existential communication (*Existents-Meddelelse*). Even though Kierkegaard was undoubtedly motivated by the intellectual debates of 19th century Denmark,⁵⁴ his philosophical aim was much broader. Kierkegaard not only wrote on theological issues that were being debated around Europe but focused on issues that he

⁵¹ István Czakó, "Abelard: Kierkegaard's Reflections on the Unhappy Love of a Scholastic Dialectician," in *Kierkegaard and the Patristic and Medieval Traditions (Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, Vol. 4)*, ed. Jon Stewart (Burlington, VT & Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2008), 145-65.

⁵² *JP* 5, 5609 / IV A 31.

⁵³ Czakó, 157; *JP* 5, 5703 / IV A 177.

⁵⁴ See Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*.

saw as being of universal concern, primarily sin and salvation, and how these issues had been shaped throughout the history of the Christian tradition.⁵⁵

The scholastic tradition largely influenced Kierkegaard in a negative fashion insofar as it motivated (at least in Kierkegaard's eyes) the development of speculative thought. Objective (systematic, abstract) theology inspired the more reactionary elements of his writing and led Kierkegaard to craft an alternative vision of Christianity, one grounded in passionate inwardness. A more direct and positive influence on Kierkegaard were the writings of medieval mystics and the representatives of the Pietist tradition. In fact, these two strands of Christian thought were deeply interrelated for Kierkegaard given the influence of the mystical tradition on Pietist authors such as Johann Arndt.⁵⁶ A particularly formative influence was the writings of Johannes Tauler,⁵⁷ a Dominican preacher who not only influenced Arndt but also Luther himself.⁵⁸ Kierkegaard extensively read Arndt's *True Christianity*, large portions of which are a presentation of Taulerian theology.⁵⁹ Kierkegaard viewed Arndt's work as one of his most "treasured devotional readings."⁶⁰ Philipp Jakob Spener, the "Father of Pietism," was also greatly

⁵⁵ See Noel Adams, "Søren Kierkegaard and Carl Ullmann: Two Allies in the War Against Speculative Philosophy," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 18, no. 5 (2010): 875-98, for an overview of Kierkegaard's engagement with debates outside of Denmark (especially in Germany) and the influence of Carl Ullmann on his thought. Adams argues that even though Kierkegaard's engagement with Danish Hegelians (especially Martensen) is a crucial component of his philosophical output these debates are not the sine qua non of Kierkegaard's philosophy.

⁵⁶ Peter Sajda, "Tauler. A Teacher in Spiritual Dietetics: Kierkegaard's Reception of Johannes Tauler," in *Kierkegaard and the Patristic and Medieval Traditions (Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, Vol. 4)*, ed. Jon Stewart (Burlington, VT & Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2008), 265-76.

⁵⁷ It should be noted that among these Kierkegaard counted the anonymous *The Imitation of the Poor Life of Jesus*, later proved to have not been authored by Tauler, as well as the hugely influential and mystagogic *Theologia Deutsch*. Though Kierkegaard did not believe that Tauler had written *Theologia Deutsch*, the Lutheran tradition at the time associated the work heavily with Tauler and the later Taulerian mystical tradition. See Sajda, 267.

⁵⁸ Sajda, 268-9.

⁵⁹ Sajda, 270; ASKB, 267-77.

⁶⁰ George Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Theology of the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 114.

influenced by Tauler.⁶¹ Carl Ullmann, a formative influence on central themes in Kierkegaard's works,⁶² commented in his works on the importance of Tauler's theology for both Spener and Luther. Ullmann presented representatives of mysticism as prefiguring the Reformation, insofar as they went against the grain of institutionalism and bureaucracy in favor of a lived, inwardly passionate Christianity.⁶³ Kierkegaard also read Carriere's *The World-View of the Reformation Period*, a book that included extensive discussion of mysticism, including analyses of Campanella, Bruno, Tauler, and extensive quotations from *Theologica Deutsch*.⁶⁴ Kierkegaard was also influenced by Georg Friedrich Böhlinger's *The Church of Christ and its Witnesses* as well as Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann's *History of Philosophy*, both of which discussed mysticism.⁶⁵ The latter undoubtedly influenced Kierkegaard's developing critique of speculative thinking as it offers a view of mysticism as "an antipode to the Scholastics."⁶⁶

The rediscovery of the theology of Meister Eckhart in the nineteenth century undoubtedly influenced Kierkegaard, as it did all religious scholars of the time, though perhaps in a rather negative fashion given the immense influence Eckhartian theology had on the development of Hegelian speculative theology.⁶⁷ Peter Sajda has argued that

⁶¹ Sajda, 271.

⁶² Among these were Kierkegaard's philosophy of self and meditations on personality (*Personlighed*) and his development of the transcendence-immanence relationship. See Adams, 881ff.

⁶³ Ullmann discusses Ruysbroeck, Eckhart, and Tauler in *Reformatoren vor der Reformation, vornehmlich in Deutschland und den Niederlanden*, accessed 3/31/2015, <https://ia600502.us.archive.org/2/items/reformatorenvor01ullmgoog/reformatorenvor01ullmgoog.pdf>.

See Sajda, 274.

⁶⁴ Sajda, 274. The relevant excerpts from Kierkegaard's journals are in *JP* 3, 3012 / VIII¹ A 69; *JP* 4, 4598 / VIII¹ A 117; *JP* 3, 3312 / VIII¹ A 166; *JP* 3, 3048 / VIII¹ A 118.

⁶⁵ Sajda, 275.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Peter Sajda, "Meister Eckhart: The Patriarch of German Speculation who was a *Lebemeister*: Meister Eckhart's Silent Way into Kierkegaard's Corpus," in *Kierkegaard and the Patristic and Medieval Traditions (Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, Vol. 4)*, ed. Jon Stewart (Burlington, VT & Hampshire, England: Ashgate 2008), 241-42.

Kierkegaard differentiated between the contemplative, “abstract” mysticism of Eckhart and the more “edifying” and praxis-oriented mysticism of figures like Tauler.⁶⁸ Eckhart’s positive influence on Kierkegaard would have been received via Arndt and the (pseudo-) Taulerian literature that was popular in Denmark at the time. This may have included Eckhart’s emphasis on the importance of suffering and *kenosis* in the spiritual life.⁶⁹

Kierkegaard’s philosophy is, in many ways, profoundly apophatic in nature.⁷⁰ This is in many ways attributable to the influence of mysticism on his thought. As I will argue, the apophatic characteristics of Kierkegaard’s philosophy place him in close correlation with the Eastern Orthodox tradition in numerous ways.

Kierkegaard’s views on the three eras of Christianity under discussion here, patristic, medieval, and contemporary (19th century Danish Lutheranism) is laid out in his work *Judge for Yourself!* Kierkegaard obviously favors the patristic era for its existential focus on imitating Christ in word, deed, and thought, though Kierkegaard is also critical of developments in the tradition that would later lead to the kinds of corruptions he decried in the Medieval and contemporary eras. Kierkegaard primarily criticized the Medieval era for its “exaggeration” of works and its notion that merit could play a soteriological role. It was this exaggeration that Luther attempted to rectify with his emphasis on *Sola Fide*, but in doing so he inadvertently created a new doctrine, one even more anemic and divorced from true Christianity than the “monastic-ascetic”

⁶⁸ Ibid., 246-47. Sajda also argues that Kierkegaard’s later interest in asceticism was divorced from any interest in mysticism. In chapters three and four, I will argue that Kierkegaard’s interest in mysticism was formative for his epistemology, which in turn was formative for his philosophy of the person (including his views on the importance of asceticism). See Sajda, 251, n. 86.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 250.

⁷⁰ See Simon D. Podmore, *Kierkegaard and the Self Before God* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington: 2011), xiv.

Christianity of the patristic and medieval eras.⁷¹ The result was the most watered-down version of Christian life possible, namely the “professorial-scholarly Christianity” of the speculative philosophers.⁷²

In describing the commitment of the early Christians, Kierkegaard tells us that they differ from the later manifestations of Christendom insofar as they were able to venture something in their conversion. Christianity, at its purest, represents a passionate inwardness of supreme vulnerability where the human being can stand completely naked before God in full authenticity. Christ does not deliver a doctrine, a teaching, or a philosophy, according to Kierkegaard, but rather provides the “place” (*Bestedelse* or *Topos*) where inner conversion can manifest itself.⁷³ As Kierkegaard makes clear, this conversion experience is achieved in the moment of absolute authenticity (“sobriety”), which can only be realized in and through a radical kind of self-emptying: “To become sober is: *to come to oneself in self-knowledge and before God as nothing before him, yet infinitely, unconditionally engaged.*”⁷⁴ The venturing needed for this kind of self-knowledge consists of “relinquishing probability,” letting go of our scheming, our cunning, our plans, our ego. In short, it is to venture *reason*, to crucify it, and let it be resurrected as a new way of knowing and seeing, one grounded in faith rather than doctrine or speculation.⁷⁵ This is what the early Christians were able to do, according to

⁷¹ *Judge For Yourself!* (hereafter *JFYS*), 194-209.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 195.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁷⁵ The Hongs’ translation of the Danish *vovet* as “venture” is not without its merit but requires some explanation. In *JFYS*, p. 191 Kierkegaard writes: “Naar du nemlig har vovet den afgjørende Handling, saa Du bliver ueensartet med denne Verdens Liv, ikke kan have Dit Liv deri, støder sammen dermed.” The Hongs’ translation reads: “When you have ventured the decisive act, you become heterogeneous with the life of this world, cannot have your life in it, come into collision with it.”

Vovet is most literally translated as “dare.” It is most commonly used as an adjective when describing someone as “daring.” Kierkegaard’s point is that true Christianity flies in the face of many of the primary

Kierkegaard, and this is what we have been losing, more and more, as we grow ever more confident in our abilities to master our surroundings and ourselves.

1.3 - Would the Real Kierkegaard Please Stand Up: Reception and Interpretation of Kierkegaard

Any interpretation or analysis of Kierkegaard's philosophy is an incredibly complex undertaking. There is, first of all, the issue of the extent to which Kierkegaard's writings can be viewed as a cohesive whole. The pseudonymous voices repeatedly contradict each other and Kierkegaard's method of indirect communication raises numerous hermeneutical difficulties. Kierkegaard nonetheless clearly stated that there was a "total structure" (*Total-Anlæg*) to his writings.⁷⁶ Gregor Malantschuk, writing on the Kierkegaardian corpus, has argued that there is a "unity pervading all these studies, binding together the several parts and pointing toward the recognition of man's inner

drives and instincts that guide human behavior, namely self-preservation and the search for self-satisfaction and pleasure. The Christian must ultimately lay everything on the line, including his own life, for Christ. Life, from the Christian perspective, is viewed as the ultimate gamble, the ultimate "all in" where we risk everything for the sake of the eternal *telos*. The Hong's translation of *Vovet* as "venture" has the advantage of having a certain kind of connotation with a gamble or a risky endeavor. The English word "daring" doesn't quite convey the fullness of the risk that Kierkegaard wants to convey. The whole point of the Christian life, for Kierkegaard, is that one either wins everything (eternal happiness) or loses everything (eternal pain).

Kierkegaard's use of *Vovet* in the context of "venturing" reason is particularly interesting, especially when considered in light of the analogy with gambling. Throughout *Judge for Yourself!*, as well as in the Climacian writings, reason is often portrayed as the most difficult thing that needs to be given up in the name of the Christian life. Kierkegaard seems to believe that it is reason, the demand for things to make sense *in a particular way*, that keeps us from devoting our lives to true Christianity. But this does not mean that we abandon all thinking, nor does it indicate that Kierkegaard is advocating for some kind of irrationalism or fundamentalism. Rather, reason, like everything else in human life, is ventured so that it can be reclaimed, reborn, and resurrected. The epistemological analysis of Kierkegaard's writings in chapter 3 of this project is largely devoted to the implications of what it means to "venture" reason.

⁷⁶ *JP* 6, 6511 / X² A 106. It is worth noting here the important difference between the Danish words *Anlæg* and *System*. *Anlæg* can mean "talent," "structure," "order," or even "propensity." Kierkegaard does not have a *Total-System*, a closed, fixed, rigid model of understanding, but rather a more fluid and open method of inquiry that nonetheless is not just a random assortment of texts and points of views.

actuality through introspection and all the existential possibilities it contains.”⁷⁷ In his book *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet*, Louis Mackey argues that the seemingly fragmented viewpoints of the pseudonyms mask a unified philosophy and that they do not point to contradictions in Kierkegaard’s own thought: “A Kierkegaardian pseudonym is a *persona*, an imaginary person created by the author for artistic purposes, not a *nom de plume*.”⁷⁸ Mackey goes on to write that: “There is some truth to be found in the mouth of each of the pseudonyms. In a sense the whole truth, as Kierkegaard understood it, is found in each of the works. But it is seen in each from a different point of view, and for that reason is not truth simply, but truth plus the distortion of partiality.”⁷⁹

Even if Kierkegaard’s philosophy is, indeed, a unified “project,” the thorny issue nonetheless remains of how we are to interpret the intention of the project. As previously mentioned, Kierkegaard’s reception in the philosophical and theological worlds has been astoundingly varied. Kierkegaard’s fragmented reception in the United States is indicative of the multifaceted nature of Kierkegaard scholarship in the last century and a half. Kierkegaard’s philosophy was initially introduced to American academia through Scandinavian immigrants and Lutheran seminaries.⁸⁰ Walter Lowrie and Charles Williams presented Kierkegaard in the early 20th century as a fundamentally Christian thinker who was to be understood in and through his (often contentious) relation to Lutheran orthodoxy.⁸¹ Both the champions and critics of existentialism in the United States were influenced by Kierkegaard and in turn influenced his reception in American

⁷⁷ Gregor Malantschuk, *Kierkegaard's Thought*, ed. and trans. Howard V. and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 11.

⁷⁸ Louis Mackey, *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 247.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 261.

⁸⁰ Barrett, 230.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* and Walter Lowry, *Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938).

academia in the 1950's and 60's.⁸² Concurrent with and following these interpretive strands was a school of thought that identified Kierkegaard with the neo-orthodoxy of Barth and Brunner,⁸³ perhaps most significantly via the works of Niebuhr and Tillich.⁸⁴ Lee C. Barrett has outlined how the neo-orthodox reception of Kierkegaard came to influence the important role Kierkegaard's philosophy played in the development of certain strands of evangelical thinking.⁸⁵ Early evangelical thinkers such as Edward John Carnell and later, post-conservative writers such as Stanley James Grenz championed Kierkegaard's fideism and anti-rationalism.⁸⁶ In addition to these religiously-inspired interpretive approaches to Kierkegaard's works in the U.S. there are also the myriad thinkers from literary theory, theology, deconstructionism, and social and political philosophy who all seemingly aim at finding the interpretive key to unlocking the mysteries of Kierkegaard's philosophy.

Kierkegaard's reception in the Orthodox world was similarly varied. Though it falls outside the scope of this study to fully analyze Kierkegaardian scholarship throughout Eastern Europe, the Russian reception of Kierkegaard bears mention and some scrutiny. Kierkegaard was introduced to Russian intelligentsia as early as the late nineteenth century.⁸⁷ Peter Emmanuel Hansen, a Dane who emigrated to Russia, introduced Kierkegaard's writings to literary and academic figures such as Leo Tolstoy.⁸⁸

⁸² Barrett, 231-32.

⁸³ Ibid., 233.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 234. See, Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1941) and Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (London and Glasgow: The Fontana Library, 1962).

⁸⁵ Barrett, 235.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Darya Loungina, "Russia: Kierkegaard's Reception through Tsarism, Communism, and Liberation," in *Kierkegaard's International Reception: Tome II: Southern, Central and Eastern Europe (Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, Vol. 8)*, ed. Jon Stewart (Burlington and Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 247.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Karl Friedrich Tiander wrote one of the first academic treatises on Kierkegaard and was the first to compare Kierkegaard to Dostoyevsky, a common trend in the Russian scholarship.⁸⁹ The 1909 edition of *The Orthodox Encyclopedia of Theology* included a reference to Kierkegaard and specifically praised his devotion to asceticism, a feature of Christian spiritual life that the Eastern Church believed had fallen out of favor in the Christian West.⁹⁰ After the revolution, Kierkegaard scholarship was greatly influenced by the writings of Lev Shestov who learned about Kierkegaard from Martin Buber and Edmund Husserl.⁹¹ Shestov, who emigrated to Paris, taught courses on Dostoyevsky and Kierkegaard as early as the 1930's.⁹² His influential work *Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy* was not widely available until after Stalinism, due to Shestov's outspoken hatred of Bolshevism. Post-*perestroika* writers such as Sergey Isayev and Aleksandrovich Podoroga later offered new translations and interpretations of Kierkegaard's works.⁹³

Shestov's deeply fascinating, though problematic, work *Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy* offers intriguing insights into Kierkegaard's reception in the Orthodox world. Shestov saw Kierkegaard and Dostoyevsky as sharing the exact same philosophical goal, namely to argue against the supremacy of *gnosis* over salvation, a trend that begins with Greek philosophy and extends throughout history to reach a frightening and possibly nihilistic apotheosis in the writings of Hegel.⁹⁴ Shestov wrote

⁸⁹ Ibid., 253.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 255.

⁹¹ Ibid., 257ff.

⁹² Ibid., 258.

⁹³ Ibid., 271-72.

⁹⁴ Lev Shestov, *Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy*, trans. Elinor Hewitt (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1969), 1-28. One of the many issues with Shestov's work is his extreme vilification of Hegel, which goes so far as to associate Hegel with the demonic.

that: “Both Dostoyevsky and Kierkegaard (the first without realizing it, the second fully aware of it) saw their life work as a struggle with, and victory over, that system of ideas embodied in Hegelian philosophy.”⁹⁵ Shestov saw both thinkers as developing an epistemology and soteriology that is focused on the debilitating effects of original sin. The path of knowledge, rationality, and systematic thought will inevitably lead human beings to ruin. Both Dostoyevsky and Kierkegaard, Shestov claimed, saw discursive reasoning, especially in its manifestation as science and technology, as an attempt to overcome (or ignore) the effects of the Fall, an attempt that was bound to not only fail but to further entangle human beings in the effects of sin. Kierkegaard, Shestov said, “perceived that the beginning of philosophy is not wonder, as the Greeks taught, but despair.”⁹⁶ Ignoring the existential categories of anxiety and despair, which is what speculation and systematic thinking attempt to do, makes us fall deeper into despair, creating a vicious cycle that results in perdition. Only faith, what Kierkegaard terms the “absurd,” allows us to break free of the closed circle of reasoning.⁹⁷ Shestov claimed that both Dostoyevsky and Kierkegaard saw faith not as irrational but rather as supra-rational, a way of transcending the limits of dianoetic reasoning and to enter into a new way of seeing and knowing. Shestov wrote that for Kierkegaard “faith is not reliance on what has been told us, what we have heard, what we have been taught. Faith is a new dimension of thought, unknown and foreign to speculative philosophy, which opens the way to the Creator of all earthly things, to the source of all possibilities, to the One for Whom there are no boundaries between the possible and the impossible.”⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Ibid., 12.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 17.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 27.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

Shestov's comparative approach where Kierkegaard's philosophy is juxtaposed with Dostoyevsky—and, by extension, the Eastern Orthodox tradition—offers many fascinating insights into Kierkegaard's works, some of which have not received a great deal of attention in Kierkegaard studies in the West. This is not to suggest that the “real” Kierkegaard was a pseudo-Orthodox thinker but rather to show that certain aspects of his philosophy that have heretofore received scant attention are brought into stark contrast when viewed through the lens of Eastern Orthodox teachings. The reasons for this are varied, though they all undoubtedly lead back to the fact that Kierkegaard saw himself as a new Luther, a revolutionary who wanted to break free from the prejudices and failings of Western Christendom. In doing so he unwittingly tapped into ways of thinking about the human person which are profoundly Eastern in nature. If Western-European and North-American post-industrial cultures have any defining characteristic in common, it is undoubtedly the deification of Enlightenment rationality. Technology, industry, capitalism, and science are the offspring of the speculative philosophical tradition that Kierkegaard so vehemently railed against and they took a much firmer foothold in the Western world than they did in the East.

Which brings us back to Shestov; even though the stereotypical image of “the West” as being the locus of technology and science and “the East” as representing contemplation and mysticism has more to do with European and North-American colonialism than it has to do with any kind of spiritual propensity, it is nonetheless true that the effects of the Enlightenment, both its beauty and its horrors, were much more profoundly felt in the West and more heavily resisted in the East, at least initially. Dostoyevsky is one of the most powerful symbols of this resistance. He, along with

writers such as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche in the West, prophetically foresaw the dehumanizing implications of a world where human beings are reduced to a cog in a speculative system. “What is man without desires, without will, and without wantings, if not a spring in an organ barrel?” rails Dostoyevsky’s *Underground Man*.⁹⁹ Like Kierkegaard, Dostoyevsky did not see reason (or science or technology) as inherently evil but rather pointed to the inherent limitations of reducing our perception of reality to that which can be systematized, analyzed, manufactured, and manipulated. “You see: reason, gentlemen, is a fine thing, that is unquestionable, but reason is only reason and satisfies only man’s reasoning capacity, while wanting is a manifestation of the whole of life—that is, the whole of human life, including reason and various little itches.”¹⁰⁰

It is the “little itches,” the despair, the desire, the confusion, the brokenness, that Kierkegaard and Dostoyevsky wanted to preserve, to safeguard the human (all too human) from the mechanistic philosophies of modernity. As I will show, the Eastern Orthodox tradition manifests a spirituality that is very much in accord with this vision. The surprising parallels between Kierkegaard’s thought and the Eastern Orthodox tradition reveal the revolutionary character of his work. The various interpretations of Kierkegaard that are grounded in Western philosophy and religion have often failed to see just how far removed from the intellectual tradition of the West he really is. Shestov was fundamentally right when he situated Kierkegaard alongside Dostoyevsky. Kierkegaard is in significant ways much closer in spirit and thought to an Eastern Orthodox thinker such as Dostoyevsky than he is to Western existentialism, post-

⁹⁹ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Notes from Underground*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Vintage Classics, 1994), 26.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

structuralism, deconstructionism, or even perhaps to orthodox Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. The goal of this project is to outline the ways in which Kierkegaard's thought echoes these Eastern sensibilities in an attempt to throw into sharp relief elements of his thought that heretofore have not received much attention in the literature.

1.4 - The Orthodox Church

In the introduction to his book *The Orthodox Church* John McGuckin writes that: "The temptation to categorize the Eastern Orthodox as romantically exotic is a powerful one."¹⁰¹ There is, indeed, a great deal of confusion and mystification surrounding Orthodox practices and theology and a short introduction to the tradition is therefore in order.

The Orthodox Church, much like the Roman Catholic, views itself as the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Christ. The teachings and theology of the church are grounded in worship, the seven ecumenical councils,¹⁰² apostolic succession, and the writings of the Fathers and Mothers of the Church.¹⁰³ Much like the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church sees itself as representing a *holy* tradition, a spiritual lineage that begins with the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

¹⁰¹ John McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to its History, Doctrine, and Spiritual Culture*, (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 1.

¹⁰² McGuckin, 17-20. These are the council of Nicea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), Chalcedon (451), Constantinople (553), Constantinople (681), and Nicaea (787). The Orthodox Church holds that only these seven councils are authentically ecumenical.

¹⁰³ The patristic era is most closely associated with the developing theology of the fourth to eighth centuries (i.e. the era of the councils). That being said, "Orthodoxy does not restrict the age of the Fathers and Mothers to a dead past. Those who are Spirit-bearers in the present age are also the authentic theologians of God, even though not all of them may have the duty of public teaching in the church, and many of them may not have academic qualifications." McGuckin, 15.

Tension between the Latin and Greek churches grew between the eighth and the eleventh centuries, for a variety of theological and political reasons, culminating in the great schism of 1054. The ensuing isolation of the Christian East further separated the Latin and Greek churches, especially after the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turkish empire in 1453.¹⁰⁴ Russia quickly took over as the cultural and political center of the Orthodox world following the decline of the Byzantine Empire.¹⁰⁵

The Orthodox Church is not organized according to the same kind of linear order that is common in the Christian West. McGuckin writes:

The jurisdictional organization of the Orthodox church flows out of the principle of the local churches gathered under their bishops, arranged in larger metropolitan provincial synods, and this as eventually culminating in the expression of the ancient pentarchy of patriarchates which were felt to express an 'international' sense of different Christian cultures in harmony with the whole. The ancient pentarchy was: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. To the latter four of this number, which remain in Orthodox communion, there are now included several other autocephalous Orthodox churches and other autonomous Orthodox churches which are still attached to their supervisory 'sponsor churches' by closer organizational ties.¹⁰⁶

The primary element of cohesion in Orthodoxy is not a particular ecclesiastical position or person, as in the case of the Papacy in Roman Catholicism, but rather the lived reality of tradition and sacramental communion. The Orthodox churches are also united in their adherence to the seven ecumenical councils and to the fundamental theological teachings outlined in the writings of the Fathers and Mothers of the church. Orthodox theology is based on an inseparable connection between lived spiritual

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 21-22.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 30

experience and doctrine, relying less on dogmatic proclamations and systematization than has been the tendency in the Latin West. Hilarion Alfeyev writes: “Dogma and mystical experience are two sides of the same coin, or rather, they are fundamentally one and the same, namely the revelation of God to the human person and the union of the human person with God. Mystical experience was in fact the driving force behind the theological reflections of the Church Fathers.”¹⁰⁷ Vladimir Lossky echoes these sentiments: “The eastern tradition has never made a sharp distinction between mysticism and theology; between personal experience of the divine mysteries and the dogma affirmed by the church. [...] There is, therefore, no Christian mysticism without theology but, above all, there is no theology without mysticism.”¹⁰⁸

A defining characteristic of Orthodox theology is its apophaticism. Lossky, basing his analysis of Orthodox theology on the works of St. Dionysius the Areopagite, writes:

All knowledge has as its object that which is. Now God is beyond all that exists. In order to approach Him it is necessary to deny all that is inferior to Him, that is to say, all that which is. If in seeing God one can know what one sees, then one has not seen God in Himself but something intelligible, something which is inferior to Him. It is by *unknowing* (*agnosia*) that one may know Him who is above every possible object of knowledge.¹⁰⁹

God’s absolute transcendence—and the absolute unknowability of God’s essence—is juxtaposed with the immanent nature of God’s revelation of Himself to the

¹⁰⁷ Hilarion Alfeyev, *The Mystery of Faith: An Introduction to the Teaching and Spirituality of the Orthodox Church* (London: St. Stephen's Press, 2002), xv.

¹⁰⁸ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976), 8.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

world. This revelation of God—and the experience of it—is supremely *personal* in character.

Faith, then, signifies a personal relationship with God; a relationship as yet incomplete and faltering, yet none the less real. It is to know God not as a theory or an abstract principle, but as a person. To know a person is far more than to know facts about that person. To know a person is essentially to love him or her; there can be no true awareness of other persons without mutual love.¹¹⁰

The dual and paradoxical focus on God's absolute transcendence and his personal nature are manifest in and through the essence-energies distinction in Orthodox theology. Dating back to the patristic era, the doctrine received its most powerful articulation in the 14th century in the works of St. Gregory Palamas.¹¹¹ Ware writes:

By the essence of God is meant his otherness, by the energies his nearness. Because God is a mystery beyond our understanding, we shall never know his essence or inner being, either in this life or in the Age to come. If we knew the divine essence, it would follow that we knew God in the same way as he knows himself; and this we cannot do, since he is Creator and we are created. But, while God's inner essence is forever beyond our comprehension, his energies, grace, life and power fill the whole universe and are directly accessible by us.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 16.

¹¹¹ See John Meyendorff, *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974).

¹¹² Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995), 22. For patristic and post-patristic sources for the essence-energies division, see Jacques-Paul Migne, ed., *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca*, 162 vols. (Paris: 1857-66) and Philip Schaff and Henry Wace Hendrickson, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series*, 14 vols. (Grand Rapids: 1982): Basil the Great, Epistle 234.1 (*PG* 32 872C-873B, *NPNF* 8, 274) and Gregory Nazianzen, *Orations* 38. (*PG* 36 317B-C; *NPNF* 7, 346-47); Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 162-69 and 219-39 (pp. 94-97 and 111-14); Maximus the Confessor, "The Four Hundred Chapters on Love" (First century, 96-100), *Selected Writings*, trans. George C. Berthold (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 45-46); Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, ed. John Meyendorff, trans. Nicholas Gendle (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), III.ii.5.-18 (pp. 93-102).

The essence-energies distinction is not primarily an epistemological matter but rather manifests the central tenets of Orthodox anthropology and soteriology. God's *energeia* are not created manifestations but rather the immanent presence of God himself. The *telos* of the human being is understood to be participation and *union* with these *energeia*. Orthodox salvation is therefore understood in terms of deification (*theosis*), a radical transformation of the entire human person: body, soul, and spirit. The understanding of salvation as a process of deification has its root in the *Logos* theology of the Alexandrian theologians Clement, Origen, Athanasius, and Cyril.¹¹³ Deification is grounded in the notion that the divine *Logos* became incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ, thereby manifesting a union between human nature and God's divine energies. McGuckin writes: "Greek patristic thought conceived the incarnation as having reconstituted the human person as a divinely graced mystery."¹¹⁴ Deification plays the same central role in Orthodox theology as redemption and atonement play in Western Christian thought.

Orthodoxy teaches that deification occurs through the interplay of divine grace and human effort, the latter of which includes ascetical practices such as fasting as well as participation in the mysteries, i.e., the sacraments of the Church.¹¹⁵ The Eastern Church never saw the same doctrinal disputes regarding the role of human free will as the Latin West did following the Pelagian controversies. The interplay or *synergeia* of human will and God is understood to be a *mysterion* and not amenable to logical analysis. Ware

¹¹³ John McGuckin, "Deification," in *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 98.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ The connection between *theosis* and the Eucharist was especially developed by Cyril of Alexandria. See McGuckin, 93-94 and 98.

writes: “Our salvation results from the convergence of two factors, unequal in value yet both indispensable: divine initiative and human response. What God does is incomparably the more important, but man’s participation is also required.”¹¹⁶ Free will, a core component of the image of God in the human person, is furthermore seen in Orthodox thought to represent the essence of personhood:

As God is free, so likewise man is free. And, being free, each human being realizes the divine image within himself in his own distinctive fashion. Human beings are not counters that can be exchanged for one another, or replaceable parts of a machine. Each, being free, is unrepeatable; and each, being unrepeatable, is infinitely precious. Human persons are not to be measured quantitatively: we have no right to assume that one particular person is of more value than any other particular person, or that ten persons must necessarily be of more value than one. Such calculations are an offence to authentic personhood.¹¹⁷

This theme of freedom and the role it plays in salvation will be at the forefront in chapter two, where I will discuss Kierkegaard’s philosophy of sin and salvation. It is worth highlighting here that one of the most radical elements of Kierkegaard’s philosophy is his view of human freedom; an area of Kierkegaard’s philosophy that often differs considerably from the orthodox Lutheran position. Kierkegaard’s philosophical views on freedom is another point of convergence between Dostoyevsky and Kierkegaard. In *Notes From Underground*, Dostoyevsky presents a hypothetical utopian reality where all of man’s needs are met, where everything is safe and comfortable and the human person only has to fit in and play along with the system in order to “have his

¹¹⁶ Ware, 112.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 51. As I will discuss in chapter 4, this view of human personhood is inherently social and communal. The uniqueness of each individual person is only fully manifest in and through a communal relationship with God and other people. As I will argue, this is a position that is also strongly advocated by Kierkegaard.

gingerbread,”¹¹⁸ to bask in pleasure and entertainment. The Underground man sees this reality as hell, as torment, because it undermines our freedom.

Shower [the human person] with all earthly blessings, drown him in happiness completely, over his head, so that only bubbles pop up on the surface of happiness, as on water, give him such economic satisfaction that he no longer has anything left to do at all except sleep, eat gingerbread, and worry about the noncessation of world history—and it is here, just here, that he, this man, out of sheer ingratitude, out of sheer lampoonery, will do something nasty. He will even risk his gingerbread, and wish on purpose for the most pernicious nonsense, the most noneconomical meaninglessness, solely in order to mix into all this positive good sense his own pernicious, fantastical element. [...] It is precisely his fantastic dream, his most banal stupidity, that he will wish to keep hold of, with the sole purpose of conforming to himself (as if it were so very necessary) that human beings are still human beings and not piano keys, which, though played upon with their own hands by the laws of nature themselves, are in danger of being played so much that outside the calendar it will be impossible to want anything. [...] The whole human enterprise seems indeed to consist in man’s proving to himself every moment that he is a man and not a sprig!¹¹⁹

In *The Sickness Unto Death* Anti-Climacus, in expounding upon the various forms of despair, echoes these sentiments of the Underground Man: “The self is its own master, absolutely its own master, so-called; and precisely this is the despair, but also what it regards as its pleasure and delight. [...] Rather than to seek help, [the person in despair] prefers, if necessary, to be himself with all the agonies of hell.”¹²⁰

Both Kierkegaard and Dostoyevsky see the only path to salvation as leading through the hell of despair. The result of the great systems of the Enlightenment is a cultural ethos that preaches the gospel of getting with the program, of ignoring the

¹¹⁸ Or his burger, fries, and Miller Lite.

¹¹⁹ *Notes from Underground*, 30 and 31.

¹²⁰ *The Sickness Unto Death* (hereafter *SUD*), 69 and 71.

vicissitudes and existential turmoil of being human.¹²¹ But this means that we need to ignore our unique individuality and our brokenness. It means that we must forego our freedom. Neither the institutionalized remedy of Roman Catholicism nor the individualized cry of the Lutheran *sola fide* seemed to satisfy Kierkegaard and Dostoyevsky as a response to this existential dilemma. Instead, they crafted a different response, one grounded in the notion of the absurd, of embracing a kind of divine madness.

In chapters 3 and 4, I will try to draw out various elements of Kierkegaard's epistemology and philosophy of personhood that resonate especially deeply with the Eastern Orthodox tradition (and, by extension, the philosophical thought of Dostoyevsky). As a short prelude to this discussion, a few words of introduction to the Eastern Orthodox view of the person are in order.

Eastern Orthodoxy understands human personhood primarily in terms of the Trinitarian nature of God. Kallistos Ware, echoing many of the primary philosophical concerns of Kierkegaard, writes:

A 'person' is not at all the same as an 'individual.' Isolated, self-dependent, none of us is an authentic person but merely an individual, a bare unit as recorded in the census. Egocentricity is the death of true personhood. Each becomes a real person only through entering into relation with other persons, through living for them and in them. There can be no man, so it has been rightly said, until there are at least two men in communication. The same is true, secondly, of love. Love cannot exist in isolation, but presupposes the other. Self-love is the negation of love.¹²²

¹²¹ In the West this ignorance took on the form of capitalism and consumerism while in the East it took on the form of communism. In either case, certain "-isms" were put in place where the individual human person was reduced to his or her role in a particular economic, philosophical, or political system.

¹²² Ware, 28.

The Trinitarian nature of God is the revelation *par excellence* of personhood understood as communion: “God the Trinity is thus to be described as ‘three persons in one essence.’ There is eternally in God true unity, combined with genuinely personal differentiation: the term ‘essence,’ ‘substance’ or ‘being’ (*ousia*) indicates the unity, and the term ‘person’ (*hypostasis, prosopon*) indicates the differentiation.”¹²³

Kierkegaard has sometimes been accused of advocating for a kind of individualism, of failing to fully account for the other.¹²⁴ There has been an attempt to rectify this view in recent years, primarily by pointing to the social and political elements of Kierkegaard’s philosophy.¹²⁵ These important contributions highlight important aspects of Kierkegaard’s works, though they sometimes divorce the political and economic dimensions of his works from the more explicitly religious and spiritual aspects. In chapter four I attempt to integrate them by relating Kierkegaard’s philosophy of personhood to the social and political dimensions of Eastern Orthodox anthropology.

1.5 – A Brief Summary of the Road Ahead

Chapter two will deal with Kierkegaard’s philosophy of sin and salvation. I begin the chapter by analyzing the understanding of original sin in the works of Luther and the later Lutheran tradition, with a special emphasis on the way the writings of Augustine influenced this development. Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous works, especially

¹²³ Ibid., 30

¹²⁴ Levinas provided one of the more influential examples of this critique. For an overview of the debate, see J. Aaron Simmons and David Wood, ed., *Kierkegaard and Levinas: Ethics, Politics, and Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

¹²⁵ Two examples of focusing on the political dimensions of Kierkegaard’s works include: James Marsh, “Kierkegaard and Critical Theory,” in *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, ed. Martin Matustik and Merold Westphal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 199-215, and Eliseo Pérez-Álvarez, *A Vexing Gadfly: The Late Kierkegaard on Economic Matters* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2009).

Haufniensis' *The Concept of Anxiety*, develop both a critique of the Lutheran understanding of original sin and provide an alternative account to it, one grounded in a developmental model of human personhood. This analysis includes an overview of Kierkegaard's contentious relationship with Luther, both as a spiritual figure as well as a philosopher, and highlights both the reasons why and the ways in which Kierkegaard sought to distance himself from Lutheran thinking on sinfulness. I end the chapter with an extensive discussion of Eastern Orthodox soteriology and theology of sin and offer a comparative analysis of Kierkegaard's philosophy in light of the Eastern tradition.

Chapter three covers Kierkegaard's epistemology. I offer an extensive discussion of Marilyn Piety's recent work *Ways of Knowing*, the first book-length project in English on Kierkegaard's epistemology. Kierkegaard's distinction between subjective and objective knowing is covered in detail, as is the existential category of "passionate inwardness." In the chapter I focus on Kierkegaard's use of the epistemological category of "acquaintance knowledge" (*Bekendelse*) which is rooted in the experience of interpersonal communion and relate this category to various elements of Eastern Orthodox epistemology, including the influential strand of apophaticism in that tradition. I will argue that Kierkegaard's focus on paradox and "the absurd" in works such as de Silentio's *Fear and Trembling* does not lead to an irrationalism but rather to a form of supra-rationalism that has its roots in Christian patristic thought.

Chapter four develops Kierkegaard's philosophy of personhood, especially in his later works such as *Works of Love* and the Christian discourses written under his own name. My primary aim is to defend Kierkegaard against the claim that his philosophy represents a form of individualism that is ethically deficient in fundamental ways. I show

that Kierkegaard's philosophy is grounded in an understanding of human *telos* that centers on self-emptying (*kenosis*). In Kierkegaard's philosophy, human "beingness," understood both existentially and ontologically, is fleshed out in terms of communion. This has significant social and political implications, some of which I develop in detail in the chapter. Kierkegaard's philosophy of the person is related to various neo-patristic Orthodox authors, such as John Zizioulas, who have integrated Orthodox theology and phenomenology in exciting ways.

Chapter five will offer a brief examination of the most fundamental difference between Kierkegaard and the Eastern Orthodox tradition: the emphasis on liturgy and sacraments in Eastern Orthodoxy. I will offer a brief overview of Kierkegaard's views on the "objective" nature of collective worship and suggest ways in which Eastern Orthodox liturgics can circumvent many of Kierkegaard's primary critiques and worries.

Chapter 2 – For the Wages of Sin is the Sickness Unto Death: Anxiety and Despair in Light of the East

Kierkegaard's writings on sin reflect his dissatisfaction with the standard account of sin as presented in the Lutheran milieu in which he was writing. In *The Sickness Unto Death* and *The Concept of Anxiety*, Anti-Climacus and Vigilius Haufniensis respectively attempt to formulate an alternative to the common Augustinian understanding of sin as inherited guilt. The philosophy of sin presented in the pseudonymous authorship is in some ways strikingly similar to the account of sin presented in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the basis of which was developed in the patristic era. In this chapter I will offer an analysis of Kierkegaard's philosophy of sin. I will argue that in critiquing the Lutheran account of sin Kierkegaard attempted to develop an alternative model that would better fit the existential considerations which lie at the heart of his philosophical inquiry, namely, how human beings can best address the lived realities of despair, anxiety, and guilt. In doing so, Kierkegaard managed to formulate a philosophical theology that bridges some of the most contentious divides between the Christian East and West, providing as it does a theology of sin which is sensitive to the soteriology of Augustine, which so heavily influenced Luther, while also safeguarding the Eastern emphasis on human involvement in the process of salvation.

The chapter will commence with a discussion of the development of the doctrine of original sin in Eastern and Western Christianity and how different readings of key biblical passages, most notably Romans 5:12, lead to different theological formulations of sinfulness and soteriology. Section 2.1 will include a detailed account of the patristic development of a doctrine of sin in the Christian East as well as an analysis of how the

Pelagian controversy influenced Augustine's seminal formulation of sin and salvation in the Western Church. Section 2.2 offers an analysis of Augustine's influence on Kierkegaard's philosophy and the ways in which Kierkegaard attempted to explicitly address what he found to be the most problematic elements of Augustine's writings on sin. I will address the extent to which Kierkegaard knew Augustine's philosophy and the role Augustine played in Kierkegaard's spiritual and philosophical formation. Section 2.3 offers a brief overview of the Lutheran understanding of original sin. Section 2.4 offers an analysis of Kierkegaard's reading of Luther's doctrine of sin and the way in which this reading was shaped by commentaries on Luther's writings which were widely read in 19th century Europe. Luther was undoubtedly Kierkegaard's primary muse when it came to theological writings, yet Kierkegaard saw fundamental problems with the way the entire Western tradition had approached the issue of sin. This section will focus on Kierkegaard's critiques of Luther and the way in which Luther's condemnation of merit in a soteriological context influenced Kierkegaard's thought. Section 2.5 focuses on Kierkegaard's attempt—primarily through the voice of Vigilius Haufniensis—to provide an alternative understanding for sin and salvation. I will argue that Haufniensis in *The Concept of Anxiety* and Anti-Climacus in *Sickness Unto Death* offer a developmental account of the human self that echoes many of the primary concerns in patristic writers such as Irenaeus and Athanasius, writers who would go on to provide the foundations for Eastern Orthodox soteriology. Section 2.6 is an analysis of Kierkegaard's views on the spheres of existence in relation to his soteriology, especially as understood in relation to Eastern Orthodox writings on sin and salvation. Section 2.7 analyzes Kierkegaard's views on free will and grace. Section 2.8 offers concluding remarks on the comparative

analysis of Kierkegaard's views on sin and Eastern Orthodox views on the matter and looks at how teachings on the essence-energies distinction in Orthodox theology illuminate Kierkegaard's philosophy.

My primary aim throughout the chapter is to show how important (perhaps essential) elements of Kierkegaard's writings on sin—elements that have heretofore not received due attention in the literature—can be highlighted through a comparative analysis with Eastern Orthodox philosophy.

2.1 - The Development of the Doctrine of Original Sin in Eastern and Western Christianity

The doctrine of ancestral sin in the Christian church was first developed by St. Irenaeus in the second century as a response to Gnostic heresies.¹ Athanasius further developed the doctrine in *De Incarnacione* and “anticipated later developments by teaching that the chief result of the sin of Adam, which consisted in the abuse of his liberty, was the loss of the grace of conformity to the image of God, by which he and his descendants were reduced to their natural condition (*eis to kata phusin*) and became subject to corruption (*phthora*) and death (*thanatos*).”² Ambrose conceived of Adam as living in a blessed state, free from physical necessity whose fall from grace primarily consisted of falling into a state determined by concupiscence and death.³ Ambrose greatly developed the Christian understanding of the “solidarity of the human race with Adam.”⁴

¹ Frank Leslie Cross, Elizabeth A. Livingstone, ed., “Original Sin,” in *The Oxford dictionary of the Christian Church* (3rd rev. ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

² Ibid.

³ J.N.D. Kelley, *Early Christian Doctrine* (San Francisco: Harper and Row 1978), 354.

⁴ Bradley L. Nassif, “Toward a ‘Catholic’ Understanding of St. Augustine’s View on Original Sin,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 39, no. 4 (1984): 288.

Ambroses' anonymous contemporary, whom we now know was Ambrosiaster, made Romans 5:12 the focal point of his writings on sin.⁵ The passage in question reads: "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned."⁶ Bradley Nassif, writing on Ambrosiaster's interpretation of the passage, notes: "The Old Latin version which he used had the faulty translation 'in whom (*in quo*) all sinned,' rather than the correct one, 'because (*eph ho*) all sinned.' He interprets the prepositional phrase to mean that all sinned 'in Adam.' Thus, all are sinners because of Adam since we all come from him."⁷ Despite this mistranslation, it is clear that neither Ambrose nor Ambrosiaster understood original sin as inherited guilt but rather as a propensity towards sinful behavior largely caused by the facticity of death.⁸ Furthermore, as John Romanides has pointed out, the grammatical structure of the Greek (*eph 'ho pantes hemarton*) makes it "both grammatically and exegetically impossible" to interpret the *eph ho* as referring to Adam: "From purely grammatical considerations it is impossible to interpret *eph ho* as a reference to any word other than *thanatos*."⁹ This means that Paul's phrase is best understood to mean that human beings sin because of *death*, rather than due to some inherited guilt passed on from Adam. This is an especially significant point considering that the Latin translation uses the masculine *in quo* instead of the gender-ambiguous *eph ho*. Given the fact that *mors* (death) is feminine in the Latin, this means that Western Christian thinkers such as Augustine read the passage quite differently from their Greek-

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ New Revised Standard Version.

⁷ Nassif, 288.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ John Romanides, "Original Sin According to St. Paul," *St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly* 4, nos. 1-2 (1955): 23. See also Henri Rondet, *Original Sin: The Patristic and Theological Background*, trans. Cajetan Finegan (New York: Shannon, Ecclesia Press, 1972), 128-9.

speaking counterparts. From Augustine's perspective, there is no way to understand Romans 5:12 except to read the "in whom" passage as referring to Adam, while the Greek makes it grammatically impossible to read it as referring to anything but death. As we shall see, these grammatical issues give rise to immensely important theological differences in the two traditions. David Weaver, in a series of articles, has further emphasized the importance of the mistranslation of Romans 5:12 in the Latin tradition and how it affected the differing accounts of sin, which in many ways came to define the divergent theologies of the East and West. Weaver writes:

It is inaccurate to apply the term 'original sin' (*originalis peccatum*) to the ideas of the Greek-speaking authors, since this term represents a concept that has a well-defined content in the terms of Latin theology but does not have an exact parallel among the Greeks. The most critical point of departure is the absence among the Greeks of any notion of inherited culpability—i.e., inherited guilt, which was the central point of the Latin doctrine and which made humanity's inheritance from Adam truly sin, unequivocally a sin of nature, which rendered the individual hateful to God and condemned him to eternal damnation prior to any independent, willful act. These conceptions seemed to be supported by the Latin translation of Romans 5:12, in which the phrase *eph ho* had been translated as *in quo* (in whom). This implied that all humanity had sinned in Adam, or in Adam's sin.¹⁰

Weaver goes on to note that early Christian apologists such as Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Tatian, Theophilus, and Irenaeus all held that "sin, properly so called, is a willful act that occurs in imitation of Adam's sinfulness, and that, though there is an inherited mortality, there is no inheritance of a sinfully corrupt nature."¹¹ Weaver emphasizes the importance of Irenaeus' teaching, namely that Adam and Eve were not

¹⁰ David Weaver, "From Paul to Augustine: Romans 5:12 in Early Christian Exegesis," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (1983): 187.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 190ff.

created perfect but were rather created in a childlike state, potentially capable of assimilating themselves to the glory of God. It is this potentiality that they fail to actualize when they fall from God's grace.¹² Weaver notes that it was in the third century that the two traditions began to truly diverge on the issue of sin "with the contemporaneous emergence of the Alexandrian and North African traditions of theology, developed by Tertullian and Cyprian in the West and Clement and Origen in the East."¹³ Tertullian marks a break in previous thinking on the issue due to his emphasis on how all human beings are directly involved in Adam's sin. Tertullian held that human nature had been affected by sin at least to the extent that our proclivity towards sinful behavior had been enormously increased.¹⁴ Despite this fact, he did not see the necessity of infant baptism,¹⁵ indicating that however negative Tertullian's view on human nature may have been, it was a far cry from the later theological developments introduced by Augustine who famously saw infant baptism as a pivotal issue for the Church.¹⁶ Cyprian, on the other hand, emphasized infant baptism to a much greater extent, prefiguring the later Augustinian tradition.¹⁷

¹² See Irenaeus' *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, trans. Joseph P. Smith (Westminster: Newman Press, 1951), Weaver 192 and Henry Rondet, *Original Sin: The Patristic and Theological Background*, trans. Cajetan Finegan (New York: 1972), 44.

¹³ Weaver, 192. See also J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: 1958), 174.

¹⁴ Weaver, 192f.

¹⁵ Tertullian, *Homily on Baptism* (London: SPCK 1964).

¹⁶ Weaver points out that this was a pivotal issue in the Pelagian controversy. If the Pelagians were correct in their denial of original sin, then it was unclear why infants would need to be baptized. Augustine saw this as a threat to the creedal affirmation of "one baptism for the remission of sins." Augustine cited Romans 5:12 as well as PS 51:5, Job 14:4, 5 Lxx, Jn 3:5, and Eph 2:3 as scriptural sources for the position that unbaptized infants risked eternal damnation. Weaver lists (p. 202) Augustine's defense of his reading of Romans 5:12 as referring to original sin inherited from Adam in *Sermons* 244:15, *Against Julian* 6:75, *Unfinished Work Against Julian* 2:48-55, *Enchiridion* 45:47, *On Nature and Grace* 48, and *Letters* 157:10 and 176:2. Furthermore, Augustine's position may have been influenced by his neo-Platonic views on the pre-existence of the soul. See Robert J. O'Connell, *St. Augustine's Confessions: The Odyssey of the Soul* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989), esp. 41-45.

¹⁷ Weaver, 193.

Clement of Alexandria is a notable influence on the development of a theology of sin in Eastern Christianity for a number of reasons. Clement, like most of the Greek fathers, presupposed a distinction between the concepts of “image” and “likeness” in the Genesis account of the creation of humankind.¹⁸ Though there is no uniform teaching on this issue within the Eastern Orthodox tradition, there is a tendency to view the image (*eikon*) of God in human beings as essential characteristics ingrained in human nature—characteristics such as freedom, rationality, and communion—while the likeness (*homoiosis*) of humans to God is understood in more dynamic terms, having to do with our ability to receive divine grace and thereby manifest and actualize the potential beauty inherent in our nature.¹⁹ Clement, along with Irenaeus, Origen, and St. Maximus Confessor, taught that even though the image of God in human beings might be obscured by sin, it could never be eradicated since the image has to do with our essential nature. The likeness, on the other hand, our ability to conform to the life of communion and love manifested by the Trinity, can be obliterated through our choice to turn away from God.²⁰

The most influential figure in the theological development of the doctrine of original sin, aside from Augustine, is unquestionably Pelagius. Pier Franco Beatrice has pointed out that the debate that arose between the two camps in the fifth century, Pelagians on the one hand and Augustinians on the other, had a long history and that the

¹⁸ Ibid., 194.

¹⁹ Kallistos Ware, “‘In the Image and Likeness’: The Uniqueness of the Human Person,” in *Personhood: Orthodox Christianity and the Connection Between Body, Mind, and Soul*, ed. John T. Chirban (London: Bergin & Garvey, 1996), 1-16. Ware stresses the fact that the distinction is not a doctrine in the Eastern Orthodox tradition but that its emphasis in the theology of several important patristic authors indicates a certain uniform view on human nature and how that nature is ultimately affected by sinfulness. The primary point here is that the Eastern tradition has always resisted the notion that human nature is entirely corrupted by the effects of sin and that the distinction between the *eikon* and the *homoiosis* is an indication of this trend.

²⁰ Ibid., 9.

two positions had already been carved out well in advance of the defense given to them by Pelagius and Augustine.²¹ Much of the debate came down to the issue of infant baptism and how the Church's understanding of the efficacy of the sacrament reflected on the competing views on the transmission of sins. Pelagius argued that humankind contained within itself a natural sanctity (*bonum naturae*). Pelagius, along with later advocates of the position that bore his name, such as Caelestius, based his arguments on an Aristotelian anthropology which emphasized the free choice of human beings.²² Human beings are born innocent and potentially good but it is only through the development of a *hexis*, the habitual doing of good or evil actions, that the potential nature becomes fully actualized. Pelagius developed a remarkably astute and nuanced psychology of sin which he saw as a corrective to the negative appraisal of human nature given in the Augustinian camp. Furthermore, the metaphysical distinction between substance and accidents led Pelagians to believe that there was no way to metaphysically argue that sin could be transmitted from parents to their offspring. Given the fact that God creates all substances, and everything God creates is good, sin and evil must be an accident and accidents cannot pass from one substance to another.²³

An essential element of Augustine's position on sin was centered on the idea that there are two ways in which we can understand human nature. Beatrice writes: "On the one hand, it can indicate the nature of man as he was originally created, i.e. blameless.

²¹ Pier Franco Beatrice, *The Transmission of Sin*, trans. Adam Kamesar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 15-38.

²² *Ibid.*, 25-35.

²³ *Ibid.*, 33. Julian of Eclanum was a primary architect of this line of argument, as cited by Marius Mercator in *Commonitorium adv. haeresim Pelagii et Caelestii* 13. See *Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum*, ed. Eduard Schwartz et al. (Berlin and Leipzig: de Gruyter, 1914-, I/5), 13. Pelagius gives the argument in *De natura*, cited by Augustine in *De natura et gratia* 19:21 (*Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, First Series*, Vol. 5, accessed on New Advent on 8/25/2015, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1503.htm>).

This is the proper meaning of the term. On the other hand, *natura* can indicate the condition in which we are all born, mortal and subject to ignorance and to the flesh. And this condition is the result of the punishment that the first man received when he was sentenced for his transgression.”²⁴ This was Augustine’s attempt at carving out a position that evaded the heretical *tradux peccati* of the Manicheans while emphasizing the corrupt nature inherited via Adam’s sin. God punishes Adam for his transgression and this punishment enters into all of mankind and not just Adam individually. This punishment consists of concupiscence, ignorance, and death.²⁵ While the Pelagians saw the sin of Adam as a particular event which had immense repercussions for human beings Augustine saw it as an ongoing condition.²⁶ For this reason, Augustine holds that it is not only death which is transmitted to us via Adam’s sin but also the guilt. Daniel Haynes, in a comparative study of Augustine and Maximus the Confessor, claims that the transmittal of guilt was necessary, in Augustine’s eyes, to defend key tenets of the Catholic faith: “The first matter is that by not affirming original sin, and asserting free-will, you deny the need for a savior since you earn grace through merits; the second worry is that the justice of God is vindicated. If humanity only accepted the punishment of sin without also the commitment of the act that deserves such death, God would seem unjust to allow countless children to die.”²⁷

²⁴ Beatrice, 38. For Augustine’s argument, see *De libero arbitrio* 3.19.54 (*On Free Choice of the Will*, transl Thomas Williams (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1993)).

²⁵ Beatrice. 43. *De libero arbitrio*, 3.18.52.

²⁶ Allan Fitzgerald and John C. Cavadini, ed., *Augustine Through the Ages* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 47.

²⁷ Daniel Haynes, “The Transgression of Adam and Christ the New Adam: St. Augustine and St. Maximus the Confessor on the Doctrine of Original Sin,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (2011): 310.

Augustine interpreted the effects of sin in both existential and ontological ways. Wiley Tatha notes that Augustine saw the immediate effects of Adam's sin upon himself, and all of humankind, as "(1) *death*, loss of the gift of immortality; (2) *ignorance*, loss of the knowledge and intimacy with God; and (3) *difficulty*, loss of the ability to accomplish the good one wills."²⁸ Among the most sustained debates between the Augustinian and Pelagian camps was the third effect, that of the inability to accomplish good. Pelagius saw the effects of sin as hindering our ability to do good but not in such a way that overcoming sin is a metaphysical impossibility. Augustine, on the other hand, saw the inheritance of Adam's sin in terms of our inability *not to sin*.²⁹ There may have been existential reasons for Augustine's formulation of the doctrine of original sin. Augustine saw his inability to accomplish the will of God in his own life as indicative of the human condition.³⁰

The ontological dimension of Augustine's teaching was largely derived from Ambrose's reading of Romans 5:12, a reading which was, as noted earlier, largely determined by a faulty translation from the Greek to Latin: "Augustine conceived of all humankind as in Adam: When Adam sinned, all sinned."³¹ John Rist notes that Augustine viewed the inheritance of sin quite literally, as if sin were a genetic disease spread

²⁸ Tatha Wiley, *Original Sin: Origins, Developments, Contemporary Meanings* (New York: Paulist Press, 2002), 63. See esp. Augustine's *De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptism parvulorum*, 1.9-10 (*Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, First Series*, Vol. 5, accessed on New Advent on 8/25/2015, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/15011.htm>).

²⁹ Wiley, 69. This is primarily due to reason being clouded in the human being. See *De Perfectionis Justitiae Hominis*, ii, 3 and *De gratia et libero arbitrio ad Valentinum* XX, 41 and XIII, 40 (*Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, First Series*, Vol. 5, accessed on New Advent on 8/26/2015, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1504.htm> and <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1510.htm>).

³⁰ See James J. O'Donnell, *Augustine: A New Biography* (New York: Ecco, 2005).

³¹ Wiley, 65. *De Nuptiis et Concupiscentia* 2.15. See also *De Nupt.* 1.45.40; 2.5.15 and *Contra Jul.* 1.3.10; 1.4.11, etc. (*Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, First Series*, Vol. 5, accessed on New Advent on 8/26/2015, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/15072.htm>).

through sexual procreation: “Adam’s tainted seed is thus in a sense the ‘nature’ of every man, and every man who generates by sexual means thus produces more tainted offspring. The seed is not merely the bearer of weakness and potentiality of sin; it is also the bearer of actual sin. All seed is Adam; hence all those who grow from seed are Adams, and thus guilty of the original sin of Adam.”³²

The writings of John Chrysostom, one of the most influential figures in the development of Eastern Orthodox thought and a towering figure in the Eastern tradition, offer a striking alternative to the view on sin offered by Augustine and the later Latin tradition. Beatrice points out that Chrysostom found the notion of sin as inherited through physical conception/concupiscence senseless.³³ Chrysostom, like all those who entered into the doctrinal debate on sin, saw the effects of the Fall as having consequences for the entire human race.³⁴ The primary consequence was death, understood either as punishment by God or as a release from the slavery of sin, a doorway towards reunion with God in and through the sacrifice of Christ. Other consequences included “concupiscence, passion, sadness, and the other frailties that cause us to be submerged in the abyss of sin,” though, as Beatrice points out, these are not sins in themselves, according to Chrysostom: “Only when they are not held in check and are in excess do they cause sin.”³⁵

³² John M. Rist, “Augustine on Free Will and Predestination,” in *Doctrines of Human Nature, Sin, and Salvation*, ed. Everett Ferguson et al. (New York: Routledge, 1993), 431.

³³ Beatrice, 159.

³⁴ *Ep. ad Olympias*, 10.3, *Sources chrétiennes*, 13 bis, 248; *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First series*, accessed on New Advent on 8/26/2015, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1916.htm>.

³⁵ Beatrice, 160. *Hom. In Ep. ad Rom.* 13.1 (*Patrologia Graeca* 60.508-509; *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First series*, Vol.11, accessed on New Advent on 8/26/2015, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/210213.htm>).

Beatrice points out that Chrysostom clearly understood these consequences for the human race as a change in our existential condition, i.e., our proclivity towards despondency, pride, and the other major causes of sinful and destructive behavior. Yet these conditions are not, in and of themselves, sinful.

According to Chrysostom, there is a clear-cut distinction between the sin of Adam and the penalties of that sin that were suffered by all of humanity. In no way is it possible, in such a situation, to confuse the penal consequences or punishment of the sin with the sin itself. The neutral evaluation of concupiscence distances the position of Chrysostom in a decisive fashion from that of Augustine, and moves it discernibly closer to the Pelagian position, notably that of Julian of Eclanum.³⁶

Chrysostom also held to a position on infant baptism akin to the one held by Pelagian authors. The grace bestowed in baptism is not to wipe out any guilt (which only becomes manifest through personal, willful sinful behavior later in life) but rather to bestow “adoption and elevation” upon the infants.³⁷

Augustine was limited by faulty translations of Chrysostom but scholars also indicate that he was at pains to force Chrysostom’s words to serve his theological purpose.³⁸ Beatrice points out that Augustine had similarly forced interpretations of the testimony of other Greek fathers on sin: “The passages of Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Irenaeus say nothing other than that through the fault of Adam, humanity was driven

³⁶ Beatrice, 160.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 164. See Chrysostom’s *Hom. ad Neophytos* 3.6 (*Sources chrétiennes*, Éditions du Cerf, Paris: 1970, 50 bis. 154;). For a differing viewpoint on Chrysostom’s teachings on infant baptisms, see Harkins, P.W., “Chrysostom’s *Sermon ad Neophytos*,” *Studia Patristica*, vol. 10 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1970), 112-17.

³⁸ See E.C. Best, *An Historical Study of the Exegesis of Colossians 2,14* (Rome: 1956), 73-74, 120-121.

from paradise and still suffers the painful consequences of his transgression of old. We pay the price of his disobedience with physical death and moral frailty.”³⁹

Augustine not only attempted to use the writings of the Greek fathers to support his theological claims, he also attempted to influence the theological debates taking place in the Christian East, perhaps even attempting to commission a translation into Greek of his works.⁴⁰ These attempts were largely unsuccessful as Augustine’s theological contributions remained largely unknown in the Christian East up until the thirteenth century when *De Trinitate* was finally translated into Greek.⁴¹ Eastern Orthodox engagement with Augustine following the thirteenth century has tended to focus on two primary ways in which Augustine’s theology, and the theological traditions of Roman Catholicism and Protestant Christianity which he so heavily influenced, deviate from Orthodox theology. These two elements are: 1) The understanding of original sin and the relationship between free will and grace, and 2) understanding knowledge of God as an intellectual activity.⁴²

With regards to the differing views on sin, the difference in opinion between Augustine’s position and that of the Christian East centers on the possibility of human

³⁹ Beatrice, 166-167.

⁴⁰ Josef Lössl, “Augustine in Byzantium,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 51 (2000): 267-73.

⁴¹ George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou, “Augustine and the Orthodox: ‘The West’ in the East,” in *Orthodox Readings of Augustine*, ed. Demacopoulos and Papanikolaou (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2008), 11-40.

⁴² John Romanides’ doctoral dissertation *The Ancestral Sin*, trans. G. Gabriel, Ridgewood (NJ: Zephyr Publishing, 1998) was among the first systematic analyses of how Augustine’s theology of original sin deviates from the Greek patristic understanding of sin. Vladimir Lossky and Christos Yannaras are two prominent examples who see Augustine’s theology as a diametrical opposite to the apophatism inherent in Eastern Orthodox thought. For Lossky see *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1976) and for Yannaras see *Elements of Faith: An Introduction to Orthodox Theology*, trans. K. Schram (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991).

involvement in the process of salvation, or in what the Eastern writers commonly call *theosis* or deification:

The eastern fathers of the late fourth century believed that the fall brought corruption to humanity and inaugurated a cycle of death, but they did not believe (as Augustine, at the end of his life, had) that the post-lapsarian human condition prevented the possibility of human participation in the process of salvation. For example, the ascetically inclined Cappadocians consistently taught that salvation required acts of almsgiving, fasting, and worship. Through ascetic discipline and active participation in the sacramental life of the Church, Christians united their own efforts to God's grace. The Augustinian/Pelagian dichotomy between grace and free will was simply not part of the Cappadocians' theological imagination. The same was also true of Augustine's teaching on predestination, which even the western Church did not accept at the pivotal Second Council of Orange in 529.⁴³

Augustine's view, characterized by his pessimism towards the human condition, saw all human action as tainted by sinfulness and that goodness could be attributed to God's grace alone, which itself transcends the natural order. McGuckin writes:

After Augustine, many Latin church leaders tended to presume that sin was almost a natural proclivity of human beings and that the works of grace were *miraculous* in contrast. Eastern Christianity never adopted such a widespread pessimism about the extent and spread of sin. Origen and Athanasius, in the Alexandrian tradition, both argued strongly that even though humanity had fallen, the potentiality for divine vision remained intact within the innermost soul, and the power of the resurrection of Christ would shine through in abundance if the disciple gave obedience with generosity of heart.⁴⁴

This difference in emphasis has led some Eastern Orthodox theologians to understand the Orthodox tradition as a kind of spiritual psychotherapy. John S.

⁴³ Demacopoulos and Papanikolaou, 31-32.

⁴⁴ John McGuckin, "Sin," in *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology*, 311.

Romanides in his *Patristic Theology* writes that “Orthodoxy is a therapeutic course of treatment that heals the human personality.”⁴⁵ Romanides, as well as Orthodox authors such as Ware, Lossky, and Alfeyev, all see God’s grace as an essential component in human salvation but also emphasize patristic writings on the participation of the human being through free choice in this process.⁴⁶ These neo-patristic writers understand the effects of sin primarily in terms of a disordered mind, using the ancient Greek terminology of *dianoia* and *nous*. Human capacity for analytic, systematic thinking (*dianoesis*) as well as our capacity for an immediate apprehension of spiritual realities (*noesis*) become disordered in the fall as human beings lose control of their emotions and thought patterns (*logismoi*).⁴⁷ The purpose of the spiritual life is understood as a therapeutic process whereby the *logismoi* are reoriented and the human self can reacquire the correct relationship to God. If the *logismoi* are not controlled through spiritual practice they have the potential to effectively create a “false” self, dominated by disordered behavior, which must be eradicated so the true self of the person can shine forth, a self which can only arise in and through our relationship with God. Many of the patristic writers, and the neo-patristic theologians in the modern Orthodox East, associate

⁴⁵ John S. Romanides, *Patristic Theology* (Dalles, OR: Uncut Mountain Press, 2008), 32.

⁴⁶ See Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995). Hilarion Alfeyev, *The Mystery of Faith* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 2002), esp. 67-72 and 189-99.

⁴⁷ The literature on the Greek patristic understanding of the corruptive effects of sin is immense. For an overview of one of the first systematic (4th c.) accounts of this analysis see Evagrius Ponticus’ *The Praktikos & Chapters on Prayer*, trans. John E. Bamberger (Kalamazoo MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981). Also Jeremy Driscoll, *Steps to Spiritual Perfection: Studies on Spiritual Progress in Evagrius Ponticus* (New York: The Newman Press, 2005). An overview of the patristic understanding can be found in Kyriacos C. Markides, *The Mountain of Silence* (New York: Doubleday, 2001). Ware has a body of literature on the effects of the *logismoi* on the *nous*. See his *The Inner Kingdom, Volume 1 of the collected Works* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2000).

this “true” self with the biblical imagery of the “heart,” understood as the psychosomatic center of the human person.⁴⁸

2.2 - Kierkegaard and Augustine

Søren Kierkegaard’s philosophy of sin, especially in the pseudonymous works *The Sickness Unto Death* and *The Concept of Anxiety*, shows a remarkable ability to traverse the gap between the theological positions of Western Augustinianism and the Orthodox East. Kierkegaard shares the view of the Reformation theologians, influenced as they were by Augustine, that grace, appropriated in and through faith, is what first and foremost allows human beings to overcome despair. Yet he also managed to safeguard the Eastern emphasis on human involvement in the process of salvation by understanding the self as a process, the *telos* of which is the ability to existentially appropriate faith. He thus manages to deny predestination while nonetheless holding true to many of the primary theological principles of both Augustine and Martin Luther. In addition to this, Kierkegaard’s writings on despair as a misrelation of the self to itself in *The Sickness Unto Death* shares many of the same fundamental concerns and analyses as the spiritual anthropology of the Greek patristic tradition.

The extent to which Kierkegaard studied Augustine’s theology is a cause for debate among scholars.⁴⁹ Kierkegaard’s only real engagement with Augustine in the

⁴⁸ The most comprehensive collection of patristic writings on these issues is found in the *Philokalia*, a collection of Eastern Orthodox writings on prayer. See G.E.H. Palmer, Phillip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, ed., *The Philokalia volumes 1-4* (London: Faber and Faber, 1983). For an excellent introduction to the notion of the “true self” and the biblical imagery of the “heart” in Eastern Orthodox writings, see Kallistos Ware, “How Do we Enter the Heart,” in *Paths to the Heart: Sufism and the Christian East*, ed. James S. Cutsinger (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2002), 2-23.

⁴⁹ The primary source on Kierkegaard’s relation to Augustine is Lee C. Barrett’s recent *Eros and Self Emptying: The Intersection of Augustine and Kierkegaard* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013). Barrett points out that scholarship on Augustine and

pseudonymous works is in Haufniensis' *The Concept of Anxiety*. Augustine is mentioned peripherally in other works, including *The Concept of Irony* and *Stages on Life's Way*.⁵⁰ Kierkegaard's primary engagement with Augustine outside of *The Concept of Anxiety* appears in his journals and papers.⁵¹ Kierkegaard's view of Augustine is in many ways similar to his complicated reception of Luther (of which I will have more to say in a moment). Kierkegaard both admires and reprimands Augustine.⁵² A telling passage from the journals is when Kierkegaard offers an ironic praise for Augustine having hit upon the notion of election by grace since the idea that human beings might be in some part responsible for their eternal salvation "is so superhumanly heavy that it will kill a man even more surely than a massive sunstroke (*Solstik*)."⁵³ A Scandinavian writer using the image of a sunstroke is particularly delightful, especially in light of the searing mockery of not only Augustine but also Luther which follows this passage. Kierkegaard accuses both Augustine and Luther of having been unable to face the despair (*Anfættung*) of the religious life and that because of their panic they develop a theology of *sola gratia*, not

Kierkegaard tends to fall into two camps, those who see them as "fellow travelers" and those who see them as philosophical rivals. Mark C. Taylor's *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship: A Study of Time and the Self* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975) argues that Kierkegaard advocated for a semi-Pelagian position and was directly opposed to an Augustinian framework. Charles Taylor is among the most prominent philosophers who see Augustine and Kierkegaard as allies. See his *The Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 1989). See also the divergent views of George Pattison and Jørgen Pedersen. Pattison argues that Kierkegaard's study of Augustine was minimal while Pedersen sees a great deal of Kierkegaard's thought as explicitly "Augustinian": George Pattison, *Kierkegaard, Religion and the Nineteenth Century Crisis of Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 47; Jørgen Pedersen, "Augustine and Augustinianism," in *Kierkegaard and Great Traditions (Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana, Vol. 6)*, ed. Niels Thulstrup and Maria Mikulova Thulstrup (C.A. Reitzel, Copenhagen: 1981), 54-97.

⁵⁰ Robert Puchniak, "Augustine: Kierkegaard's Tempered Admiration of Augustine," in *Kierkegaard and the Patristic and Medieval Traditions (Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources, Vol. 4)*, ed. Jon Stewart (Burlington and Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), 12. See also *CI*, 173; *SLW*, 147.

⁵¹ Puchniak, 13.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 13-14.

⁵³ *JP* 3, 2551 / *XI*¹ A 297. Interestingly, Puchniak fails to pick up on the irony in the passage and believes it to be an example of Kierkegaard's praise for Augustine. See Puchniak, 14. Barrett correctly reads the passage and sees it as a clear condemnation of both Augustine and Luther. See Barrett, 64.

because such a philosophy corresponds to the truth but because the alternative simply seems untenable. Kierkegaard accuses Luther of serving humanity as opposed to Christ and that he failed to make his true “sovereign” known.⁵⁴ It is obvious that Kierkegaard does not view the notion of election by grace favorably and that he sees both Augustine and Luther as having failed to accurately represent the Christian life.

Even though Kierkegaard wrote favorably of Augustine’s passionate engagement with Christianity, he increasingly began to view Augustine as representative of an objective and systematic approach to faith, an approach which Kierkegaard unfavorably compares to a “true philosopher” such as Socrates.⁵⁵ It is important to note that Augustine’s motto of “faith seeking reason” was an important inspiration for speculative theologians such as Martensen who increasingly became the focal point of Kierkegaard’s philosophical condemnation and wrath.⁵⁶

There has been a great deal of debate on the extent to which Augustine and Kierkegaard agree or disagree on the subject of sin. Kierkegaard has been characterized by various philosophers as being a staunch Augustinian, a semi-Pelagian, or an Arminian.⁵⁷ Kierkegaard studied the Pelagian controversy and Augustine’s views during his theological training. During this time Kierkegaard was influenced in his reading of

⁵⁴ Ibid. Kierkegaard’s critique of Augustine and Luther bears a striking resemblance to Dostoyevsky’s critique of Roman Catholicism in “The Grand Inquisitor” chapter of *The Brothers Karamazov*.

⁵⁵ See Barrett, 61; *JP* 4, 4299 / XI A 371.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ See Niels Thulstrup, “Adam and Original Sin,” in *Theological Concepts in Kierkegaard, Bibliotheca Kierkegardiana, Vol. 5*, ed. Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mululová (CA: Reitzels Boghandel, Copenhagen: 1980), 122-156; A.C. Cochrane, *The Existentialists and God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956); Gregor Malantschuk, “Kierkegaard’s Dialectical Method,” in *Soren Kierkegaard: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers*, ed. Daniel Conway (London: Routledge, 2002), 140-41; Timothy Jackson, “Arminian Edification: Kierkegaard on Grace and Free Will,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. Alastair Hannay and Gordon Marino (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 235-56.

Augustine by interpretations offered in the seminary textbooks of the day as well as H.N. Clausen's lectures on Augustine.⁵⁸ According to Kierkegaard's notebooks, Clausen argued that a middle ground between Pelagius and Augustine was the only tenable theological solution to the problem of grace and free-will. Moreover, Clausen was extremely dissatisfied with the contradictory view in Augustine's teachings that sin was both inherited, on the one hand, and involved guilt and merited our punishment, on the other.⁵⁹ Kierkegaard was also influenced by the lectures of Philipp Marheineke and the works of Julius Muller.⁶⁰ Both thinkers emphasized the individual and inward nature of sin. They also emphasized the Augustinian focus on sin and guilt as characteristics of the individual as such and not just specific acts performed by the individual person. Both Marheineke and Muller saw Augustine's attempt to explain exactly how this sinfulness is inherited as largely unsuccessful and confused.⁶¹

Kierkegaard's primary aim, via the voice of Vigilius Haufniensis in *The Concept of Anxiety*, is to give an inward, existentially focused account of sin. Kierkegaard wants to maintain the Augustinian (and Lutheran) focus on the corruption and guilt that infuses human life while offering an alternative to the notion that this corruptibility and guilt should primarily be accounted for through inheritance and concupiscence. For Kierkegaard, the relationship of the existing individual to Adam is not important. Rather, the inward categories of anxiety and despair account for how sin arises in human life.

⁵⁸ See Barrett, 218-219. The textbooks were Hase's *Huterus redivivus oder Dogmatik der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 4th ed. (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Hartel, 1839); Bretschneider's *Handbuch der Dogmatik der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, vols. 1-2, 3rd ed., Johann Ambrosius Barth (Leipzig: 1828); and Hahn's *Lehrbuch des christlichen Glaubens* (Leipzig: Friedrich Christian Wilhelm Vogel, 1828).

⁵⁹ See Barrett, 219. For Kierkegaard's notes see *KJN* 3, 31, *KJN* 3, 29 and *KJN* 3, 30.

⁶⁰ Barrett, 222-3. Julius Muller, *Die christliche Lehre von der Sunde*, 3rd ed. 2 vols. (Breslau: Josef Max, 1839 and 1849).

⁶¹ Barrett., 223.

Haufniensis' aim is to force the reader to engage his or her own anxiety and sinfulness with *pathos*.

Before analyzing Kierkegaard's account of sin in *The Concept of Anxiety* and *The Sickness Unto Death*—an account which stays remarkably true to the main theological considerations of Augustine while also echoing many of the main theological considerations of the Christian East—I will offer a brief overview of Luther's appropriation of Augustine's views on sin and examine how commentators on Luther shaped Kierkegaard's interpretation of the Reformer.

2.3 - Luther's Understanding of Original Sin

It is first of all worth noting that the notion of the *Bondage of the Will* is derived from Augustine, and that Luther may have used the title to identify his position with Augustine's.⁶² Luther maintains that original sin is inherited by birth and, due to its effects, we are destined to sin and damnation.⁶³ All human beings are sinners due to the effects of Adam's sin.⁶⁴ Furthermore, all human beings are completely and utterly sinful and depraved, even those whom some people would call "saints."⁶⁵ The most debilitating effect of sin is the fact that human beings are unaware of their own sinfulness, which is so epistemologically harmful that we cannot even discern the most basic truths of scripture which otherwise might make us cognizant of our damaged state.⁶⁶ Due to the immense

⁶² Bernard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 163. Augustine uses the phrase *De servo arbitrio*, which Luther discusses at P&J 142; WA 18:665.10-11; (WA: *Weimarer Ausgabe*; See *D. Martin Luthers Werke: kritische Gesamtausgabe* 120 vols. (Weimar: 1883-2009); P&J: *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. J.I. Packer & O.R. Johnston (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 1959)).

⁶³ P&J 297-298; WA 18:773.17-18.

⁶⁴ P&J 202; WA 18:708.23-24.

⁶⁵ P&J 114; WA 18:644.4-11.

⁶⁶ P&J 286-287; WA 18:766.10-12.

effects of our condition, human beings are effectively ruled by Satan. Even after baptism and the acquisition of the Holy Spirit, the will remains utterly corrupt and tends towards evil and depravity.⁶⁷ In the “Smalcald Articles” Luther writes: “Repentance teaches us to recognize sin: namely, that we are all lost, neither hide nor hair of us is good, and we must become absolutely new and different people.”⁶⁸

This utterly helpless and completely corrupted state that human beings find themselves in is inherited through the bloodline of Adam:

Where did original sin come from? The simple answer is from Adam, ‘By the single offence of the one man, Adam, we all lie under sin and condemnation.’ But that single offence now belongs to every human being, for, Luther inquires, ‘who could be condemned for another’s offence, especially in the sight of God?’ This does not mean, however, that each of us has committed this sin. No, we are born with it, ‘His offence becomes ours; not by imitation nor by any act on our part (for then it would not be the single offence of Adam, since we should have committed it, not he) but it becomes ours by birth.’⁶⁹

Luther never explains exactly how this transmission takes place or the exact nature of this metaphysical condition yet he nonetheless remains adamant that every single faculty of the human person, including our will, is inherently and absolutely corrupt. This is why Luther makes the famous analogy between God fashioning new human beings and a carpenter who is forced to use warped wood.⁷⁰ God remains good, as

⁶⁷ See Cameron A. MacKenzie, “The Origins and Consequences of Original Sin in Luther’s *Bondage of the Will*,” *Concordia Journal* 31, no. 4 (2005): 384-97. On the dominance of Satan in the human makeup see especially 388-90.

⁶⁸ Martin Luther, *Basic Theological Writings 3rd edition*, ed. William R. Russell (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 355-56.

⁶⁹ MacKenzie, 390-391. The quotations from Luther are from P&J 297-298, WA 18:773.8-16. See MacKenzie 391, n. 27.

⁷⁰ P&J 203, WA 18.708.31-34

do all of his intentions and works, yet he is nonetheless stuck with the miserably corrupt raw material at hand, namely the inextricably contaminated nature of human beings.

Luther, much like Augustine, was deeply influenced by existential concerns in developing a theological model of original sin. Luther's spiritual life and his relationship to God was in many ways dominated by what he called *Anfechtung*, a deep-rooted despair and alienation that seemingly formed the background of all his activities and beliefs.⁷¹ This led Luther to develop an alternative model to the more humanistic/Aristotelian account formulated by the scholastics.⁷² Luther's account is primarily centered on the need for human beings to abandon any belief in the efficacy of their own will or works in the process of salvation and spiritual healing. In a letter to a young monk in 1516 Luther proclaims: "Despair of yourself and your own works."⁷³ Luther's development of the doctrine of *sola fides* took shape between 1512 and 1518 and resulted from his deep existential struggle with himself. Luther, much like Augustine, despaired of his inability to follow God's will in his own life, falling into bouts of severe depression and self-mortification.⁷⁴ Luther's theological development provided an escape from this existential hell. In his biography of Luther, John M. Todd writes:

⁷¹ See, for example, the introduction to Luther's "The Freedom of a Christian" by Mark D. Tranvik, (Fortress Press, Minneapolis: 2008), 11-12: "[Luther's] inability to achieve salvation resulted in an intense trial known by the German word *Anfechtung*. There is no precise English equivalent, but *Anfechtung* can be described as an experience of doubt and despair that pierces the very soul—far more than a case of 'the blues.' *Anfechtung* points to a profound sense of being lost, alienated, and out of control."

⁷² In his treatise on the influence of the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas on Luther, Karl-Heinz Zur Mühlen writes: "[Luther's approach] contradicts Aristotle and the way he is taken up in the Scholastic doctrine of grace, according to which righteousness is realized in good works with the help of sanctifying grace." Karl-Heinz Zur Mühlen, "The Thought of Thomas Aquinas in the Theology of Martin Luther," in *Aquinas as Authority*, ed. Paul van Geest, Harm Goris and Carlo Leget (Utrecht: Publication of the Thomas Instituut te Utrecht, 2002), 72.

⁷³ Quoted in John M. Todd, *Luther: A Life* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 73.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 64-80.

Semper peccator, semper justus. Man was always a sinner, but always justified—if he only turned to Christ. It was the way of *sola fides*, faith alone, which he found through *Scriptura sola*, only through the words of Scripture, and not through Canon Law or conventions. *Sola gratia*, grace alone, and not any action of man’s part, enabled him to be a Christian, and to do the good works which flowed freely and strongly from a faithful Christian. This now provided the substance, the heart, of all Luther’s lecturing and preaching. It provided a solution to the problem of free will and grace which had bothered theologians for centuries.⁷⁵

The result of Luther’s own existential despair was therefore a theological account of human sinfulness which sees human beings as utterly and absolutely helpless to affect their own salvation, tossed to and fro in a continual cosmic battle between Satan and God, the two “riders” of the human soul.⁷⁶ The only way “out” is through the “alien righteousness” of Christ imparted upon the believer which frees him or her from their own corrupt faculties: “This freedom does not lead us to live lazy and wicked lives but makes the law and works unnecessary for righteousness and salvation.”⁷⁷ According to Luther, the Christian is free exactly because he or she has renounced the freedom of their own will for the freedom given by Christ. The believer is in no way, shape, or form righteous but is rather righteous only in and through Christ, her sinfulness covered with the “cloak” of Christ’s righteousness.

Luther developed a spiritual anthropology that sees a clear split in the human person between the “inward” (soul/spirit) and “outer” (body/works) dimensions of the human being. The Christian path towards salvation only concerns the inner dimension, reducing all outward manifestations of faith to hypocrisy:

⁷⁵ Ibid., 79.

⁷⁶ “If God rides, it wills and goes where God wills... If Satan rides, it wills and goes where Satan wills. Nor may it choose to which rider it will run or which it will seek; but the riders themselves fight to decide who shall have and hold it.” P&J 104, WA 18:635.17-22.

⁷⁷ Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, 60.

It does not help the soul if the body wears the sacred robe of a priest or visits holy places or performs sacred duties or prays, fasts, and refrains from certain types of foods. The soul receives no help from any work connected with the body. Such activity does not lead to freedom and righteousness for the soul. The works just mentioned could have been done by any wicked person and produce nothing but hypocrites.⁷⁸

2.4 - Kierkegaard's Reading of Luther

Kierkegaard's reception of Luther was immensely influenced by the theological milieu of 19th century Copenhagen, especially through Clausen's influence. "As was the case at many Lutheran theology faculties during the early nineteenth century, few of Luther's own writings were read. Clausen did, however, hold frequent lectures on the Augsburg Confession and SK probably attended these during 1834."⁷⁹ Kierkegaard must also have been influenced by the aforementioned textbooks of the day by Bretschneider and von Hase.

There is considerable scholarly debate regarding the extent to which Luther directly influenced Kierkegaard. Thulstrup maintains that Luther had no influence on Kierkegaard's developing philosophy of subjectivity.⁸⁰ Podmore sees Luther's influence as primarily consisting of providing the existential impetus for thinking of the self's relationship to God in and through the experience of *Anfechtung*.⁸¹ Jaroslav Pelikan contends that Kierkegaard and Luther were engaged in the exact same philosophical and

⁷⁸ Ibid., 52.

⁷⁹ Craig Quentin Hinkson, *Kierkegaard's Theology: Cross and Grace, The Lutheran and Idealist Traditions in His Thought, Vols. 1 and 2*, Dissertation submitted to The Faculty of the Divinity School, Chicago University, (Chicago, IL: 1993), pp. 2-3. See also Leif Grane, "Det teologiske Fakultet 1830-1925," in *Det teologiske Fakultet*, ed. Leif Grane, vol. 5 of *Københavns Universitet 1479-1979*, ed. Svend Ellehoj et al. (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gads Forlag 1980), 330.

⁸⁰ Quoted in Thomas, J. Heywood, *Subjectivity and Paradox* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957), 48.

⁸¹ Simon D. Podmore, *Kierkegaard and the Self Before God: Anatomy of the Abyss* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011), 122-23.

theological pursuit, namely to offer an existential alternative to the systematic tendencies in the cultures in which they wrote.⁸² Kierkegaard did not study Luther's own writings until relatively late, in 1847, and then mostly focused on Luther's sermons.⁸³

Ernest B. Koenker offers an in-depth reading of Kierkegaard's relationship to Luther, highlighting both the positive and negative responses Kierkegaard had to Luther's theology. The positive reactions are few and far between and located mostly in the pseudonymous works, while the journals contain a great many entries that espouse negative views of Luther, especially later on in Kierkegaard's life, as he moved further away from Lutheran orthodoxy.⁸⁴ Positive responses to Luther focus on Lutheranism as being a "corrective" to the Christendom of the time (Roman Catholicism).⁸⁵ Kierkegaard also praised Luther's focus on the gospels.⁸⁶ Luther is also praised for his emphasis on Christian freedom, the focus on authority as arising from faith (as opposed to institutional hierarchy), the way Luther's *Angst* influenced his theology, and the focus on "inwardness" in the sermons.⁸⁷

Kierkegaard's criticisms of Luther arise from the way in which Luther failed to really carry through on his revolutionary break with Roman Catholicism and how the

⁸² Jaroslav Pelikan, *From Luther to Kierkegaard: A Study in the History of Theology* (Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, Saint Louis, 1963), 113-20.

⁸³ Hermann Diem, *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Existence*, trans. Harold Knight (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1959), 159.

⁸⁴ Ernest B. Koenker, "Soren Kierkegaard on Luther," in *Interpreters of Luther*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 231-52; On Luther's developing attitude towards Luther, see Hinkson, 177-226. See e.g. *JP* 3, 2460 / VI A 108; *JP* 3, 2467 / IX A 11; *JP* 3 2481 / X1 A 154; *JP* 3, 2482 / X¹ A 172.

⁸⁵ Koenker, 232. *JP* 3, 2521 / X³ A 217. Note that Kierkegaard also saw an inherent danger in Luther's emphasis as a corrective, due to its being made into a new norm, resulting in an increasing spiritual confusion that results in "the most refined kind of secularism and paganism." See *JP* 1, 711 / XI¹ A 28.

⁸⁶ Koenker, 233. *JP* 3, 2547 / XI¹ A 77.

⁸⁷ Koenker., 233-236. *JP* 3, 3724 / VII² B 235; *JP* 3, 3153 / X³ A 267; *JP* 2, 2140 / X³ A 672; *JP* 3, 2543 / XI² A 301. More often than not, Kierkegaard adds some slight caveat or derogatory comment even when he is praising Luther.

“corrective” (Lutheranism) falls into the same traps as the status quo which it had pitted itself against.⁸⁸ Koenker highlights Kierkegaard’s dissatisfaction with Luther’s attempts to reform Christianity as opposed to correcting, i.e., the tendency to offer a new systematic alternative as opposed to a critical, Socratic engagement with Christendom. Especially interesting in this regard is Kierkegaard’s complex view of monasticism, which he discusses in *Fear and Trembling*, *Unscientific Postscript*, and in the *Journals*.⁸⁹ Kierkegaard saw Luther’s criticism of monasticism as correct due to the overemphasis on external works and merits but that Luther went too far in his critique, overlooking the value and truth of asceticism and human endeavor in the spiritual life. Koenker writes:

When Luther broke with the monastery—and this is, significantly, Kierkegaard’s phrase—he could not clearly see the truth that lay in the falsely exaggerated monasticism he opposed. The false exaggeration obscured the actual measure of truth still present in the monastic ideal of forsaking the world. It was not the emphasis on asceticism that was at fault but the Medieval preoccupation with merits and its restriction of its ideal to the extraordinary individual. An example is Luther on marriage. Luther quite properly roused people by his marriage, but this very corrective, ‘this salt,’ was transformed into a norm.⁹⁰

Kierkegaard praised Luther for the way in which his *Angst* provided the basis for his spirituality⁹¹ but at other times he criticized Luther for not facing his *Angst* but instead turning Christianity into an anesthetic against despair. Kierkegaard maintained that the Lutheran doctrine of *sola gratia* had made Christianity too easy, a barbiturate to be

⁸⁸ Koenker, 236-241. See e.g. *JP* 1, 711 / XI¹ A 28; *JP* 2, 1901 / X⁴ A 340; *JP* 2, 1913 / X⁴ A 521.

⁸⁹ *F&T*, 125f; *CUP*, 401f; *JP* 2, 1138 / X³ A 298.

⁹⁰ Koenker, 237.

⁹¹ *JP* 3, 2544 / XI² A 303.

gobbled up by the masses.⁹² Perhaps most importantly, Kierkegaard saw the focus on inwardness in Luther's sermons as corrupt, resulting in worldliness and a lack of passion:

Luther established the highest spiritual principle—inwardness alone. This can become so dangerous that we can sink to the very lowest levels of paganism (yet the highest and the lowest are also alike), where sensuous debauchery is honored as worship. Similarly, it can come to the point in Protestantism where worldliness is honored and venerated as godliness. And that, I maintain, *cannot happen in Catholicism*.⁹³

Kierkegaard's concern here indicates that he believed that Luther's theology of sin and grace, influenced as it was by Augustine, could potentially lead to a resignation quite different from the resignation which must precede faith (as outlined by de Silentio in *Fear and Trembling*). If one is born a sinner, completely corrupt and guilty from the start, then why try to be good at all? Why attempt to control the passions, follow the commandments, or do good works? Even though Luther attempted to reconcile this tension in works such as *The Freedom of a Christian*, there are hints that Luther was willing to bite the bullet on this issue, to admit that the extent to which a person is a sinner is altogether irrelevant for salvation, in much the same way that good works are irrelevant. In a letter to Philip Melancthon, Luther writes: "Be a sinner and sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly. For he is victorious over sin, death, and the world. As long as we are here we have to sin. This life is not the dwelling place of righteousness but, as Peter says, we look for a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells... Pray boldly—you too are a mighty sinner."⁹⁴

⁹² Koenker, 238. *JP* 3, 2481 / X¹ A 154.

⁹³ *JP* 3, 3617 / XI² A 305. Emphasis mine.

⁹⁴ Martin Luther, "Let Your Sins Be Strong," Letter no. 99 (1. August 1521), in *Dr. Martin Luther's Saemmtliche Schriften*, vol. 15, trans. Erika Bullmann Flores, ed. Johannes Georg Walch (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1880-1910), 2585-2590.

Kierkegaard's concurrent praise and criticism of Luther reveal his goal as a thinker and writer: To continue the "corrective" work that Luther started but then failed to manifest when he began developing a new (systematic) alternative to the status quo he wished to criticize. Kierkegaard wished to become a new Luther, the true revolutionary who maintains the "salt" of Christianity against any and all attempts to water it down. To do this, Kierkegaard had to develop an existential philosophy of sin, the primary goal of which was to allow believers to face the reality of despair instead of running away from it, a flight Kierkegaard feared was the inevitable result of Augustinian and Lutheran theology on original sin.

2.5 - Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Sin

Vigilius Haufniensis' *The Concept of Anxiety* is an attempt to provide an alternative model to the standard account of sin developed in the Western Christian theological tradition. Haufniensis attempts to hold true to many of the primary considerations of both Augustine and Luther while also critiquing elements in their thinking of sin, which he sees as failing to adequately account for the psychological⁹⁵ reality of sinfulness. Beabout points out that Haufniensis views sin as a dogmatic concept that needs to be approached with passion and earnestness.⁹⁶ Because sin is not susceptible to a purely metaphysical, ethical, or systematic treatise, it must be explored via a different

⁹⁵ There is some debate as to exactly what Kierkegaard or the various pseudonymous authors mean by "psychological." Primarily Kierkegaard is talking about an examination of human experience which is not reducible to the study of human behavior (like modern psychology) but which includes an examination of the spiritual dimensions of human reality. "Spiritual anthropology" might be a good way of understanding Kierkegaard's aim. See Greg Beabout, *Freedom and its Misuses: Kierkegaard on Anxiety and Despair* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1996), 36, n. 2.

⁹⁶ Beabout, 36-38. For a discussion of the notion of "passion" (*lidenskab*) in Kierkegaard's works, especially in relation to the concept of *apatheia* in Christian spirituality, see chapter 3, pp. 119-30.

method, namely an exploration of the inner life of the human individual. But *The Concept of Anxiety* is not a dogmatic work, hence it is not primarily focused on sin but rather on the precondition of sin, namely anxiety (*angest*). In fact, Haufniensis never clearly defines what he means by “sin,” leaving that to Anti-Climacus in *The Sickness Unto Death*.

Haufniensis’ main critique of the standard Augustinian account is that Adam⁹⁷ is viewed as qualitatively different than other human beings. He is placed “fantastically outside” human experience.⁹⁸ Haufniensis offers a dialectical account that reverberates throughout all of Kierkegaard’s works, namely the tension that exists between the individual and the universal: “Man is *individuum* and as such simultaneously himself and the whole race, and in such a way that the whole race participates in the individual and the individual in the whole race.”⁹⁹ The only way to approach the issue of sin is through a dialectical engagement that achieves some kind of harmony between the realities of individuality and the universal. Traditional attempts at understanding sinfulness, according to Haufniensis, tend to either focus on Adam as outside the human race, viewing sin in an entirely abstract manner, as a reality that somehow enters into the human condition from “outside,” i.e., as something completely alien to the human experience, or they tend to emphasize an emotional inwardness, the “woe is me a sinner” model which completely misses the universal and historical characteristic of sin.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Haufniensis, throughout *The Concept of Anxiety* (hereafter *COA*), usually only refers to Adam in his discussion of sin, as opposed to both Adam and Eve. This curious trend, is, of course, reflected in a great deal of Christian literature, both dogmatic and spiritual, for reasons that fall outside the boundaries of this current discussion, most of which have undoubtedly more to do with patriarchy than any theological considerations.

⁹⁸ *COA*, 25.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 26. See especially Haufniensis’ mocking of the *Smalcald Articles*: “This feeling assumes the role of an accuser, who with an almost feminine passion and with the fanaticism of a girl in love is now

Haufniensis' focus on anxiety therefore attempts to maintain a sensitivity towards both the individual and universal dimensions of human existence. All human beings, including Adam, are in anxiety. It is an essential element of the human experience, a universal category. Yet anxiety is also inherently individual. My anxiety is different from yours.¹⁰¹ Anxiety necessarily arises out of the experience of freedom and possibility, from the lived reality of self-determination. We are simultaneously repelled and attracted to the horizon of possibilities in front of us: "Anxiety is a *sympathetic antipathy* and an *antipathetic sympathy*."¹⁰² Adam's experience of anxiety is quantitatively different from ours because he lived in innocence, in a state of "dreaming," while we live in a reality suffused with sin, temptation, suffering, and pain. Yet qualitatively speaking, Adam's experience when confronted with God's prohibition not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is the experience of every single human being when faced with the reality of possibility, of "being able."

What I would like to focus on here is Haufniensis' reading of the Genesis story as a developmental account. Adam's story is compared to the dawning of anxiety in a child. Anxiety is what makes us truly human, since only a creature that is not fully biologically determined could feel anxiety: "Man is a synthesis of the psychical and the physical; however, a synthesis is unthinkable if the two are not united in a third. This third is spirit. In innocence, man is not merely animal, for if he were at any moment of his life merely

concerned only with making sinfulness and his own participation in it more and more detestable, and in such a manner that no word can be severe enough to describe the single individual's participation in it."

¹⁰¹ Haufniensis' view of sin as belonging to the individual in inwardness bears no small resemblance to Heidegger's analysis of death as belonging "in a distinctive sense to the Being of Dasein" in section 50 of *Being & Time* (H. 250). The horizon of possibilities that gives rise to anxiety manifests itself in particular ways, according to each individual human being. My anxiety is always *mine*. At the same time, the experience of anxiety is a universal phenomenon among human beings, an essential part of the structure of human personhood.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 42.

animal, he would never become man. So spirit is present, but as immediate, as dreaming.”¹⁰³ Being simultaneously drawn towards something while also being repelled by it is what makes us spiritual creatures, capable of both the greatest good and the greatest evil. Haufniensis even associates anxiety with the inherent potential in both individuals and whole cultures “In all cultures where the childlike is preserved as the dreaming of the spirit, this anxiety is found. The more profound the anxiety, the more profound the culture. Only a prosaic stupidity maintains that this is a disorganization. Anxiety has here the same meaning as melancholy at a much later point, when freedom, having passed through the imperfect forms of its history, in the profoundest sense will come to itself.”¹⁰⁴

Haufniensis understands why Augustine, and later Luther, wanted to preserve the biblical emphasis on the fact that it was through Adam that sin entered into the world. The more that sin is seen as a break in time, as a qualitatively different dimension in human behavior, the easier it becomes to show the crushing and debilitating effects this would have on both the individual and the race. Augustine and Luther clearly believed that if human beings believed they could solve the pain and suffering we face, then they would not turn towards God, simply because they would not see any need to do so. Kierkegaard was obviously sympathetic to this view, given his excoriating critique of the modern world, post-enlightenment rationality, and any and all systematic attempts to heal despair

¹⁰³ Ibid., 43.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 43. The passage on melancholy is particularly fascinating. Kierkegaard seems to think that cultures and individuals that have a profound sense of melancholy have achieved a kind of spiritual maturity, a deepening of anxiety which allows us to better understand sin and perhaps to seek out ways to overcome despair. This is interesting in light of the stress modern culture puts on fun, entertainment, frivolity, and “the pursuit of happiness.” This would indicate, paradoxically, that the only way to become happy is to give up on the pursuit of happiness.

and suffering.¹⁰⁵ Yet he is equally vary of the idea that human beings play no decisive role in the way they appropriate God’s grace. The last chapter of *The Concept of Anxiety* makes it clear that the correct appropriation of anxiety is fundamental to human salvation. “Whoever has learned to be anxious in the right way has learned the ultimate.”¹⁰⁶ Haufniensis points to the Gospel¹⁰⁷ affirming that Christ was an exemplar in this appropriation of anxiety. Christ was “anxious unto death” as affirmed by his words on the cross: “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” Manifestations of anxiety and the correct appropriation of them are what make us truly human¹⁰⁸ and they are the only possibility human beings have with regards to living a spiritual life, of relating correctly to the self and to realize one’s potential as not only a finite, biological entity but also as a spiritual entity, capable of entering into a relation to the absolute and infinite: “Whoever is educated by anxiety is educated by possibility, and only he who is educated by possibility is educated according to his infinitude.”¹⁰⁹

This means that, according to Haufniensis, anxiety does not determine or cause us to sin. Christ, according to Haufniensis, being fully human, experienced anxiety, but he did not thereby sin. On this account, when Christ is faced with the temptations in the desert,¹¹⁰ he is truly faced with the *possibility* of sin, but Christ represents the “ultimate” potential of the human person when he overcomes these temptations.

There are two parallels of particular interest here to the theological tradition that was developed in the Christian East. The first is a developmental model of Adam and Eve

¹⁰⁵ See especially part III of *Two Ages*, 60 – 112.

¹⁰⁶ *COA*, 155.

¹⁰⁷ Matthew 26:37, 38; Mark 14:33, 34; John 12:27, 13:27. See *COA*, 155, n2.

¹⁰⁸ “If a human being were a beast or an angel, he could not be in anxiety.” *COA*, 154.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹¹⁰ Luke 4:1-13, Matthew 4:1-11, and Mark 1:12-13.

in paradise, where the first parents of the human race are viewed as spiritual adolescents who must find their own way towards spiritual maturity. This view, as we shall see, was expressed and developed by a number of thinkers in the Christian East. The second is the Orthodox teaching of *theosis* or deification, which represents one of the more profound differences between the soteriology of the Christian East and West.

I will begin with an analysis of the developmental model of sin. In his work *The Orthodox Church*, Metropolitan Kallistos Ware writes:

Humans at their first creation were therefore perfect, not so much in an actual as in a potential sense. Endowed with the image from the start, they were called to acquire the likeness by their own efforts (assisted of course by the grace of God). Adam began in a state of innocence and simplicity. [...] God set Adam on the right path, but Adam had in front of him a long road to traverse in order to reach his final goal.

This picture of Adam before the fall is somewhat different from that presented by Augustine and generally accepted in the west since his time. According to Augustine, humans in Paradise were endowed from the start with all possible wisdom and knowledge: theirs was a realized, and in no sense a potential, perfection.¹¹¹

Irenaeus of Lyons was one of the primary proponents of the developmental view of humankind that would come to influence a great deal of Orthodox soteriology.¹¹² In *On the Apostolic Preaching* Irenaeus writes:

¹¹¹ Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 219-20. The quote from Irenaeus is from *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, 12.

¹¹² Though my focus here is on Irenaeus' developmental anthropology and soteriology the specific issue of viewing Adam and Eve as "children" who had yet to reach maturity is also found in Theophilus and Clement of Alexandria. See Matthew C. Steenberg, "Children in Paradise: Adam and Eve as 'Infants' in Irenaeus of Lyons," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 12, no. 1 (2004): 1-22; John Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). There are also connections between larger themes in Irenaeus, including the developmental model, and the theology of Cyril of Jerusalem, Tertullian, and Athanasius; see: Matthew C. Steenberg, *Of God and Man: Theology as Anthropology from Irenaeus to Athanasius* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2009). For Clement of Alexandria's views on the development of human persons, see especially *Paedagogus* 1.1.3.3. and 3.12.97.3; *Protrepticus* 11.111.1.; *Clemens Alexandrinus I: Protrepticus, Paedagogus*, ed. O. Stählin, 3rd edn. (Berlin: Rev. U. Treu, GCS 12, Akademie Verlag, 1972). For Theophilus, see *To Autolycus* 2.25., ed. and trans. R.M. Grant (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970). Though this developmental model of Adam and

He fashioned man with His own Hands, taking the purest, the finest and most delicate elements of the earth, mixing with the earth, in due measure, His own power (*dynamis*); and because He sketched upon the handiwork His own form—in order that what would be seen should be godlike, for man was placed upon the earth fashioned in the image (*ikon*) of God—and that he might be alive, ‘He breathed into His face a breath of life’: so that both according to the inspiration and according to the formation man was like (*homoios*) God. [...] Now having made the man lord of the earth, and of everything that is in it, He secretly appointed him as lord over those who were servants in it. But they, however, were in their full development, while the lord, that is, the man, was very little, since he was an infant, and it was necessary for him to reach full development by growing in this way. [...] And so beautiful and good was the Paradise, that the Word of God was always walking in it: He would walk and talk with the man prefiguring the future, which would come to pass, that He would dwell with him and speak with him, and would be with mankind, teaching them righteousness. But the man was a young child, not yet having a perfect deliberation, and because of this he was easily deceived by the seducer.¹¹³

Four theological elements immediately stand out in Irenaeus’ account: First, the divine likeness is connected to the Holy Spirit entering into Adam and Eve, imbuing humankind with the potential to become godlike in their humanity. Second, the actualization of this potential is centered on humankind living life on earth in a particular way, i.e., as the caretakers of the earth. Irenaeus’ focus on the divinization of the entire human person, both soul and body, is immediately apparent.¹¹⁴ Third, the Word of God, the divine *Logos*, guides humankind toward the fulfilment of their potential. This guidance is only

Eve was especially important in the East it competed with the more traditional view of Adam and Eve as perfected adults; e.g. Gregory of Nyssa’s *On the Making of Man* 2-5, 16; see *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 5*; accessed 9/28/2015 on New Advent, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2914.htm>. For Augustine’s account of Adam and Eve as perfect adults, which became standard in the West, see *De Genesi ad litteram* 1-10.

¹¹³ Irenaeus, *On the Apostolic Preaching*, trans. John Behr (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997), 1.11-12, 46-47.

¹¹⁴ See also the beautiful passage at 1.14 where Irenaeus describes Adam and Eve “kissing and embracing each other in holiness as children.” Irenaeus does not connect the Fall with any sort of concupiscence. Everything about the human person, including our sexual faculties, is created good and beautiful. The Fall is not due to sexual immorality but rather the inability of the early humans to listen to the Word of God and thereby divinize the entirety of human experience.

fully manifest when the *Logos* becomes human in the person of Christ, but even in the Garden the Word walks with Adam and Eve. Fourth, the inability of human beings to follow the Word and to fulfill their potential is primarily due to the imperfect state of the early humans who were almost infant-like in their pre-lapsarian state, a state that they were supposed to ultimately grow out of.¹¹⁵

There is, in addition, a clear sense in Irenaeus that the Incarnation is not primarily a response to the Fall but rather a foreordained and necessary part of human development. Irenaeus echoes here an important teaching which, as Bogdan Bucur has argued, is a “doctrine shared by significant early Christian and later Byzantine writers.”¹¹⁶ These include Maximus Confessor, Dionysius Areopagite, Isaac of Nineveh, Gregory Palamas, and Nicholas Cabasilas.¹¹⁷

Eric Osborn, in his study of Irenaeus, writes: “Human development moves through history and beyond; humans cannot be imprisoned in permanent categories or classes. Development fits, adjusts, accustoms man to God to ensure man’s progress, growth, maturing, and fruitfulness. While Adam is in one sense perfect, the possibility of further perfection is set before him.”¹¹⁸ This future perfection is ultimately revealed in Christ, the new Adam, who becomes human in order to manifest the full potential of

¹¹⁵ There is some debate on to what extent Irenaeus, as well as authors such as Theophilus and Clement, thought that Adam and Eve were literally children and to what extent this language is meant metaphorically. See Steenberg, “Children in Paradise,” 11ff.

¹¹⁶ Bogdan Bucur, “Foreordained From All Eternity: The Mystery of the Incarnation According to Some Early Christian and Byzantine Writers,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 62 (2008): 120.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. This position was also held by Scotus in the West, though the scholastic debate surrounding this position differed in significant ways with the development of these themes in the Orthodox East. See Bucur, 200. For Scotus’ position, see “The Predestination of Christ and His Mother,” in *John Duns Scotus: Four Questions on Mary*, ed. and trans. A.B. Wolter (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Inst. Publications, 2000), 19-29.

¹¹⁸ Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 85. See *Against Heresies* 3.20.2, in *St. Irenaeus of Lyons Against the Heresies*, trans. Dominic J. Unger & John J. Dillon (New York: Paulist Press, 1992).

human nature by assuming it.¹¹⁹ Due to this emphasis on human growth Irenaeus' soteriology is primarily focused on the notion of recapitulation rather than justification.¹²⁰

Osborne writes:

Christ came so that fallen man might be corrected to his first integrity and so that imperfect man might be brought to perfection. The savior includes all men in himself, compendiously and repeats the life of the first man, correcting that life at each point. [...] As creator; he comes to his own (5.18.2) and recapitulates his own creation in himself (4.6.2.); while true man and true God, he is the end rather than the beginning (4.6.7.; 1.10.3.)¹²¹

Answering the question of why it is that God did not create human beings perfect, Irenaeus in *Against Heresies* writes: "It was in the power of God Himself to grant perfection to man from the beginning; but the man, on the contrary, was unable to receive it, since he was still an infant... we were not able to receive the greatness of that glory. Therefore, as if to infants, He who was the perfect bread of the Father offered Himself to us as milk, since His coming was in keeping with a man."¹²²

As Steenberg notes, Irenaeus, along with writers such as Clement and Theophilus, emphasizes the essential needfulness of the human person in her relationship to God:

The state of infancy which Irenaeus is speaking seems, above all else, to be a state of *want*: the first man is a child because he 'falls short of the perfect,' because he cannot receive perfection, because he cannot endure God's greatness. There is a distinction between Adam and his creator which is real and ontological, not simply a state of mind or logical distance. This monumental gulf between Adam and God, a gulf founded here in Adam's own being as newly created man, is not one of physical

¹¹⁹ *Against Heresies*, 4.2.4.

¹²⁰ Osborne, 97ff. Book 2 of *Against Heresies* is focused on this theme.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 99. Numbers in parentheses refer to *Against Heresies*.

¹²² *Against Heresies*, 4.38.

distance nor deprivation of grace, but the natural different of being that exists between Creator and created. One is infinite, the other finite.¹²³

Haufniensis' holds to a very similar view of Adam and Eve in *The Concept of Anxiety*. Adam is like a child in a "state of dreaming" before he is presented with the opportunity to eat (or not to eat) from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.¹²⁴ The heightening of anxiety and Adam's awareness of freedom represents the possibility for spiritual growth and self-actualization.¹²⁵ The primary difference, therefore, between the view presented by Irenaeus and Haufniensis, on the one hand, and that of Augustine, on the other, is between a dynamic view of the human self, versus a more static conception which sees Adam and Eve as having been created perfect and views sin primarily in terms of a juridical transgression.

According to Haufniensis, anxiety is the concurrent repulsion and attraction that occurs in the experience of freedom and a necessary component in the self-realization of human persons.¹²⁶ Both Haufniensis and Anti-Climacus understand the human person to be a synthesis of opposing poles of existence.¹²⁷ The human person is not only an animal determined by biological drives and instincts but also a being capable of free choice; not only a finite being subject to death but also a being that is able to participate in eternity; not only a bodily being but equally a spiritual one. Though Kierkegaard was fully aware of the ontological implications of such an anthropological view, he always emphasized the existential experience of this reality over and beyond the metaphysical. Kierkegaard

¹²³ Steenberg, "Children in Paradise," 15.

¹²⁴ *COA*, 41.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 42ff.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹²⁷ *COA*, 43, *SUD*, 29-30. For a particularly clear and well developed account of this in the secondary literature, see Johannes Sløk, *Kierkegaard's Universe: A New Guide to the Genius*, trans. Kenneth Tindall (Copenhagen: The Danish Cultural Institute, 1994), chapters 4, 5, 6, and 9.

and the pseudonyms go to great lengths to point out that even if one is an ardent physicalist, one cannot escape experiencing reality in a “spiritual” manner, i.e., in terms of meaning, beauty, value, and so on.¹²⁸ Even if one is entirely convinced that human beings are nothing but the outcome of a purely physical, evolutionary process, one nonetheless experiences oneself making free choices and relating oneself to eternity, even if it only occurs occasionally as one is faced with existential despair and doubt in moments of loss and pain.¹²⁹ The synthesis of these two poles occurs in a third, which Haufniensis calls “spirit.”¹³⁰ Beabout writes: “Spirit is the power of the will to self-consciously relate the two poles of the synthesis to one another and hence to the self.”¹³¹ This relation of the poles is the dynamic manifestation of the self. To be a self is to relate the two poles of existence, in spirit, in increasingly deeper ways.

Haufniensis makes it clear that it is a necessary component of being human to experience anxiety.¹³² An animal, purely driven by biological instincts and drives, is incapable of feeling anxiety. A human being is able to project him or herself into the future, to open up a horizon of possibilities, and must therefore be both simultaneously repelled and attracted to these possibilities.¹³³ As Beabout writes:

The person who looks over the edge of the cliff feels anxious; there is both the dizzying feeling that one might fall with its accompanying repulsion

¹²⁸ Even if one were to experience life entirely as absent of such spiritual values, one is unable to escape the existential significance of this absence.

¹²⁹ It is, indeed, easy to surmise from Kierkegaard’s writings that the “spiritual” aspects of our existence only fully come to the forefront of our lives during times of suffering. That being said, Kierkegaard had a great deal to say about the importance of joy in human existence (the *duty* of joy, in fact). This topic will be examined more closely in chapters three and four.

¹³⁰ *COA*, 42

¹³¹ Beabout, 46.

¹³² *CA*, 42-43.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 44: “Anxiety is freedom’s actuality as the possibility of possibility.” This is basically the “What if?” moment of a decision which haunts us both before the decision is made and often continues to do so after we actualize the possibility.

and a quietly felt urge to lean out farther, to leap. Yet, Vigilius' analysis of anxiety goes beyond a description of these affective states. In describing the human being as a synthesis of the psychical and the physical united by spirit, he provides an analysis of the structure of human being. Given this structural analysis of human being, the psychical aspect can imagine future possibilities based on one's present and past (the physical aspect). The structural relation between one's present and imagined future possibilities is a relation of anxiety. *This is an ontological claim, a claim that the way a human being is related to the future is through the ambiguity of simultaneous attraction and repulsion. In this sense, anxiety is not a description of how one feels, but of a person's relation to the future.*¹³⁴

The development of the human person is a heightening of this anxiety, of taking responsibility for one's life and understanding the implications of one's actions. It is not only an ontological analysis, as Beabout points out, but equally an existential and ethical one. Adam and Eve's development, as depicted in the Book of Genesis, is primarily focused on the manifestation of anxiety in their spiritual life and their failure to take responsibility for their actions. God's order to Adam not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is a test (*provelse*) of the highest order, much like the test given to Abraham when God asks him to sacrifice Isaac. It is a poetic representation of the test that all human beings must undergo as we attempt to become an authentic self.

The most important aspect of Haufniensis' account of anxiety, an account that is later taken up in Anti-Climacus' discussion of despair and sin, is the fact that anxiety is an essential component in our ability to open ourselves up to God. This ability to receive God is the central facet of Kierkegaard's soteriology. In *The Concept of Anxiety* Haufniensis writes: "Anxiety is freedom's possibility, and only such anxiety is through faith absolutely educative, because it consumes all finite ends and discovers all their

¹³⁴ Beabout, 47-48. Emphasis mine.

deceptiveness. [...] Whoever is educated by anxiety is educated by possibility, and only he who is educated by possibility is educated according to his infinitude.”¹³⁵ Anti-Climacus in the *Sickness Unto Death* notes how an increasing awareness of sin opens us up to our complete dependence on God. It is really only by becoming aware of anxiety, of our existential status as free beings, that we can begin to see the nature of human sinfulness and it is this awareness of sinfulness that allows us the humility to open ourselves up to stand in God’s presence:

What really makes human guilt into sin is that the guilty one has the consciousness of existing before God. Despair is intensified in relation to the consciousness of the self, but the self is intensified in relation to the criterion for the self, infinitely when God is the criterion. In fact, the greater the conception of God, the more self there is; the more self, the greater the conception of God. Not until a self as this specific single individual is conscious of existing before God, not until then is it the infinite self, and this self sins before God.¹³⁶

If sin is primarily viewed in terms of a legalistic transgression and inherited guilt then Kierkegaard’s view of an increasing consciousness of sinfulness seems bleak indeed. But as I have already noted, it is clear that Haufniensis’ primary aim in *The Concept of Anxiety* is to provide an alternative account to Augustinian notions of sin as inherited guilt. Anxiety represents the individual’s status as a free person, as always living in possibility, and it therefore makes sin possible, but it does not necessitate sin. Kierkegaard and his pseudonymous voices always view sin in terms of human development and existential possibilities.

¹³⁵ COA, 155-156.

¹³⁶ SUD, 80.

If we read the preceding passages from *The Concept of Anxiety* and *The Sickness Unto Death* in light of Irenaeus' soteriology, we immediately find echoes with the development anthropology and soteriology of Kierkegaard, Haufniensis, and Anti-Climacus. Osborn notes that for Irenaeus

Salvation is a process to perfection as the son of God, according to David, perfects praise from babes (4.11.3). Man could not be made perfect from the beginning because of what is created from the beginning must be inferior to and later than the creator (4.38.1). Because of human immaturity, the perfect son of God passed through infancy in order that man might be able to receive him. As a recent creature man could not have received perfection at the beginning (4.38.2), yet he grows to perfection in an ordered universe (4.38.3). He is destined to partake of the glory of God (4.39.2) and to become the perfect work of God (4.39.2).¹³⁷

Given the fact that human beings have sinned, and that death and suffering have entered into the world through sin, the development of the human person is intrinsically bound up with a correct attitude towards suffering and death. This is ultimately what Christ manifests. As Osborn notes, one of Irenaeus' primary points of contention with Gnostic dualism is the inability of the Gnostic to relate suffering and death to our relationship with God. Orthodox Christianity, on the other hand, sees the only path towards salvation as *passing through* suffering and death.¹³⁸

As previously noted, Haufniensis is adamant that anxiety does not necessarily lead to sin. Adam and Eve *did not have to sin*, even though they were free beings (as Christ represents the possibility of a free being continuously choosing communion and love). But the fact is that they *did* sin, and this fact, the fact that all human persons live in a realm suffused with suffering and pain, colors every aspect of human possibility. For

¹³⁷ Osborn, 108. Numbers in parentheses refer to *Against Heresies*.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 118f.

Kierkegaard, this means that there are ultimately only three options available to us in the way we relate to sin: We can attempt to ignore it, we can become engulfed by it in sorrow and despair, or we can pass through it and open ourselves up to the experience of forgiveness, an experience of standing before God in absolute love and openness. Kierkegaard's edifying discourse on "The woman that was a sinner" is an especially profound meditation on this reality.¹³⁹ The account in Luke 7:37 presents the woman as being deeply aware of her sins but instead of this resulting in her falling into "the sin of despairing over one's sin," as Anti-Climacus puts it,¹⁴⁰ she is ready to receive forgiveness. Kierkegaard says that what we learn from this woman is to become "indifferent to everything else, in absolute sorrow for our sins, yet in such a way that one thing is important to us, and absolutely important: to find forgiveness."¹⁴¹

Furthermore, Kierkegaard, much like Irenaeus, Maximus Confessor, Gregory Palamas, and other seminal writers of the Eastern Orthodox tradition, saw the Incarnation in terms of recapitulation and reorientation, of putting the human race back on the path towards achieving the fulfilment of its potential, rather than as a response to a juridical wrong. In a journal entry from 1844, Kierkegaard writes: "The Incarnation is so very difficult to understand because it is so very difficult for the absolutely Exalted One to make himself comprehensible to the one of low position in the equality of love (not in the condescension of love)—*in this lies the erotic profundity, which through an earthly misunderstanding has been conceived of as if it had occurred unto offense and*

¹³⁹ *Training in Christianity*, 244-54.

¹⁴⁰ *SUD*, 109.

¹⁴¹ *Training in Christianity*, 245.

degradation."¹⁴² Five years later, Kierkegaard takes this theme even further, viewing the Incarnation as the necessary condition for the flourishing of not only human beings but of all of creation (*Skabelsen*):

Here one rightly sees the subjectivity in Christianity. Generally, the poet, the artist, etc. is criticized for introducing himself into his work. But this is precisely what God does; this he does in Christ. And precisely this is Christianity. Creation is really fulfilled only when God has included himself in it. Before Christ God was included, of course, in the creation but as an invisible mark, something like the water-mark in paper. But in the Incarnation creation is fulfilled by Gods including himself in it.¹⁴³

Parallels between Kierkegaard's developmental anthropology and that of Eastern Orthodox soteriology and Incarnational theology are most apparent when one examines Kierkegaard's psychology of anxiety and despair in relation to Adam and Eve. Irenaeus' developmental account of Adam and Eve's state in paradise and subsequent transgression bears many similarities to Kierkegaard's (and Haufniensis' and Anti-Climacus') account of the deepening consciousness of sin and despair. In *Against Heresies* Irenaeus describes Adam's repentance over his sin as being a further manifestation of pride:

[Adam] showed his repentance in deed, by means of the girdle, covering himself with fig-leaves; while there were many other leaves which would have irritated his body to a lesser degree, he, nevertheless, made a garment conformable to his disobedience, being terrified by the fear of God. [...] And thus he would no doubt have retained this clothing for ever, thus humbling himself, if God, who is merciful, had not clothed them with garments of skin instead of fig-leaves.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² JP 3, 2402 / IV A 183. Emphasis mine. Note that the Hongs' here translate the Danish word *Fald* as "degradation." *Fald* is most directly translated as "fall." Kierkegaard's point here is strikingly clear: The idea that the Incarnation is a response to the Fall is the result of an "earthly misunderstanding," a failure to see the "erotic profundity" (*Erotik-Dybe*) of God's love. Additionally, the Danish word *Dybe* is most directly translated as "abyss." We as human beings fail to stare into the abyss of God's erotic yearning for us, which causes us to misunderstand the implications of the Incarnation.

¹⁴³ JP 2, 1391 / X¹ A 605

¹⁴⁴ *Against Heresies*, 3.23.5.

John Behr has noted that Irenaeus' sees Adam and Eve's sin primarily in terms of their refusal to ask for and to receive forgiveness, rather than in terms of their transgression in eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.¹⁴⁵ It was, to some extent, perfectly "natural" for Adam and Eve to eat of the tree, given the fact that God had created them as free beings and that they would experience anxiety, i.e., simultaneous attraction and repulsion in light of the lived reality of their possibilities. But after Adam and Eve sin, instead of turning to God, they devise a self-imposed penalty upon themselves that alienates them from God:

The state of continence which Adam adopted after his act of disobedience is, according to Irenaeus, one which is self-imposed. Furthermore, it is one which Adam imposes upon himself and his wife in his state of confusion, in which, having lost his natural and childlike mind, he feels unworthy to approach and hold converse with God. As such, one might describe it as an adolescent reaction of the disobedient man to his new situation.¹⁴⁶

Adam and Eve were always supposed to lose their childlike mind, according to Irenaeus. To be able to listen to the Word and to grow in perfection they must mature, and this can only be done through trial and error (as any parent knows). The reason why the fall into sin was such a tragic event was primarily due to mankind's inability to take responsibility for their actions and to learn from their mistakes. This theme was also developed by St. Symeon the New Theologian, who in his homily 66 on the creation of Adam and Eve states that if

¹⁴⁵ John Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 118.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Adam had simply said “I have sinned” in response to God’s “Where art thou?” he would have “redeemed all the multitude of years which he spent in hell.”¹⁴⁷

Irenaeus intertwines the metaphysical and existential implications of sin when he points to the fact that human beings, being born into a world filled with suffering, pain, and death, must learn to accept their fallible nature (unlike Adam and Eve before the Fall) and to have the humility to accept the fact that we will often make bad choices but that this does not condemn us to eternal damnation. John Behr, in a passage written on Irenaeus, but which could just as easily be applied to Kierkegaard, notes:

One of the most noteworthy aspects of Irenaeus’ historical sense of the unfolding of the economy is how it places a positive value upon man’s experience of evil and his own weakness, which ultimately concludes in death. Within the framework of the progression of each individual life, this same perspective demands that, to become truly human, each person must fully engage themselves in their concrete lives and situations. One learns by experience. One cannot simply abstain, through a self-imposed continence, from anything that carries with it a risk that one might become ensnared thereby in apostasy. Irenaeus does not exalt a state of primal innocence, or exhort his readers to recapture it through an evasive virginity; for, as the economy has unfolded, it is through a knowledge of good and evil, and the consequent rejection of evil, that man becomes like God.¹⁴⁸

When read in the light of Irenaeus’ soteriology, Kierkegaard’s (very similar) views on sin and salvation, especially as expressed by Haufniensis and Anti-Climacus, do not represent a morbid obsession with guilt and self-condemnation but rather a celebration of human potential. This is not to undermine the essential role of repentance

¹⁴⁷ St. Symeon the New Theologian, *The First-Created Man*, trans. Fr. Seraphim Rose from the Russian edition of St. Theophan the Recluse (Manton, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2001), 109. The scriptural reference is to Genesis chapter 3.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 125.

in both Kierkegaard's writings on sin as well as in the Eastern Orthodox tradition.¹⁴⁹ Yet repentance, for Kierkegaard, is always understood as a manifestation of love; of our love for God but primarily as our *response* to God's love for us.¹⁵⁰

The developmental account of the human self is present throughout all of Kierkegaard's works and is further developed in his other pseudonymous works such as *Fear and Trembling*, *Stages on Life's Way* and *Either/or*. I will now turn to reading Kierkegaard's views on the "stages" of human development in light of the kind of developmental soteriology that was first developed by writers such as Irenaeus, Maximus Confessor, and St. Symeon the New Theologian, and which became a cornerstone of Eastern Orthodox theology.

2.6 - The Developing Self: Stages on Life's Way

Kierkegaard presents the struggle of becoming a self in terms of "stages" or "spheres" of existence. These are clearly not supposed to be static, clearly delineated manners of living but rather a dynamic representation of the continual unfolding of the self. A great deal of the secondary literature on Kierkegaard focuses on the three stages or "selves" which Kierkegaard calls the aesthetic, ethical, and religious.¹⁵¹ One way of

¹⁴⁹ A comprehensive overview of either Kierkegaard's or Eastern Orthodox views on repentance would take a book-length project by itself. Examples of Orthodox views on repentance can be found in *The Philokalia, Vol. 1*, ed. and trans. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1983), 26, 70, 129, 131, 183, 189, 221, 299, and 363. For a concise overview of Kierkegaard's views on the matter, see Sean Anthony Turchin, "Repentance," in *Kierkegaard's Concepts, Tome V: Objectivity to Sacrifice (Kierkegaard Research, Sources, Reception and Resources, Vol. 15)*, ed. Steven M. Emmanuel, William McDonald, and Jon Stewart (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2015), 222ff. Note also *JP* 3, 2390 / III A 137: "...and you who feel so far removed from your God, what else is your seeking God in repentance but loving God?"

¹⁵⁰ *JP* 3, 2390 / III A 137: "...and you who feel so far removed from your God, what else is your seeking God in repentance but loving God?" Also, *Either/or* 2, 216.

¹⁵¹ See, for example Clare Carlisle, *Kierkegaard: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London & New York: Continuum, 2006), 83-90, and C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 68-139.

reading the stages is to say that the aesthetic sphere, which Victor Eremita in *Either/or* calls the life of “immediacy,” represents a complete misrelation of the self to itself insofar as it shows an inability to unify the life of temporality/finitude with the life of the transcendent/eternal.¹⁵² Johannes Sløk, on the other hand, has provided an excellent argument for counting four stages. In addition to the three aforementioned stages of existence Sløk points out that the first stage is what Kierkegaard sometimes calls the life of the “philistine” (*Spidsborger*).¹⁵³ This is the life of the person who runs away from anxiety and despair by any means necessary, whether via alcohol, entertainment, sex, travel, or whatever other means that provide one with a calm, fuzzy pleasantness by which one can turn away from whatever is difficult and challenging in one’s life and self. As Sløk points out, the reason why Kierkegaard did not devote a book to this particular kind of self is that it is not really a type of self at all.¹⁵⁴ It is, rather, a kind of non-self, a complete failure to be a self, an implicit undercurrent in all of Kierkegaard’s writings.¹⁵⁵

The aesthetic self, therefore, is the beginning stage of a person’s increasing awareness of his or her own anxiety and despair. The aesthete notes the despair and alienation so apparent in the surrounding culture and rebels against the status quo, which he conceives as the source of this despair. The *diapsalmata* at the beginning of *Either/or* paints the picture of a person in the grips of existential angst and despair, someone who is completely unable to happily immerse himself in everyday, bourgeois existence: “How empty and meaningless life is.”¹⁵⁶ The only escape is through pleasure, excitement,

¹⁵² This is Beabout’s reading. See Beabout, 86-94.

¹⁵³ Sløk, 31.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁵⁵ Kierkegaard perhaps comes closest to dealing with this particular stage of existence in *Two Ages* and *Johannes Climacus*.

¹⁵⁶ *Either/or* (hereafter *EO*), 29.

adventure, newness. Yet this ultimately fails us. No amount of sex, drugs, and rock n' roll can satiate us. The aesthete can only cling to anticipation and the sweet promise of possibility that pleasure holds: "Pleasure disappoints, possibility never. And what wine is so sparkling, what so fragrant, what so intoxicating, as possibility."¹⁵⁷

The aesthetic stage, like all of the stages, contains within itself a dialectical movement where there is a deepening awareness of despair. The aesthete tries to rebel against the despair of the philistine by abandoning the values and norms of the status quo.¹⁵⁸ Yet when the aesthete realizes that satisfaction cannot ultimately be attained, he abandons himself to the meaninglessness of his pursuit, resigning himself to the emptiness of pleasure.¹⁵⁹ But as the aesthete gets increasingly worn down from the pursuit of pleasure, physically and psychologically exhausted from the deleterious effects of incontinence, the despair deepens to a point where it becomes unbearable. As described in *The Sickness unto Death*, the misrelation of the self to itself becomes increasingly more pronounced. Seeking meaning and peace in immediacy alone is doomed to failure.¹⁶⁰ The aesthete is not only aware of anxiety but also embraces it, due to the fact that he venerates the "intoxicating" elements of pure possibility (as opposed to the *Spidsborger* who doesn't even contemplate possibility and simply goes along with whatever people around him are doing). But pure possibility becomes a prison if one

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 41.

¹⁵⁸ The aesthetic sphere is always best represented by the counterculture. In American 20th century popular culture this may have included such movements as the Beats, the hippies, and the punks.

¹⁵⁹ One is reminded here of Oscar Wilde's remark on the delectable nature of cigarettes: "A cigarette is the perfect type of a perfect pleasure. It is exquisite, and it leaves one unsatisfied. What more can you want?" See *The Picture of Dorian Gray: An Annotated, Uncensored Edition*, ed. Nicholas Frankel (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 136.

¹⁶⁰ See Beabout, 102-111 for a description of the different kinds of despair described in the work. The "despair of infinitude and possibility" most aptly describes the aesthetic self, i.e. a life which is completely bound up in the poetic realm of existence, of being unable to deal with the mundane nature of the everyday.

never ventures a choice. In the commentary preceding the *Seducer's Diary* in *Either/or* we see a description of a mind in pure anxiety, perhaps not dissimilar to the anxiety that Adam and Eve felt preceding their fall:

I can think of nothing more tormenting than a scheming mind that loses the thread and then directs all its keenness against itself as the conscience awakens and it becomes a matter of rescuing himself from this perplexity. The many exits from his foxhole are futile; the instant his troubled soul already thinks it sees daylight filtering in, it turns out to be a new entrance, and thus, like panic-stricken wild game, pursued by despair, he is continually seeking an exit and continually finding an entrance through which he goes back into himself.¹⁶¹

The pain and despair of the aesthetic despair is encapsulated in the inability to choose, to make a commitment to something. Even though such commitments are painful, they are essential for the development and growth of the self. The ethical stage, as exemplified by Judge Vilhelm in *Either/or*, represents the dialectical progression of the self where commitment and stability are seen as meaningful and positive. The ethical stage is externally a mirror image of the first stage, that of the philistine, yet it differs from the life of the philistine because the ethical person has faced the despair and passed through the aesthetic. The ethical person gets married and commits to a person, for example, not because it is “what one should do” but rather because he or she recognizes it as a way to truly become a person, to truly become a self. The philistine lives a life that is completely unthought while the ethical person is acutely aware of the suffering and hardship that follows from making commitments, of having certain values and standards that one is willing to not only live for but also to die for. As Judge Vilhelm remarks, the

¹⁶¹ *EO* 1, 308.

life of the aesthete lacks all substance. It is the life of a shadow, of one who is not *real* in any existential manner.¹⁶²

Yet the ethical stage is not the safe harbor that it at first appears to be. As Anti-Climacus points out, there is a heightened version of despair within the ethical stage, when we begin to despair over the earthly or some particular earthly thing (a job, a spouse, our children). Yet this despair is bringing us closer to the eternal, to manifesting our self in relation to the absolute: “Despair over the earthly or over something earthly is in reality also despair of the eternal and over oneself, insofar as it is despair, for this is indeed the formula for all despair.”¹⁶³ If one truly makes the leap of commitment to another human being, for example, while fully appropriating the pain and suffering that comes with such a commitment instead of running away from said pain and suffering, one’s life becomes filled with a great deal of meaning. The ethical person has something concrete to live for, and to die for. Yet this something (or someone) is temporal, finite, mortal. My wife, no matter how much I love her, will die. My son, no matter how much I try to protect him, will die. And in this realization lies a despair that can only be faced in light of the eternal. Furthermore, this despair is ultimately a despair over oneself.

First comes the consciousness of the self, for to despair of the eternal is impossible without having a conception of the self, that there is something eternal in it, or that it has had something eternal in it. If a person is to despair over himself, he must be aware of having a self; and yet it is over this that he despairs, not over the earthly or something earthly, but over himself. Furthermore, there is a greater consciousness here of what despair is, because despair is indeed the loss of the eternal and of oneself.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² See Judge Vilhelm’s remarks on Chamisso’s story about Peter Schlemihl, *EO* 2, 10-11. Also see Karsten Harris, *Between Nihilism and Faith: A Commentary on Either/Or* (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 111-24.

¹⁶³ *SUD*, 60.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

The way out of despair, which always initially leads to a heightening of despair (through the dialectic of the self), is via resignation. The ethical person resigns himself to the fact that no commitment, even to the noblest cause, can ever afford one with complete inner peace and happiness. We are always faced with the absurdity of ignorance, suffering, and death. If one seeks absolute meaning then one must define the self in relation to the absolute. And this is when despair becomes sin, when the misrelation of the self to itself is understood in terms of our relationship to God. “Sin is: before God, or with the conception of God, in despair not to will to be oneself, or in despair to will to be oneself. Thus sin is intensified weakness or intensified defiance: sin is the intensification of despair.”¹⁶⁵ The movement from the ethical stage to the religious marks the realization that the cause of our existential suffering, our inability to truly be ourselves, lies in our broken relationship to God. It is only by mending that relationship that we can be healed. “To say that one despairs ‘before God’ means that one has a conception of a transcendent, personal God. When one either fails to take responsibility for oneself or attempts to be oneself without admitting one’s dependence on God and does either with a conception of a transcendent personal God, then one’s despair is sin.”¹⁶⁶

The central aspect of Kierkegaard’s disagreement with Luther on the issue of sin, as I have repeatedly noted, is Kierkegaard’s view that Luther (due to the influence of Augustine) does not focus on self-responsibility but rather attributes salvation entirely to Christ. Similarly, Luther attributed the force of sin and spiritual struggle largely to the

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹⁶⁶ Beabout, 112. See *SUD*, 81.

influence of the devil,¹⁶⁷ a claim Kierkegaard calls “childish” in his journals.¹⁶⁸

Kierkegaard’s developmental model, much like that of Irenaeus, views sin, struggle, and suffering as necessary components of human growth and development rather than as legalistic transgression. The theme of self-surrender to God/Christ is pivotal in Anti-Climacus’ analysis of how human beings might overcome despair. Yet this self-surrender is, paradoxically, one which hinges on freedom and self-responsibility. The dialectical intensification of sin throughout the stages of existence reaches its culmination when the self can stand “transparently” before God (as Anti-Climacus puts it),¹⁶⁹ fully immersed in the reality of God’s redemption and forgiveness. Yet the only way for someone to arrive at an existential position where this is possible is through that person taking responsibility for him or herself, heightening his awareness of his relationship to himself (or lack thereof) and how his experience of anxiety and despair separates him from God and from himself.

2.7 - Kierkegaard on Free Will and Grace

There are interesting parallels between Kierkegaard’s existential view of sin and the soteriology developed in the Christian East by Gregory of Nyssa, which then further evolved in the thought of Maximus the Confessor, two of the most influential figures in

¹⁶⁷ See Luther, “Of the Devil and His Works,” in *The Table Talk of Martin Luther*, 263-65. See also Podmore, “The Lightning and the Earthquake: Kierkegaard on the *Anfechtung* of Luther”, 562-78.

¹⁶⁸ JP 4:4372/ Pap. X1 A 22. It should be noted that Kierkegaard did not dismiss the influence of demonic forces on the human person. One could interpret his criticism of Luther and Augustine as primarily wanting to avoid a form of dualism that creeps into their theology. See JP 4:4384 / XI² 133 for a further discussion of the influence of the devil, which aims to preserve the absolute sovereignty of God. Furthermore, Luther’s insistence that Satan is to blame for the spiritual trials of human beings is most likely more complex than Kierkegaard is willing to admit. See Hinkson, “Kierkegaard’s Theology: Cross and Grace. The Lutheran and Idealistic Traditions in His Thought,” 36-37. See also Podmore, *Kierkegaard and the Self Before God*, 129-32.

¹⁶⁹ *SUD*, 82.

Eastern Christian theology. What I want to highlight here is the fact that Kierkegaard's primary philosophical and theological aim seems to be to develop a view of salvation which safeguards the self-responsibility and free will of the believer (which he feels that Augustine and Luther may have jeopardized due to their inability to face up to the despair, the *Anfechtung*, of their spiritual lives) while also maintaining that the inner psyche of the human person is the arena *in which* God brings about said salvation. The synergy between divine grace and human free will has interesting connections to the emphasis on the divine energies (*energeia*) in the writings of the Cappadocian fathers, especially in the works of Gregory of Nyssa. I will begin with a brief overview of Kierkegaard's views on free will and grace, followed with a discussion of the Eastern Orthodox position on these matters.

The previously outlined progression between the stages of existence shows a parallel deepening of not only self-awareness but a concurrent awareness of our relationship to God, which ultimately culminates in our growing existential awareness of—and relationship to—the absolute paradox. As despair is heightened (through the effects of anxiety, which manifest itself via our free choice) we become acutely aware of our inner turmoil and suffering as manifesting our relationship with God. To see despair as sin is to begin to see the self as being constituted by God. Kierkegaard, in his discourse “Look at the Birds of the Air; Look at the Lily in the Field,” speaks of silence and self-abnegation as the only correct response to this increasing awareness of God.¹⁷⁰ Simon D. Podmore, in his analysis of Kierkegaard's views on prayer and silence, notes that, for

¹⁷⁰ *Without Authority* (hereafter *WA*), 7-20. See also Ettore Rocca, “Soren Kierkegaard on Silence” in *Anthropology and Authority: Essays on Soren Kierkegaard*, ed. Poul Houe, Gordon D. Marino, and Sven Hakon Rossel (Amsterdam: Rodolphi, 2000), 80.

Kierkegaard, the prayer of silence is a prayer of unknowing, much like in the Eastern Orthodox contemplative tradition of *hesychasm*.¹⁷¹ Podmore writes:

And so in praying one falls silent because there is nothing that one can say—a freely chosen silence of self-abnegation that is qualitatively different from the imposed silence of despair... And this silence of faith’s prayer is a silence of unknowing in which the self esteems its capacities as nothing before God; the prayer of silence which, by renouncing the despair of human impossibility, marks the beginning of faith in divine *possibility*.¹⁷²

Kierkegaard writes that such prayer and self-knowledge can only come as one stands before God in “the mirror of the Word.”¹⁷³ Anti-Climacus furthermore states that the self comes to know itself in relation to that which it stands before.¹⁷⁴ Podmore has analyzed this paradoxical language of Kierkegaard’s view of the self “standing before God” in some detail.¹⁷⁵ The sinful self, standing “afar from” God, as the tax collector does in the parable,¹⁷⁶ faces an abyss. The gulf between the self and God seems insurmountable. Yet Anti-Climacus is clear on the fact that the gaze of the sinful believer is uplifted, through the grace of God, towards the divine forgiveness of God. The human intellect and will are unable to bridge the gap between the self and God and must therefore be crucified in unknowing and silence so that God may lift the self towards Himself.¹⁷⁷ The resignation of the Knight of Faith, as described by de Silentio,¹⁷⁸ is ultimately a description of a

¹⁷¹ See Ware, 121-124. See also Ignatius Brianchaninov, *On the Prayer of Jesus*, trans. Father Lazarus (Boston and London: New Seeds, 2006). For an overview of patristic and post-patristic sources on hesychasm, including the writings of St. Symeon the New Theologian, St. Gregory of Sinai, Nicephorus the Solitary, and Hesychius of Jerusalem, see *Writings from the Philokalia: On the Prayer of the Heart*, trans. E. Kadloubovsky and G.E.H. Palmer (London: Faber and Faber, 1979/7).

¹⁷² *Kierkegaard and the Self Before God*, 149.

¹⁷³ JP 4:3902 / X⁴ A 412.

¹⁷⁴ *SUD*, 79.

¹⁷⁵ See especially *Kierkegaard and the Self Before God*, 151-80.

¹⁷⁶ See “The Tax Collector,” *WA*, 132.

¹⁷⁷ On the “crucifixion” of the understanding see *CUP*, 564.

¹⁷⁸ *F&T*, 50.

person whose self is constituted in and through his relation to God. Even though there seems to be no external difference between the philistine and the Knight of Faith, the former constitutes his self by standing before a corrupted image of himself while the latter constitutes his self by standing before God and “the mirror of the Word.”

Both Podmore and Ferreira suggest that Kierkegaard’s use of this imagery of standing before God, especially in *The Sickness unto Death*, should be understood in a very concrete way.¹⁷⁹ The believer *faces* God and grounds him or herself in the gaze of God. And even though it is ultimately this gaze, constituting the forgiveness and grace of God that allows the believer to face despair, “it is, crucially, the subject’s free choice to see itself in this way.”¹⁸⁰ Kierkegaard’s language denotes a manifestation of the divine where the continual resignation of the believer, deepening awareness of despair and self, and the facing-towards-God is understood as divine revelation.

Kierkegaard’s notion of the self before God raises important questions with regards to his conception of how human beings can come to know God. In chapter 3, I will examine the epistemological dimension of Kierkegaard’s works but here I would like to examine Kierkegaard’s view of the self standing before God in light of Kierkegaard’s soteriology and his views on the relationship between divine grace and free-will.

According to Kierkegaard, human effort (human “works,” to use St. James’ expression) is an essential component in the process of salvation.¹⁸¹ Kierkegaard wanted

¹⁷⁹ *Kierkegaard and the Self Before God*, 157. See also M. Jamie Ferreira, “Imagination and the Despair of Sin,” in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook, Volume 1997*, edited by Heiko Schulz, Jon Stewart, and Karl Verstrynge (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1997), 24. Anti-Climacus writes that one must stand “with the conception of God” (*Forestillingen om Gud*) (*SUD*, 77). Ferreira claims that though “conception” is usually understood in a more abstract manner in English, *Forestillingen* “calls to mind a very concrete apprehension.” It should be noted that *forestilling* can also mean a “presentation,” a “show,” or, more crucially, an “event.”

¹⁸⁰ *Kierkegaard and the Self Before God*, 158.

¹⁸¹ *JP* 3, 2483 / X¹ A 197.

to provide an alternative between the notion of salvation through merit presented in the “Middle Ages” (i.e., by Roman Catholicism, at least according to the standard Lutheran account) and the *sola fide* of Luther.¹⁸² Kierkegaard viewed faith in inwardness as an essential component of opening oneself up to God but he believed that individual striving and good works were necessary to achieve this inwardness.¹⁸³ This striving does not necessarily mean that the efforts of the individual person primarily determine the possibility of salvation or directly cause it. Kierkegaard wholeheartedly agreed with the Lutheran critique of merits.¹⁸⁴ Rather, all individual efforts (asceticism, prayer, charity, works of love, etc.) are ultimately means to an end, that end being the “intensification of the consciousness of self,” as Anti-Climacus puts it—i.e., the ability to truly have faith in God and His forgiveness.¹⁸⁵ This intensification of self allows the self to become open and vulnerable before Christ: “The intensification of the consciousness of the self is the

¹⁸² *JP* 3, 2503 / X² A 30; *JP* 3, 2522 / X³ A 218. The latter section references Kierkegaard’s critique of the lack of Lutheran support of the poor, at least in Kierkegaard’s time. Kierkegaard believed this to be due to the fact that Luther had pointed out that acts of charity are not “the highest good,” since faith in God is the highest good. Kierkegaard agrees with Luther on this matter but points out that even though helping the poor is not “the highest good,” it is nonetheless essential for a Christian life.

¹⁸³ *JP* 3, 2543 / XI² A 301. This section is among Kierkegaard’s most fascinating meditations on the relationship between faith and works. Kierkegaard’s point is that *sola fide* should not be viewed as a norm or dogma but rather an existential orientation available only to those who have undergone an immense amount of spiritual struggle, which would include a certain amount of dedication to “works.” Luther was able to proclaim that works were useless in achieving salvation (especially in relation to the model of meritoriousness of medieval Roman Catholicism) only because he had lived the life of a person completely devoted to serving Christ in and through works. The problem with turning *sola fide* into a religious norm, according to Kierkegaard, is that most people take this to mean that one doesn’t need any struggle or effort in order to be a Christian.

¹⁸⁴ E.g. *JP* 2, 1485 / X⁴ A 419. Also see *JP* 3, 2503 / X² A 30 where Kierkegaard clearly states that he is trying to point the way back towards an emphasis on viewing Christ as a prototype and on the importance of works, but not in order to return to a “medieval” focus on merits, i.e., of human beings being able to somehow secure salvation through their own efforts. Rather, struggle is essential for the Christian life because it is through works that we are able to receive the *gift* of Christ. It is always the gift (grace) that makes our salvation possible, though we are free to deny that gift. Kierkegaard is therefore trying to carve out some kind of middle-way in between the extremes of Luther, on the one hand, and medieval Roman Catholicism, on the other.

¹⁸⁵ *SUD*, 113.

knowledge of Christ, a self directly before Christ.”¹⁸⁶ There is also a concurrent intensification of the consciousness of sin as one becomes open to the gaze of God.¹⁸⁷ The self-abnegation of the self, the “letting go” that occurs in the deepening of resignation and self-awareness (which ultimately is God-awareness), is aimed at allowing the believer to accept God’s forgiveness. And this, Kierkegaard claims, is the absolute *telos* of the human person: To allow God to make us as He is. “The self rests transparently in the power that established it,”¹⁸⁸ writes Anti-Climacus. This transparency reveals the true nature of the human person, his or her true potential. The self that is open to God, writes Kierkegaard, is “illuminated so that it resembles God.”¹⁸⁹

But even though works, striving, and suffering are ultimately a means to an end, insofar as they allow us to become “like God,” to become divinized, the ultimate manifestation of this divinization is the ability to become like Christ, which ultimately means to become love.¹⁹⁰ And this love is not a feeling or a state of mind but rather *the work of love*.¹⁹¹ “Love is the work of love,” Kierkegaard writes, and Christ’s life was this work of love.¹⁹² The notion of love as duty and commandment in *Works of Love* ultimately opens itself up to the notion of the believer *becoming* love through the acquisition of faith.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 113-14.

¹⁸⁸ *SUD*, 14.

¹⁸⁹ “One Who Prays Aright Struggles in Prayer and is Victorious - in that God is Victorious,” *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* (hereafter *EUD*), 399.

¹⁹⁰ Kierkegaard, especially in his journals and in *Works of Love*, uses this language of human beings *becoming* love. Love is not just an action (much less an emotion) but rather an ontological state of being. See *JP* 3, 2447 / XI¹ A 411; *JP* 2, 1411 / X³ A 347.

¹⁹¹ *JP* 3, 2423 / X¹ A 489.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ There are, of course, interesting parallels here between Kierkegaard’s ethics and Aristotelian virtue ethics (or at least, a certain reading of said virtue ethics). See George J. Stack, “Aristotle and Kierkegaard’s Existential Ethics,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 12, no. 1 (1974): 1-19.

Kierkegaard's soteriology offers a fascinating, dialectical back-and-forth between divine grace and human free-will and striving.¹⁹⁴ Kierkegaard obviously believes that divine grace is absolutely essential for human salvation and that it is what empowers us to fulfill our potential and to overcome our brokenness. But human striving is essential for *accepting* this grace, to let it energize us so that we can become who we truly are. God's grace is freely given, but the human person must accept responsibility for this gift. In his journals, Kierkegaard writes:

The fact that grace is free finds its absolutely right expression in the New Testament. An heir has not merit, not the remotest whatsoever. Everything is the bequeather's benefaction to him.

Now if the matter is viewed purely externally, namely, that the heir has the right to do whatever he likes with the inheritance, then the whole thing is taken in vain. In the realm of the spirit—where the inheritance is not something external, and 'faith' therefore is the condition for becoming, for becoming aware that one is *the heir*—it is essential that a person have a relationship of responsibility toward the inheritance. Here, again, is the concept of striving.¹⁹⁵

This notion of a *synergy* between human striving and divine grace is also a core component of Eastern Orthodox theology. I would now like to explore some of these parallels, especially in relation to Kierkegaard's notion that much of this striving has to do with "resignation," a kind of *gelassenheit* of the ego where the person can become "transparent" before God. As Climacus puts it in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, this process of acquiring faith is only possible insofar as one is able to "crucify" one's understanding, i.e., one's attempt to "get it," to achieve holiness and salvation through one's own methods and devices. Similarly, in the *Life of Moses*, Gregory of Nyssa writes:

¹⁹⁴ *JP* 1, 763 / *X*² A 132, where Kierkegaard complains of Christendom having ruined this dialectic by placing grace "too high."

¹⁹⁵ *JP* 1, 984 / *X*² A 224.

“For leaving behind everything that is observed, not only what sense comprehends but also what the intelligence thinks it sees, it keeps on penetrating deeper, until by the intelligence’s yearning for understanding it gains access to the invisible and the incomprehensible, and there it sees God. This is the true knowledge of what is sought; this is the seeing that consists in not seeing.”¹⁹⁶ The resignation of the understanding in faith, described by Johannes de Silentio as the ultimate act of resignation and “the highest passion in a person”¹⁹⁷ ultimately has to do with the self not finding rest in anything earthly, constantly falling deeper into despair as it seeks absolute meaning in finite things. Since neither pleasure (the aesthetic) nor good works fueled entirely by our own efforts (the ethical) can properly provide us with what we seek, we must ascend higher towards the ultimate beauty and meaning, but to do so we must leave behind all elements of the self which we have heretofore relied upon.

There is a distinct Platonic element to Kierkegaard’s writings on the stages of existence, a depiction of an erotic ascent where one attempts to find peace and happiness in different manifestations of the beautiful until one finally arrives at the beautiful itself. In the *Life of Moses*, Gregory of Nyssa echoes this Platonic imagery:

And although lifted up through such lofty experiences, he is still unsatisfied in his desire for more. He still thirsts for that with which he constantly filled himself to capacity, and he asks to attain as if he had never partaken, beseeching God to appear to him, not according to his capacity to partake, but according to God’s true being. Such an experience seems to me to belong to the soul which loves what is beautiful.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ *Life of Moses*, 95.

¹⁹⁷ *F&T*, 122.

¹⁹⁸ *Life of Moses*, 114.

Since despair is ultimately “loss of the eternal,” as Anti-Climacus says,¹⁹⁹ we try to infuse different aspects of our lives with the eternal to achieve peace and happiness. The philistine runs away from despair and is therefore so completely immersed in it that he is not even aware of his own alienation. The aesthete has become aware of despair but can only respond to it by seeking transcendence in pure immediacy, through pleasure, adventure, drink, and drugs. This works for a while but the effects of despair ultimately become heightened yet again as the painful repetition of addictive and self-destructive behaviors settles in, especially given the aesthete’s inability to choose and thereby constitute himself as a person. The ethical person seeks the eternal by living and dying for something greater than herself, yet does so only within the boundaries of what can be seen, understood, and planned out. This could include such diverse activities as starting a family, joining the military, or working for charity. Yet all things that fall within this category can never give us peace since they are ultimately all earthly and finite, while the beauty we seek is absolute. As Gregory of Nyssa writes: “The ardent lover of beauty, although receiving what is always visible as an image of what he desires, yet longs to be filled with the very stamp of the archetype. And the bold request which goes up the mountains of desire asks this: to enjoy the Beauty not in mirrors and reflections, but face to face.”²⁰⁰

This face to face encounter can only come when the individual “ventures everything,”²⁰¹ as Abraham did when he ventured the life of his son Isaac. This is necessary because the *telos* of the human being, according to de Silentio, can only be

¹⁹⁹ *SUD*, 62.

²⁰⁰ *Life of Moses*, 114-115.

²⁰¹ *CUP*, 426.

found in God.²⁰² The spiritual anthropology of Maximus the Confessor similarly emphasizes a human teleology that can only find its rest in God, a rest that comes about through a kind of infinite resignation:

What is not good and lovable in itself, and does not draw all movement toward it simply because it is good and lovable, cannot properly be the beautiful. Such beauty would be incapable of satisfying the desire of those who find delight in it... No created thing then is at rest until it has attained the first and only cause (from which what exists was brought into being) or has possessed the ultimately desirable.²⁰³

For Luther and Augustine, this *telos* could only be fulfilled through the “alien grace” of Christ, enveloping the sinner. The emphasis is entirely on the salvific grace of Christ. On the other end of the spectrum lies an ethics where human action and free will entirely determine the possibility of salvation. Kierkegaard wants to carve out a middle path. He, as I have argued, wanted to develop a spiritual anthropology which respected both human free will as well as maintaining the Lutheran/Augustinian focus on divine grace and spiritual trial (*Anfechtung*). Similarly, Maximus the Confessor developed a theology of salvation which focuses on self-responsibility as self-abnegation:

If the intellectual being is moved intellectually in a way appropriate to itself, it certainly perceives. If it perceives, it certainly loves what it perceives. If it loves, it certainly experiences ecstasy over what is loved. If it experiences ecstasy, it presses on eagerly, and if it presses on eagerly it intensifies its motion; if its motion is intensified, it does not come to rest until it is embraced wholly by the object of its desire. It no longer wants anything from itself, for it knows itself to be wholly embraced, and intentionally and by choice it wholly receives the life giving delamination. When it is wholly embraced it no longer wishes to be embraced at all by itself but is suffused by that which embraces it.²⁰⁴

²⁰² *F&T*, 59.

²⁰³ Ambiguum 7, *On The Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, 47 and 49.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

Crucially, this self-abnegation hinges upon the active *kenosis* or self-emptying of the believer: “Do not be disturbed by what I have said. I have no intention of denying free will. Rather I am speaking of a firm and steadfast disposition, a willing surrender.” In their commentary on *Ambiguum 7*, Blowers and Wilken write: “Maximus wishes to say that when one is firmly attached to the good there is a voluntary transcending of oneself, a giving over of oneself... in which one passes over into the deifying activity of God. In this ‘willing surrender’ free will is not eliminated but reaches its proper end in God.”²⁰⁵

For Kierkegaard, our freedom primarily consists of becoming a self. As Beabout writes: “Freedom means self-actualization. This sense of freedom denotes being oneself, that is, living in right relation to oneself, (and to others), and ultimately also to God.”²⁰⁶ This freedom can only be achieved in and through Christ’s grace, since it is Christ who bridges the unfathomable gap between the human being and God: “It sometimes happens that our eyes turn toward heaven, and we are astonished at the infinite distance, and the eye cannot find a resting place between heaven and earth—but when the eye of the soul seeks God and we feel the infinite distance, then it is a matter of confidence—but here we have a mediator.”²⁰⁷ The movement through the stages of existence enables us to deepen our awareness of anxiety, which in turn allows for a deeper awareness of self, which ultimately leads to an awareness of our position as sinners before God. This awareness at first brings nothing but dizziness and a heightened form of anxiety and despair until the believer makes the leap of faith in the most absolute form of resignation, when she lets go

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 52, n. 19.

²⁰⁶ Beabout, 141.

²⁰⁷ *JP 2*, 1200 / II A 326.

of all attempts at overcoming despair through her own power, self-will or ingenuity and instead becomes transparent, vulnerable and open to the mercy of Christ. The moment (*øjeblik*) where this takes place is a moment of silence and unknowing, of standing face to face with God where our discursive faculties are crucified in self-transcendence.

2. 8 - A Few Words on Essence and Energies

Kierkegaard, in both his journals and the pseudonymous works, goes to great pains to try to overcome the tension so prevalent in the Western Christian tradition between grace and works. He does this, in part, by circumventing the issue of merits, agreeing with Luther that our salvation is never merited but always a free gift from God. But Kierkegaard does not thereby want to agree with Luther (or, at least, the contemporary interpretation of Luther) that this means we are saved by faith alone, irrespective of our own striving. Striving and suffering are essential components of the Christian life because they prepare us to accept grace, which, according to Kierkegaard, is always granted to us through the intercession of the Holy Spirit.²⁰⁸ Kierkegaard's pneumatology indicates another point of contention with what he perceives as a standard account of Christian doctrine in Lutheranism, namely that the acquiring of faith in grace is a one-time thing. Kierkegaard believes that we need grace continually, since we ultimately always fall back into sin, and that this can only be accomplished by opening ourselves up to grace of the Holy Spirit: "Grace is the everlasting fountain—and the Holy Spirit the dispensator, the Comforter."²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ *JP* 2, 1654 / X2 A 451.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

Kierkegaard's concepts of the indwelling of grace, the synergy of divine gift and human effort, and the notion that human beings are able to open themselves up to an experience of divine revelation (of standing "face to face" with God) point to interesting connections between Kierkegaard's soteriology and the theological issue of the essence-energies distinction in Eastern Orthodox thought. I will have much more to say on the epistemological and ontological implications of the essence-energies distinction in later chapters but I would like to conclude this discussion of Kierkegaard's views on sin and salvation with a brief overview of how one could read Kierkegaard's philosophy as hinting at God's presence as a certain kind of *energeia* or activity within the human person, an activity that is made available through the deepening consciousness of sin and despair and the opening up of the human self to the experience of the divine.

According to the Eastern Christian theological viewpoint, dating back to the patristic era, God is completely unknowable in his essence (*ousia*) while he can be known in and through his activities (*energeia*), which effectively *are* God. God is both completely transcendent and absolutely immanent.²¹⁰ From an Eastern Orthodox perspective, the *energeia* described in these passages is not a created effect or some kind of "boost" that God gives to the human person. Rather, it is the manifestation of God

²¹⁰ There is a plethora of literature on the essence/energies distinction. A good introduction to the issue is in Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, pp. 67-91, and Alfeyev, pp. 14-31. See also Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). for a discussion of how the essence/energies distinction can be understood in relation to ancient Greek metaphysics. See also his "The Divine Energies in the New Testament," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 50 (2006): 189-223. This stands in direct contrast to the tradition that originates with Augustine and permeates all of Western Christian thought, both Catholic and Protestant, which differentiates only between the divine substance and created things (God being reducible to His essence). See especially Augustine's *On the Trinity* VII. 1.2. (PL 42 936; NPNF I.3, 106, also V.10.11, VI.7.8, XV.5.7-8, 13.22, 17.29. For a discussion of the debate in the Roman Catholic tradition with regards to divine simplicity and the opposing viewpoint of Eriugena, see H.F. Dondaine, "L'objet et le 'medium' de la vision béatifique chez les théologiens du XIIIe siècle" *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 19 (1952), 60-130; and Dominic J. O'Meara, "Eriugena and Aquinas on the Beatific Vision," in *Eriugena Redivivus*, ed. Werner Beierwaltes (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1987), 224-36.

Himself in and through his activity, namely his love and mercy. The human person, in being “energized” by God, stands before God. Furthermore, it is only in and through the free “striving” of the believer that there is a possibility of the energy being “energized.” This is not to say that human beings can “manufacture” divine revelation, but rather that God is “everywhere present and filling all things,” as one of the prayers of the Eastern Orthodox liturgy puts it. In order to receive this presence, the believer must achieve a certain kind of *kenosis* that allows the human intellect (*nous*) to experience the divine presence.

David Bradshaw has argued that scriptural passages pertaining to the “glory” of God are of special importance in understanding the role of divine revelation in Christian soteriology.²¹¹ Western theology, both Protestant and Catholic, has always viewed these passages as especially problematic given the question of whether or not the divine glory actually *is* God or simply a created effect. Bradshaw and Bogdan Bucur argue that due to the influence of Augustine the Western Christian tradition has interpreted references to divine revelation in scripture as describing created effects, thereby missing important theological elements having to do with the synergy that occurs between God’s divine grace and human free will in these passages.²¹² The Eastern Orthodox tradition, especially in the writings of the Cappadocian fathers, safeguards the view of theophany as a revelation of God’s *energeia*, and provides a more robust view of the divine-human cooperation in salvation. Kierkegaard’s soteriology aligns much more closely with this Eastern view, providing as it does an emphasis on an apophatic encounter with God that

²¹¹ See David Bradshaw, “The Divine Glory and the Divine Energies,” *Faith and Philosophy* 23, no. 3 (2006): 279-298.

²¹² See Bogdan Bucur, “Theophanies and Vision of God in Augustine's De Trinitate: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective,” *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 52, no.1 (2008): 67-93.

is dependent upon the self-responsibility of the human agent but which nonetheless revolves around self-abnegation and the “crucifixion” of discursive reasoning.

Bradshaw outlines several scriptural passages where reference is made to the divine glory.²¹³ He focuses especially on Moses’ encounter with God on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 33:19-23).

Here the divine glory is described as God’s ‘back parts,’ as opposed to His ‘face,’ which no man can see and live. This suggests an answer to our question about whether the divine glory is God. It *both is, and is not*, as a man’s back parts both *are* him, in that they are the part of him seen from behind, and *are not* him, for he cannot be reduced or equated to them. Of course to speak of God’s ‘face’ and ‘back parts’ is a metaphor.²¹⁴

Bradshaw goes on to outline the mention of the glory of God by Jesus at the beginning of chapter 17 of the Gospel of John where it is presented as a *relational* reality. Jesus prays that the glory which has always existed (before the creation of the world) in the relationship of the Father and the Son may become manifest in the relationship Christ has with the disciples (“All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them,” John 17:10). Bradshaw notes how the language in Christ’s prayer not only emphasizes the dynamic and relational aspect of the glory of God but also the way in which it collapses the categories of time and eternity: “This is not simply a matter of temporal events manifesting an eternal reality. Time and eternity here interpenetrate; what is true eternally is true, in part at least, because of what Jesus has accomplished, and what the Father is accomplishing, here and now.”²¹⁵ If we apply this paradigm to

²¹³ “The Divine Glory and the Divine Energies,” 279-280. Passages under consideration are Ex. 16:7, 10; Ex. 24:16-17; Ex. 40:34-35; II Chron. 5:14, 7:1-3; Ezek. 8:4, 9:3, 10:4, 19, 11:22-23; Rev. 21:11, 23. There are also mentions of the glory of God in Pentateuch, Isaiah, and Habbakuk.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 281.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 282.

Kierkegaard's description of despair as a misrelation of the self to itself, which occurs when the opposing poles of time and eternity, finitude and infinitude, are not joined together in the correct manner in "spirit," we can better draw out the elements of Kierkegaard's writings that focus on the self "standing before God" and the indwelling of grace. When the self truly becomes a self, when the human person correctly relates to him or herself, then time and eternity intermingle in such a way that the glory of God, God's love and mercy, permeates all of who we are and what we do. Despair, especially when understood as sin, is a form of groundlessness, a dizzying realization that we stand before the abyss.²¹⁶ To let go of oneself via resignation, to stand naked before "the mirror of the Word," is a way of grounding one's existence. Podmore, summing up Kierkegaard's views on the matter, writes: "By faith's self-surrendering of its own despair, the self realizes that God has hold of it."²¹⁷

Bradshaw also refers to Phil. 2:12-13 where Paul exhorts the faithful to work out their salvation "with fear and trembling:" "For it is God which worketh in you (*ho energon en humin*) both to will and to do (*energein*) of his good pleasure." Bradshaw emphasizes the interplay between the *energeia* of God and human person" "The Philippians are both free agents responsible for their own salvation, and the arena in which God works to bring about that salvation."²¹⁸ Bradshaw also refers to Col. 1:29 where Paul speaks of "striving according to his [Christ's] working, which worketh in me mightily." The Greek focuses on the connection between *energeia* and *energein*. The

²¹⁶ *Works of Love* (hereafter *WOL*), 276.

²¹⁷ *Kierkegaard and the Self before God*, 177.

²¹⁸ "Divine Glory and Images," 282.

passage could therefore be rendered: “Striving according to his energy, which is being energized in me.”²¹⁹

As I have pointed out, Christ’s work, according to Kierkegaard, is always the work of love. Striving according to Christ’s work, striving according to his energy, which is energized in us, is to open ourselves up to God’s love which then flows through us to other people. The trajectory of Kierkegaard’s writings on the stages on life’s way is always oriented towards *kenosis*, openness, and vulnerability, of becoming aware of one’s brokenness and in humility and love accepting that brokenness so that it can be transformed into something very beautiful and perhaps even divine. This “immense passivity, vulnerability and wounded openness,” as George Pattison has put it, stands in stark contrast to most modern or post-modern conceptions of the self, perhaps most significantly with “the post-Enlightenment pursuit of autonomy.”²²⁰ But this conception of the self is, as I have argued, also quite different from most standard Protestant (and orthodox Lutheran) accounts of the self, insofar as it does not view human sin in terms of transgression or guilt nor does it view salvation primarily in terms of justification or atonement. Rather, the view of the human self in Kierkegaard’s works is highly dynamic and developmental, viewing sin as a basic fact of human existence that should be primarily understood in terms of its existential and psychological implications, while salvation is seen in terms of our ability to let go of our ego, of those elements that isolate us from each other and from God. Kierkegaard’s language of the believer “reflecting the image of God” echoes significant elements of Eastern Christian theology and spirituality,

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 283.

²²⁰ George Pattison, “‘Before God’ as a Regulative Concept,” *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 1997*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn and Hermann Deuser (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 84.

especially when considered in relation to the essence-energies distinction, the notion of divinization or *theosis*, and the prevalent soteriology of the East, especially as developed by such writers as Irenaeus and Clement. Kierkegaard's views on prayer are also deeply apophatic and indicate a view of spirituality that bears a striking resemblance to Eastern Orthodox *hesychasm*. In his treatise "One Who Prays Aright Struggles in Prayer and is Victorious" Kierkegaard writes:

Whom should the struggler desire to resemble other than God? But if he himself is something or wants to be something, this something is sufficient to hinder the resemblance. Only when he himself becomes nothing, only then can God illuminate him so that he resembles God. No matter how great he imagines his self to be, he is unable to manifest himself in God's likeness; God can imprint himself in him only when he himself has become nothing.²²¹

Even though there are fundamental differences between Kierkegaard's views on sin and that of the Eastern Orthodox Church (of which I will have more to say in chapter five) a comparative analysis between Kierkegaard and Orthodoxy manages to highlight fascinating elements of Kierkegaard's soteriology that have perhaps not received due attention in the secondary literature. Kierkegaard's philosophy of sin and salvation is remarkably "Eastern" insofar as it highlights many of the elements that became central to the soteriology of the Greek Church. As I have pointed out, this is not due to the fact that Kierkegaard explicitly set out to write a pseudo-Orthodox theology but rather due to his reactionary criticism of Augustine and Luther, especially in relation to sin. In providing an alternative to Augustinian and Lutheran accounts of sin and salvation, Kierkegaard crafted an alternative view that echoes many of the core elements in the teachings of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

²²¹ *EUD*, 399.

Chapter 3 – The Crucifixion and Resurrection of the Understanding: Kierkegaard’s Epistemology in Light of the East

In this chapter I will explore Kierkegaard’s epistemology, especially in light of the ongoing scholarly debate that centers on to the extent to which Kierkegaard believed that human knowledge of God was a possibility. I will highlight certain parallels in Kierkegaard’s epistemology with the epistemological framework that developed in the Christian East to provide a new interpretive framework for understanding Kierkegaard’s philosophy. Much as with Kierkegaard’s writings on sin, his views on human knowledge tend to be interpreted within the boundaries of Western (mostly Augustinian and/or Thomistic) Christianity which, as I will argue, Kierkegaard transgressed in numerous ways. My analysis will center on Kierkegaard’s focus on relational knowledge and its relationship to discursive (“objective”) knowledge. Much of my analysis will engage the recent work done by Marilyn Piety on Kierkegaard’s epistemology. Piety’s book remains the only major English language work to center on this subject.¹

My primary aim in this chapter is twofold: First, to argue that there are important similarities between Kierkegaard’s notion of subjective, relational knowledge and the Greek epistemological term *noesis*, especially as the term is used in Eastern Orthodox epistemological thinking, and second, to show that Kierkegaard’s epistemology makes a clear distinction between positive (kataphatic) and negative (apophatic) knowledge, and

¹ See Marilyn G. Piety, *Ways of Knowing: Kierkegaard’s Pluralist Epistemology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010). The only other works, prior to Piety’s, to focus entirely on Kierkegaard’s epistemology are: Anton Hügli, *Die Erkenntnis der Subjektivität und die Objektivität des Erkennens bei Søren Kierkegaard* (Zürich: Editio Academia, 1973); and Martin Slotty, “Die Erkenntnislehre S.A. Kierkegaards,” (dissertation, Friedrich-Alexanders-Universität, 1915).

that he believes that knowledge of God is largely negative. I will explore the difference between the Eastern Orthodox and Western Christian (Protestant and Roman Catholic) understanding of the terms kataphatic and apophatic and argue that Kierkegaard's position is much more in alignment with the Eastern Orthodox understanding of negative theology.

I will begin the chapter by giving a brief overview of Piety's analysis of subjective and objective knowledge in Kierkegaard's epistemology. Section 3.1 will include a discussion of the Kierkegaardian categories of passion and interest (*Lidenskab* and *Interesse*). Section 3.2 will then offer a brief "interlude" in the analysis to address an important issue in the overall scheme of this project, namely to what extent the Kierkegaardian notion of "passionate inwardness" and the ancient Christian teaching of *apatheia* are either diametrically opposed or spiritually concomitant. I will indeed be arguing that Kierkegaard's view of passionate inwardness is not a reference to any sort of emotional fervor but rather a state of clearing away the conceptual thought-processes that make us unable to enter into communion with other human beings and with God. Following this interlude, I will resume my discussion of Kierkegaard's epistemology per se and move on to a comparative analysis of Kierkegaard's views on knowledge and the ancient Greek epistemological distinction between the faculties of *nous* and *dianoia* in section 3.4. I will then move on to a more in-depth analysis of subjective knowledge in Kierkegaard, focusing on his use of the Danish words *Erkjendelse* and *Viden* in section 3.5. The former word denotes "acquaintance knowledge," only available to us as existing individuals, while the latter refers to objective knowledge. Following this section is another interlude, section 3.6, this time devoted to a comparative analysis of

Kierkegaard's views on knowing and the *Logos* theology of Maximus the Confessor. The reason for this second interlude is that Kierkegaard seems to suggest, in various places throughout the corpus, that knowledge of God and self-knowledge are two sides of the same coin. In doing so Kierkegaard hints at a peculiar kind of essentialism that can, at first glance, seem out of place in his existentialist philosophy. A comparison with Maximus reveals that Kierkegaardian "authenticity" can be fruitfully read as a reference to an "essential self" but that this essential self is grounded in the individual *hypostasis* of the person rather than in any sort of universal nature. Section 3.7 focuses on the role of suffering in Kierkegaard's epistemology and section 3.8 looks at to what extent Kierkegaard can be viewed as an "apophatic" thinker. This last section will largely be devoted to offering a critique of Piety's analysis of Kierkegaard and will offer an alternative way to understand what Kierkegaard means by knowledge of God.

3.1 - Kierkegaardian Consciousness and *Interesse* / Subjective and Objective

Knowledge

Piety argues that "there are several kinds of knowledge according to Kierkegaard and that they can be divided into two basic sorts: 'objective knowledge (*den objective Viden*)' and 'subjective knowledge (*den subjective Viden*).'"² Objective knowledge is a purely descriptive sort of knowledge that is "not essentially related to the existence of the individual knower."³ Subjective knowledge is "essentially related to the existence of the individual knower."⁴ An example of objective knowledge would be knowledge gained

² Piety, 3. See also *CUP*, 169.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

through the natural sciences while any kind of ethical or religious knowledge would be an example of subjective knowledge, i.e., knowledge that has to do with how one lives one's life.

Piety further subdivides each kind of knowledge into two categories: Objective knowledge can be knowledge "in the strict sense" or knowledge "in a looser sense." The former has to do with "formal certainty" while the latter has to do with "probability rather than certainty."⁵ Subjective knowledge is divided into "subjective knowledge proper," on the one hand, which is associated with "certitude, or psychological certainty," and "pseudo-knowledge," which refers to "a subject's intellectual grasp of propositions that are essentially prescriptive but whose substance is not reflected in the existence of the 'knower.'"⁶ The category of "pseudo-knowledge" is especially interesting since it denotes a kind of "hypocrisy" or inauthenticity, a purported grasping of ethical or religious truths that nonetheless do not affect the individual self.

Before digging deeper into these distinctions, it is important to analyze Kierkegaard's view of consciousness that grounds his epistemology. In *The Sickness Unto Death*, Anti-Climacus writes that "generally speaking, consciousness—that is, self-consciousness—is decisive with regard to the self. The more consciousness, the more self."⁷ Interestingly enough, the development of consciousness parallels the growing acuteness of anxiety in the self. As discussed in the previous chapter, Adam and Eve in paradise, according to Kierkegaard, before eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, had a consciousness which was, at least to some extent, like that of a child. It is

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *SUD*, 29.

only after appropriating the possibility of sin, of the concurrent repulsion and attraction that accompanies freedom, that the human self begins to truly develop (i.e., truly becomes a proper self). This also makes the self vulnerable to the possibility of despair. In *Johannes Climacus*, the consciousness of a child (and non-human animals), an “immediate” consciousness that has “doubt outside of itself,”⁸ is characterized in the following manner: “It consists of the data that is presented directly to the sensate self independently of how that data are interpreted or understood. The immediate is that which is ‘given’ directly to the self by the self’s sensory engagement with the world; it is that which the self, quite independently of its volition, receives.”⁹

As with all of Kierkegaard’s writing on the self, it is important to keep in mind that Kierkegaard is always aiming to understand every aspect of human existence, including consciousness, within a dynamic spectrum rather than using fixed categories. The person described in *The Sickness Unto Death* who despairs because he refuses to acknowledge he is in despair¹⁰ is in a state of pure immediacy because he refuses to acknowledge that he has an eternal self to despair over. The aesthete—the self that Anti-Climacus describes as falling under the category of “despair in weakness”—has come to realize that he is a self but is failing to fully manifest that self and therefore seeks an authentic existence in the earthly (or in something earthly).¹¹ Subsequent forms of despair, and the deepening authentication of the self throughout the ethico-religious stages of existence, show a concomitant change in consciousness where the self develops

⁸ *JC*, 168.

⁹ Patrick Stokes, “‘Interest’ in Kierkegaard’s Structure of Consciousness,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 48, no. 4, issue 192 (2008): 438.

¹⁰ *SUD*, 42-47.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 49-60.

from a childish/animal-like consciousness which deals directly with sense-data and instinct to an adult (spiritually developed) consciousness which deciphers sense-data as experience or event, i.e., as mediated by consciousness and self-consciousness.

It is important to note that even though Climacus speaks of an “increase” of consciousness, existentially speaking, there is no way for a human being, even a very young child, to experience reality in a way that is not mediated by consciousness. Consciousness is the conceptually ordered medium by which human beings experience reality: “While Climacus does take the concept of raw sensibilia seriously, he nonetheless holds that experience is not *prior to* our conceptualization but rather that experience *is* conceptualization; *all* our experience is always already conceptually structured.”¹² But Kierkegaard’s aim is not to analyze this conceptual structure in an abstract manner, like Kant does with the Categories. Rather, he seeks to understand how the lived experience of the individual, and the different structures of the existential self, allow human beings to appropriate reality in different ways. Patrick Stokes, in his study of consciousness in Kierkegaard, writes: “Neither immediacy nor mediacy can intelligibly exist independently, but they are rather always already present in any instantiation of consciousness. [...] So consciousness, according to the formulation of *Johannes Climacus*, is the ‘collision’ of immediacy and mediacy, or as he then puts it, the collision of reality and ideality.”¹³

¹² Stokes, 440.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 441. A detailed analysis of the incongruence between the ideal and actual falls somewhat outside the boundaries of this project, though it will be discussed in an ancillary manner throughout this chapter. Kierkegaard usually refers to “actual being” with the Danish words *Tilværelsen*, *Væren*, and *Realitet*. Actual being primarily denotes temporality and change. As Piety points out, “mathematical objects [for Kierkegaard], have *ideal* being, but they do not have *actual* being. The being of mathematical objects is purely abstract, which is to say that it is timeless and eternal” (p. 26). Furthermore, Kierkegaard differentiates between “factual being” (*faktisk Væren*) and “ideal being” (*ideel Væren*). Piety notes that factual being refers to “the

In *Johannes Climacus* Kierkegaard writes: “Ideality and reality therefore collide—in what medium? In time? That is indeed an impossibility. In eternity? That is indeed an impossibility. In what then? In consciousness, there is the contradiction.”¹⁴ We can see that consciousness is where the synthesis of the opposing but correlative poles of existence occurs, as Anti-Climacus explains in *The Sickness Unto Death*.¹⁵ Consciousness is where time and eternity, finitude and infinitude, collide.¹⁶ But it is only in a certain kind of consciousness where this can occur, namely a self-consciousness (*Bevidsthed*).¹⁷ As *Johannes Climacus* makes clear, human consciousness is a “triad.”¹⁸ “The triad here consists of the sensory impression, the consciousness of the sensory

being of everything that has reality in itself and not simply as an idea” (p. 21). This distinction is most clearly outlined by Climacus in the *Fragments* in the critique of Spinoza’s ontological proof for the existence of God (*Fragments*, 41-42). The problem with the ontological proof is that it circumvents the problem of talking about whether or not God exists, the difficulty of which is to “grasp factual being and to bring God’s ideality into factual being” (p. 42).

As will become clear in the following discussion, Kierkegaard’s point is to undermine the Hegelian notion that ideality and actuality, mediacy and immediacy, somehow map onto each other. Human beings always experience reality conceptually, to some extent. There is no way for us to experience reality as it “truly” is, i.e., as apart from consciousness. This is not just an epistemological point but rather an existential/ethical/spiritual one as it has immense implications for the way in which we try to relate to God. Climacus, for example, asserts that the truths of science (speculation) are always just an approximation (*CUP*, 159). As Hannay notes, a “proof” for Kierkegaard is therefore always associated “with psychological rather than factual or logical certainty” (Hannay, 138-39).

See Gregor Malantschuk, *Nøglegreber I Søren Kierkegaards Tænkning*, ed. Grethe Kjær and Paul Müller (Copenhagen: Reitzels Forlag, 1993), 210-12.

¹⁴ *JC*, 171.

¹⁵ *SUD*, 29-30.

¹⁶ This is not to say that to have a consciousness is the same as having “Spirit,” i.e. having an authentic relation to oneself where the poles of existence are correctly synthesized. One’s consciousness must be aligned in a certain way in order for this to happen. The purpose of this chapter is to map out how Kierkegaard thinks this is possible. Kierkegaard’s epistemology is therefore deeply intertwined with his “psychology,” i.e., his writings on despair, sin, and the possible responses to these conditions.

¹⁷ Stokes writes that the Danish word “refers more explicitly to the ‘awareness of awareness,’ i.e., self-reflexive consciousness, than its English or German equivalents do. Stokes references Elrod on this. See John W. Elrod, *Being and Existence in Kierkegaard’s Pseudonymous Works* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1975), 50. In addition, it is worth remarking that the verb *vide* means “to know” while *bevidsthed* means “awareness” or “consciousness.” Interestingly, there is no distinction made in the Danish between consciousness and self-consciousness, i.e., self-awareness. To be conscious *of something* means to be conscious of oneself (being conscious of the thing in question). The most immediate translation of “self-conscious” into Danish would be *genert* or *forlagen*, as in “shy.”

¹⁸ *JC*, 169.

impression (thus its translation into ideality), and the *I* that holds these together.”¹⁹ As Stokes points out, the “I” posits itself in relation to the mis-relation of the ideal and the actual, which is what creates doubt. C. Stephen Evans furthermore writes that the “I” is not only the “event” of this dichotomy (the real and the ideal) being put into a dynamic relation but that it is furthermore the “event” of moving past them, meaning that the individual consciousness enables reflection (and hence doubt) but that it also enables us to put a halt to reflection and to make a decision.²⁰

Kierkegaard’s examination of consciousness differs a great deal from a Cartesian or Kantian analysis of consciousness. As Schrag points out, Kierkegaard’s intention is to analyze “a pre-cognitive level of experience which undercuts the subject-object dichotomy and which is characterized by an existential intentionality... Kierkegaard speaks of the priority of the ethically existing self over the thinking self.”²¹ In *Johannes Climacus* this is expressed in the identification of consciousness with interest (*interesse*): “Reflection is the possibility of the relation. This can also be stated as follows: Reflection is *disinterested*. Consciousness, however, is the relation and thereby is interest, a duality that is perfectly and with pregnant double meaning expressed in the word ‘interest (*interesse* [being between]).’”²² Note that this means that for Kierkegaard, ideality (*Idealitet*) denotes not just the conceptual framework by which we experience reality but also the value-laden *interesse* that directs that consciousness. Stokes, arguing against Roberts and Westphal, argues that it is important to demarcate between interest and

¹⁹ Stokes, 443.

²⁰ C. Stephen Evans, “Where There’s a Will There’s a Way: Kierkegaard’s Theory of Action,” in *Writing the Politics of Difference*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), 5-33.

²¹ Craig O. Schrag, *Existence and Freedom* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1961), 22.

²² *JC*, 170.

passion (*lidenskab*) in this regard.²³ Interest is the essential characteristic of human consciousness. We cannot help but be interested in the world around us. We are not pure reflection, nor could we ever be. The purported “objective” analysis of the Hegelian scholar or the scientist is ultimately a ruse. “Interest is a characteristic of *vision*, a *seeing* of our relationship to what we see. Interest here constitutes the non-neutrality of the conscious subject, not simply in its reflection, but in its *apprehension*. We see the world as already value-laden.”²⁴ Even though reflection is a necessary condition of consciousness, we always reach a point where we existentially engage with that which we reflect upon, which ultimately means making a *decision*: “[To choose is] becoming decisively interested. It is allowing one’s interest or attraction to win out, to take precedence, i.e. to engage us decisively.”²⁵ The scientist or scholar who takes up a position of disinterested analysis takes up that position *as if* it is humanly possible to view reality in a purely objective manner, even though it is not.

It must be repeatedly emphasized that Kierkegaard is not arguing against scientific/Hegelian/scholarly analysis per se. He is, rather, trying to point out the limits of such an endeavor, both due to the fact that such a method can never give us absolute

²³ Stokes, 450-452. See Robert C. Roberts, “Passion and Reflection,” in *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Two Ages*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1984), 88. See also Merold Westphal, *Becoming a Self: A Reading of Kierkegaard’s Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1996), 51.

²⁴ Stokes, 453. See also M. Jaime Ferreira, *Transforming Vision: Imagination and Will in Kierkegaardian Faith* (Oxford UK: Clarendon Press, 1991), 125-26.

²⁵ Ferreira, 127. The connection between interest and desire is never explicitly developed by Kierkegaard but it is an underlying theme of the pseudonymous works. The analysis of sin and despair in *The Concept of Anxiety* and *The Sickness Unto Death* shows that our interested engagement with the world is often heavily influenced by our desires. The aesthete, for example, engages with the world in a highly interested manner (as opposed to the speculative thinker) but this interest is largely dominated by his desires, many of which fail to provide any satisfaction. The development through the ethico-religious stages shows how our interest can be directed towards things that provide us with more lasting peace and satisfaction than what we seek in the aesthetic sphere. This primarily has to do with our growing awareness of the absolute-telos that is an essential element of what it means to be human i.e., the fact that this world will never fully satisfy us.

certainty, even though it may sometimes seem to do so, and also because it betrays the existential intentionality that grounds all human thinking and understanding. The scientist must ultimately make an interested decision in her analysis since reality can only be understood in terms of probability and not certainty, since the ideal and the actual can never map onto each other perfectly.

Interest, therefore, is always a part of consciousness, even in so-called “disinterested” thinking. Passion, on the other hand, can be entirely lacking in our engagement with the world. Passion is the full awareness of interest, the appropriation of it, where our solicitude for the world around us becomes a part of an authentic existence, a taking up of the mantle of understanding the world in a manner that is fully engaged with it. A passionate engagement with the world (which ultimately means a passionate engagement with our own self) is authentic insofar as it is true to the *telos* of our consciousness: “Thought that is pervaded by a non-thetic sense of self-involvement is truer to the self’s status as a concrete being that finds itself ‘between’ ideality and actuality than disinterested thought that never refers back to the condition of the thinker.”²⁶ Again it is worth remind ourselves that even though Kierkegaard clearly views a lack of passionate engagement with the world as inauthentic and potentially dangerous, spiritually speaking, he nonetheless clearly believed that the “disinterested” point of view could be a fruitful one,²⁷ at least in certain circumstances. That being said, Kierkegaard’s concern about the inauthentic nature of the (supposedly) disinterested stance is not just

²⁶ Stokes, 457-58. Notice again the play of “interest” in the Danish *interesse* (literally *inter-esse*, the act of being in-between reality and ideality).

²⁷ See *JP* 1, 197 / IV C 100, where Kierkegaard suggests that the various sciences should be “ordered according to the different ways in which they accent being and how the relationship to being provides reciprocal advantage.” In a later journal entry, though, Kierkegaard suggests that there is an inherent danger in *all* scientific (disinterested) thinking, claiming that “In the end all corruption will come from the natural sciences” (*JP* 3, 2809 / VII¹ A 186).

epistemological but rather ethical/religious. In his study of Kierkegaard and Paul Feyerabend, Ian James Kidd writes:

Both argue that ‘scientific’ objectivity is not just philosophically incoherent but also detrimental to human wellbeing, since it radically devalues human capacities for self-development. This is why Feyerabend expresses alarm at the devaluation of ‘personal connections,’ and why he echoes Kierkegaard’s warning that our ‘activity as an objective observer of nature’ will diminish our capacity to be a ‘human being.’²⁸

The connection in Kierkegaard’s writings between ethics and epistemology arise from his view that an authentic existence largely hinges upon self-knowledge. The combined force of *The Sickness Unto Death* and *The Concept of Anxiety* describes an increase in self-consciousness which empowers the human being to increasingly face despair and to potentially overcome it. When the scientist or (“Hegelian”) scholar takes on the position of a disinterested observer *as if* this was an actual possibility they are, in effect, taking on a position which is essentially dehumanizing and inauthentic to the human condition (given the fact that all human consciousness is interested and inextricably bound up with a *lidenskab* which engages with the world in a personal manner). Even though there may be obvious advantages to this point of view insofar as it allows us to further develop technology and affords us an understanding about our place in the natural world, it is nonetheless fraught with danger, especially as it ceases to be viewed as a performative act which stands in opposition to our “natural” engagement with the world and becomes an all-encompassing, totalizing manner of knowing and seeing. In *The Concluding Unscientific Postscript* Climacus writes that the objective

²⁸ Ian James Kidd, “Objectivity, abstraction, and the individual: The influence of Soren Kierkegaard on Paul Feyerabend,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 42 (2011): 126.

scientist/scholar “disappears from himself”²⁹ and that this disappearance threatens to become the default mode by which human beings attempt to understand themselves and the world around them: “To be a human being has been abolished, and every speculative thinker confuses himself with humankind.”³⁰

3.2 - Orthodox Writings on Consciousness and Thinking

Before further exploring Kierkegaard’s epistemology, especially his writings on subjective knowledge, I would like to begin to map out important ways in which the Eastern Orthodox spiritual tradition parallels many of the primary philosophical issues at stake in Kierkegaard’s writings on knowledge. A great deal of Orthodox spiritual thought is focused on the distinction made in ancient Greek epistemology between discursive, systematic thinking (*dianoia*) and an intuitive grasp of first principle (*noesis*). The distinction is famously made in the divided line passage in Plato’s *Republic* (505a - 511e) and is further developed in Aristotle’s *De Anima*, especially the notorious III.4 and III.5. For Plato and Aristotle, *dianoia* denotes discursive, systematic thinking, which encompasses what Plato calls “mathematicals” (510b-511e), where the soul is “forced to investigate from hypotheses, proceeding not to a first principle but to a conclusion. [...]” *Noesis*, on the other hand, proceeds “from a hypothesis but without the images used in the previous subsection, using forms themselves and making its investigation through them.” *Noesis* grasps first principles in a direct, intuitive manner. Given that these first principles are the forms (*eidei*) of reality, *nous* is an experiential faculty, which allows for an immediate apprehension of the highest spiritual realities. Seeing as how the divided

²⁹ *CUP*, VII, 42, 56.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, VII, 102, 124.

line maps onto the cave allegory, the philosophers, trained in dialectic, are able to see reality for what it truly is without the use of any “shadows,” i.e. images, theories, or systematic attempts at rationally analyzing reality.

Though it falls outside the scope of this project to fully address the extent to which Plato and Aristotle are referring to what might be called a “mystical” apprehension of reality, this is certainly the way in which the Eastern Christian tradition understood this terminology. The writings of Gregory of Nyssa and Evagrius Ponticus form some of the earliest attempts at systematically appropriating this epistemological distinction and relating it to the specific religious and philosophical context of Christian revelation. Nyssa especially emphasized the notion of the *nous* as constituting the unity of human consciousness, likening it to ineffable nature of the godhead.³¹ Nyssa furthermore emphasizes the connection of the *nous* to the body and the way in which the body and the spiritual intellect must be harmonized in order for the believer to acquire true wisdom, i.e. knowledge of God.³² This is the beginning of a long epistemological tradition in the Christian East, which emphasizes the relationship between the *nous* and the figurative as well as literal imagery of the human “heart,” which represents both the physical and spiritual center of the human person.³³ The object of mystical prayer is to center the *nous* in the heart and to overcome the influx of distracting thoughts and emotions (*logismoi*).

³¹ Gregory of Nyssa, “Making of Man”, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 5, accessed 8/24/2015, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2914.htm>, 10 [152-153] and 11 [153-156]

³² Nyssa, “Great Catechism,” 8[33], “Making of Man,” 12-15 [160-177], “Soul and Resurrection” [45-48].

³³ The function of the *nous* as it enters the heart in the Eastern Orthodox tradition is to enable us to have knowledge (or awareness) of a person rather than a form or essence. As I will illustrate in section 3.5, such relational knowledge is a central aspect of Kierkegaard’s epistemology. This theme will also be revisited in section 4.2 in chapter 4. For now, my goal is to focus on the importance of the *nous/dianoia* distinction in relation to Kierkegaard’s critique of the kind of speculative thinking that wants to reduce human knowing to dianoetic reasoning.

St. Neilos the Ascetic, a fifth century contemplative writer, notes the *nous/dianoia* distinction in his *Ascetic Discourse*: “The intellect (*nous*) in each of us resides within like a king, while the reason (*dianoia*) acts as door-keeper of the senses. When the reason occupies itself with bodily things... the enemy without difficulty slips past unnoticed and slays the intellect.”³⁴

Epistemology in Eastern Orthodox thought is also directly linked to the development of the human *psyche* and to specific spiritual practices such as asceticism and prayer. This is especially apparent in the writings of Gregory of Nyssa, who understood the concept of *nous* not only in epistemological terms but also as having enormous ethical and existential implications. In his analysis of Nyssa’s writings, Donald L. Ross writes:

There are two further characteristics of the human *nous* according to Gregory. First, because the human *nous* is created in the image of God, it possesses a certain ‘dignity of royalty’ (*to tes basileias axioma*) that is lacking in the rest of creation. For it means that there is an aspect of the human person that is not of this world. Of no other organism can that be said. The souls of other species are totally immanent in their bodies. They have only energies, in other words. Only the human *nous* has a transcendent nature in addition to its energies. But that more than anything else is what makes us like God. Now God is of supreme worth. Consequently human beings have an inherent ‘dignity of royalty’ just by virtue of being human.

Second, the *nous* is free. In an early work Gregory argues strenuously against astral determinism. In his more mature reflections, Gregory derives the freedom of the *nous* from the freedom of God. For God, being dependent on nothing, governs the universe through the free exercise of will; and the *nous* is created in God’s image.³⁵

³⁴ *Philokalia*, St. Neilos the Ascetic, “Ascetic Discourse,” in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, Vol. I, 210. For a discussion of the translation of *nous* and *dianoia* and their respective meanings in the context of the *Philokalia*, see 362 and 364.

³⁵ Donald L. Ross., “Gregory of Nyssa,” *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed: 8/8/2014, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/gregoryn/>. See *Patrologia Graeca*, Vols. 44-46, 132-36 and 145-73.

Evagrius Ponticus, similarly, sees the *nous* as representing the ultimate *telos* of the human person, namely the “communion of the intellect with God.”³⁶ Some commentators have wanted to argue that a split occurs in early Eastern mysticism in the Christian church between writers who focus on the role of the intellect (*nous*) in communion with God and those who focus on the role of the heart.³⁷ Others, such as Kallistos Ware, see the two as being intrinsically connected. Ware argues that in texts such as the “Macarian Homilies,” which emphasize the role of the *kardia* in the relationship between human beings and God, the heart does not simply represent the affective elements of the human person but rather “the moral and spiritual centre of the human person considered as an integral unity; it is the seat not only of the feelings but of intelligence, conscience and wisdom.”³⁸ Ware also emphasizes the fact that in *dianoia* “the thinker is conscious of the object of his thought as being ‘other than himself, but in *noesis* the subject-object distinction disappears, and the *nous* is identified with that which it apprehends. *Dianoia* admits of error, but *noesis* does not.”³⁹

The Eastern Orthodox writings on the *nous* and how it is differentiated from systematic thinking is well summed up by Kallistos Ware:

With his soul (*psyche*) man engages in scientific or philosophical inquiry, analyzing the data of his sense-experience by means of the discursive reason. With his spirit (*pneuma*), which is sometimes termed *nous* or spiritual intellect, he understands eternal truth about God or about the *logoi* or inner essences of created things, not through deductive reasoning, but by direct apprehension or spiritual perception—by a kind of intuition that St Isaac the Syrian calls ‘simple cognition.’ The spirit or spiritual

³⁶ Evagrius, “On Prayer,” *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Vol. 1*, 57.

³⁷ Irénée Hauser, “Les Grands Courants de la Spiritualité orientale,” *Orientalia Christiania Periodica*, I (1935): 121-28.

³⁸ Kallistos Ware, “Nous and Noesis in Plato, Aristotle and Evagrius of Pontus,” *Diotima* 13 (1985): 159.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 160.

intellect is thus distinct from man's reasoning powers and his aesthetic emotions, and superior to both of them.⁴⁰

In the previous chapter, I outlined the ways in which Kierkegaard's understanding of human freedom and the development of the self connect to his understanding of sin and salvation. If we situate Kierkegaard's philosophical and theological concerns as paralleling those of Eastern Orthodox writers, we can now see how these issues all interrelate with Kierkegaard's highly nuanced epistemology. The *kenosis* described by Anti-Climacus in *The Sickness Unto Death* where the self stands "transparent before God" is perhaps not best understood in terms of an irrationalism or extreme skepticism but rather as a description of a kind of *noesis* where the self stands naked before "the mirror of the Word."⁴¹

There are good reasons to view Kierkegaard's epistemology as a continuation of the patristic project. As previously stated, Kierkegaard's view of human consciousness is triadic, i.e., consisting of the object of our experience, the consciousness of that object and the "I" that holds these together (or rather, holds the misrelation of these two things together). As Evans points out in his contention that the "I" also constitutes the "event" by which this misrelation is "overcome,"⁴² Kierkegaard saw our engagement with the world as an immersive one. The "dispassionate," analytic reasoning of the systematic thinker holds subject and object apart, thereby killing all passionate engagement with the object in question. Yet passionate engagement is essential when it comes to ethical and religious categories, which means that the division between subject and object must be

⁴⁰ Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 48.

⁴¹ *JP* 4, 3902 / *X⁴* A 412; *SUD*, p. 79.

⁴² See Evans, 5-33.

broken down. The reality of the ethical/religious cannot be analyzed or systematized but must rather be lived. The reason for why passion is so integrally connected to the ethical and religious is that these subjective categories—which have to do with our “inwardness,” i.e., our lived, individual reality—ultimately correspond to objective uncertainty. As Climacus writes in the *Postscript*:

*An objective uncertainty, held fast through appropriation with the most passionate inwardness, is the truth, the highest truth there is for an existing person. At the point where the road swings off (and where that is cannot be stated objectively, since it is precisely subjectivity), objective knowledge is suspended. Objectively he then has only uncertainty, but this is precisely what intensifies the infinite passion of inwardness, and truth is precisely the daring venture of choosing the objective uncertainty with the passion of the infinite.*⁴³

It is precisely because the truths of existing individuals, i.e., subjective truths, are *not certain* that we feel passionately about them. If God’s existence could be objectively proved, we would not feel one way or another about the fact that God either does or does not exist (whichever the case would be). As Climacus points out: “In a mathematical proposition, for example, the objectivity is given, but therefore its truth is also an indifferent truth.”⁴⁴ Subjective truth differs from objective truth primarily in the way that it can deeply affect who we are as human beings. Truths of logic and mathematics have no bearing, on the other hand, on who we are as *individuals*.⁴⁵ Ethical and religious truths, on the other hand, shape our understanding of ourselves and thereby shape how we choose to live in the world. This is why the truths of ethics and religion must be *ventured*.

⁴³ *CUP*, 203.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 204.

⁴⁵ This is not to say that they don’t provide us with important information. They simply provide to tell us anything about the *self*, i.e., who *I* am and what it means to live *my* life.

They involve a risk, precisely because we *could be wrong*. A good example of this is when our partner in a romantic relationship tells us for the first time that he or she loves us. When the woman who is now my wife told me for the first time that she loved me I was terrified because I had to respond, and my response would reflect something fundamental about *who* I am as a human being. But there was no way for me to objectively know whether or not I loved her or if she, in fact, actually loved me. There is no formula, equation, or system that can reveal such truths. This is why speculation must be brought to a halt by our self-awareness, the awareness of the “I” that is the “event” (to use Evans’ term) of our consciousness. There is no absolute, precise, sure answer to love, or to any ethical/religious truth, for that matter. This is why we must resign ourselves to the fact that there is no objective truth that applies in such a scenario and instead turn towards inwardness, passion, and subjective truth.

3.3 - Interlude: Passion in Kierkegaard and Eastern Orthodoxy

Before continuing with my analysis of how the *nous/dianoia* distinction in Eastern Orthodoxy relates to Kierkegaard’s epistemology I would like to address the concept of passion(s) in Kierkegaard’s philosophy and the Eastern Orthodox tradition.⁴⁶ In some ways, Kierkegaard’s *lidenskab* resembles the use of *pathē* as it is used in the Greek philosophical tradition and its later appropriation in the Christian tradition, i.e., as denoting emotion and desire. Yet there are also important differences between the two. It is especially important to have conceptual clarity in the case of these terms since

⁴⁶ Portions of this section were originally developed in a paper submitted for a class on Monastic Theology at Marquette University in the fall of 2009. I owe a debt of gratitude to Bishop Alexander Golitzin for his comments and insights during the course.

lidenskab is an essential element of not only Kierkegaard's epistemology but his entire philosophy, and *apatheia* is a core spiritual principle in the Eastern Orthodox tradition. On the face of it, it might seem that Kierkegaard's call for "passionate inwardness" contradicts the Eastern Orthodox notion of "passionlessness," of overcoming our unruly desires and emotions. I will argue that this is not necessarily the case. There is an important strain of thought in the Eastern Orthodox tradition that holds that *apatheia*, correctly understood, does not mean overcoming the passions (our desires and emotions) but rather transfiguring them in a way that allows us to direct them towards communion and love rather than selfish gratification. I will argue that the same ethical dimension informs Kierkegaard's notion of *lidenskab*, especially when it is understood in light of the "stages on life's way."

The Stoic concept of *apatheia* has a long history in Christian spirituality, dating back to the first century with Ignatius of Antioch who used the concept to describe Christ himself.⁴⁷ It was later appropriated by Clement of Alexandria and subsequently by the developing monastic tradition in the fourth century.⁴⁸ The use of the concept met with some resistance, especially in the Western part of the church, with Jerome critiquing Evagrius' use of the term and Cassian choosing to replace it with the concept "purity of heart."⁴⁹ *Apatheia* nonetheless gained increasing popularity in Christian literature. A prime reason for this may have been the fact that a core component of the Stoic use of the word was its relation to *askesis*. *Apatheia* was considered to be a *techné*, the art of living

⁴⁷ Ignatius of Antioch, *The Epistles of St Clement of Rome and St Ignatius of Antioch*, trans. James A. Kleist (Westminster: The Newman Bookshop, 1946), 63.

⁴⁸ John McGuckin, "Apatheia," in *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology*, 18.

⁴⁹ See C. Joest, "Die Bedeutung von acedia und apatheia bei Evagrius Pontikos," *Studia Monastica*, 35 (1993): 7-53; Antoine Guillaumont, *Les "Kephalalaia Gnostica" d'Evagre le Pontique et l'histoire de l'origenisme chez les Grec et les Syriens* (Paris: Editions Du Seuil, 1962).

one's life in a way that most conducive to *eudaimonia*.⁵⁰ *Apatheia* was juxtaposed with purely abstract, metaphysical concepts that were in and of themselves not conducive to happiness. Zeno, whose primary philosophical influence was Socrates, saw philosophy as a way of life and *apatheia* as a core component of the philosophical path.⁵¹ *Apatheia* revolved around the ability to address our incorrect responses to external circumstances over which we have no control. The Stoics did not believe that human beings could achieve a state of complete passionlessness, i.e. of being completely immutable or unmoved by external reality, but rather that we could overcome our enslavement to emotional states that often seem out of our control. Human beings are able to control their passions because they have reason (*logos*) which is the mark of the divine in them.⁵² Stoic theology and anthropology were deeply intertwined, with human happiness primarily understood in terms of our ability to form a blessed (*makaria*) relationship with the divine. The *telos* of human existence is therefore to align the human *logos* with the divine *Logos* that permeates the universe, a state of being that the Stoics described as being "in accordance with nature" (*kata phusin*).⁵³

As Christian writers began using the concept more seriously, especially following the influence of Clement, *apatheia* began to evolve from its Stoic origins. A primary element of this evolution was the Christian emphasis that the state of *apatheia* was not one where emotions and desire were extinguished⁵⁴ but rather as a state where harmony is

⁵⁰ See John Sellars, *Stoicism* (UK: Acumen Publishing Ltd., 2006), 27-30.

⁵¹ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives and Opinions of the Philosophers*, ed. Tiziano Dorandi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 7.2-3.

⁵² Willem S. Vorster, *Speaking of Jesus: Essays on Biblical Language, Gospel Narrative and the Historical Jesus*, ed. Botha, J. Eugene (Boston: Brill, 1999), 116.

⁵³ Sellars, *Stoicism*, 81-106.

⁵⁴ As previously noted, this was also not the case for the majority of Stoic writers, though the concept was often mischaracterized in this way, especially by critics such as Jerome. See n. 47 above.

achieved between the affective faculties and the human *nous*. In his introduction to Evagrius' *Praktikos*, John Baumberger writes: "Clement does not go so far as to convey that all emotion is extinguished in the man who possesses this state of harmony. Rather, he sees it as the full possession, under the influence of divine contemplation, of the affective faculties, so that disordered passions are resolved into a state of abiding calm."⁵⁵

Clement also made an important contribution to the Christian appropriation of *apatheia* when he coupled the concept with *agape*. Clement saw *apatheia* as being a form of *kenosis* where the ego-self is transcended and the true self of the human person materializes in her relationship with God. *Apatheia*, for Clement, was an essential component in contemplation, deification, and the union of the human soul with God.⁵⁶

Evagrius Pontikos combined elements of Clement's use of the term with elements of Origen. For Evagrius, *apatheia* can never have the connotation of permanent impassibility. It is, rather, a dynamic state, nourished by love, humility, and repentance.⁵⁷ Evagrius was clear on the fact that human beings will continue to struggle throughout their earthly life, even if they achieve a state of *apatheia*. Far from seeing this as a bad thing, Evagrius saw it as a sign of the deeply personal nature of human love, a love that ultimately reflects the divine love of God for human beings. *Apatheia*, for Evagrius, was not a levelling out of emotions but rather a state where the passions no longer inhibit the manifestation of love in the human heart.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ John Baumberger, *The Praktikos & Chapters on Prayer* (Michigan: Cisterciana Publications, 1981), lxxxiii.

⁵⁶ Louis Bouyer, *The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers* (Paris: Desclee Company, 1960), 274.

⁵⁷ Baumberger, lxxxv

⁵⁸ See Jeremy Driscoll, *Steps to Spiritual Perfection: Studies on Spiritual Progress in Evagrius Ponticus* (New Jersey: The Newman Press, 2005), 79; *Praktikos* 35 and 36; and Baumberger, lxxxv.

Evagrius' writings on *apatheia* reveal the most fundamental difference between the Stoic use of the concept and the later Christian appropriation, namely the divergent understandings of *noesis* in these traditions. The function of the *nous* in the Greek philosophical tradition was an immediate grasp of the highest principles of reality. The *nous* in the Christian tradition, especially in the Greek speaking world, was understood in much more personal terms. The purpose of spiritual *askesis* was for the *nous* to descend into the heart (the spiritual and physical center) of the human person and to thereby allow the human person to be transfigured by God's *energeia*, which are always understood in personal terms.⁵⁹

This distinction is readily apparent in Evagrius' distinction between the two levels of contemplation: Contemplation of nature (*theoria phusike*) and the "higher" contemplation of the Trinity (*thelogia*). The former bears some resemblance with the Stoic notion of living *kata phusin*, in accordance with nature, of being able to contemplate the fundamental nature of reality. The latter level of contemplation, on the other hand, achievable only through *apatheia*, does not represent an intellectual activity but rather spiritual transformation where the human soul becomes a "mirror of God."⁶⁰ In achieving this state, the human person becomes the place (*topos*) of God, a manifestation of divine love. Evagrius writes: "When the spirit has put off the old man to replace him with the new man, created by charity, then he will see that his own state at the time of prayer resembles that of a sapphire; it is as clear and bright as the very sky. The

⁵⁹ See Kallistos Ware, "Nous and Noesis in Plato, Aristotle and Evagrius of Ponticus," *Diotima* 13 (1985): 158-163.

⁶⁰ Baumberger, xci.

Scriptures refer to this experience as the place of God which was seen by our ancestors, the elders, at Mount Sinai.”⁶¹

The role of *apatheia* in this process is related to Evagrius’ epistemology, which was highly influenced by the Stoic philosophers. According to Columba Stewart, Evagrius distinguished between “thoughts” (*logismoi*) and “concepts” or “depictions” (*noemata*).⁶² The former is an external suggestion of some sort (sometimes demonic in nature) and the latter is “the means by which the mind processes information.”⁶³ Evagrius’ epistemology, influenced as it was by both Stoic and Aristotelian philosophy, understood the function of the mind in terms of these *noemata*, of impressions or depictions made on the mind from external sources.

As Stewart notes, these *noemata* can bear “positive, neutral, or negative moral valence.”⁶⁴ The *noemata* are simply the functioning processes of the mind, and the extent to which they influence us is entirely up to how we react to the “impressions” made upon us through our experiences. True prayer, for Evagrius, consists largely in the ability to set these *noemata* aside. This is essential due to the fact that God has no form or image, nor is he a concept to be grasped by the mind. Stewart writes that: “According to Evagrius, ‘pure prayer’ is the move beyond all sensory knowledge (and corresponding mental impressions) to the God who is without form or body.”⁶⁵

Apatheia, therefore, is the “letting go” of conceptual thinking, the clearing away of the *noemata* (whether they be “good” or “bad” in nature). *Theologia*, according to

⁶¹ Baumberger, xci, n. 281.

⁶² Columba Stewart, “Imageless Prayer and the Theological Vision of Evagrius Ponticus,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9, no. 2 (2001): 173-204.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 190.

Evagrius, is a state of pure receptivity where the human being stands completely open and vulnerable to God, where the love of god flows freely through us to the world around us. *Agape* is, therefore, revealed to be a state of being rather than an affective state. This does not mean that one becomes unfeeling or impassible but that one's emotional and intellectual faculties are opened up to an experience that transcends both.

A great deal of Evagrius' understanding of *apatheia* and imageless prayer would become core components of Eastern Orthodox spirituality. Gregory Palamas, quoting Solomon in the *Triads*, speaks of prayer as "a sensation intellectual and divine." He goes on to say: "By adding those two adjectives, [Solomon] urges his hearer to consider it neither as sensation nor as an intellection, for neither is the activity of the intelligence a sensation, nor that of the sense an intellection. The 'intellectual sensation' is thus different from both. Following the great Denys, one should perhaps call it union, and not knowledge."⁶⁶ Palamas also followed Evagrius in coupling *apatheia* with *agape* and promoting the notion that the passions were not, in and of themselves, corruptive influences and that they harm us only insofar as we let them control us. In fact, Palamas went so far as to speak of "the blessed passions," speaking of "common activities of body and soul, which, far from nailing the spirit to the flesh, serve to draw the flesh to a dignity close to that of the spirit, and persuade it too to tend towards what is above."⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, ed. John Meyendorff, trans. Nicholas Gendle (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), I. iii. 20, p. 37.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, II. ii. 20, p. 51. It should be noted that the view expressed here concerning the role of passions in the spiritual life, though influential, was not the sole view expressed in Eastern Christian spirituality. Gregory of Nyssa, for example, viewed all passions as corrupt activities of the mind brought about by the fall and that the purpose of the spiritual life is the eradication of the passions and not their transfiguration. Maximus the Confessor, on the other hand, expressed a view that was very much in agreement with Evagrius and Palamas, i.e., that the passions are to be transfigured rather than eradicated. See J. Warren Smith, *Passion and Paradise: Human and Divine Emotion in the Thought of Gregory of Nyssa* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2004) and Adam G. Cooper, *The Body in St. Maximus the Confessor: Holy Flesh, Wholly Deified* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). See also Kallistos Ware, "The

Kierkegaard's views on the passions appear throughout the corpus, though perhaps most prominently in the Climacian writings. In the *Postscript*, Climacus writes: "In relation to an eternal happiness as the absolute good, pathos does not mean words but that this idea transforms the whole existence of the existing person."⁶⁸ A core element of this transformative power of the passions is a distinction that is made between two kinds of *pathos*: Esthetic and existential: "Esthetic pathos expresses itself in words and can in its truth signify that the individual abandons himself in order to lose himself in the idea, whereas existential pathos results from the transforming relation of the idea to the individual's existence."⁶⁹ Esthetic passion is the passion of the poet, philosopher, or scientist, an abstract idea that one can become obsessed with in an intellectual fashion. The Kierkegaardian notion of an esthetic passion in many ways corresponds to the Eastern Orthodox notion of *logismoi*, thought-patterns that begin as abstract entities but which begin to affect the person in different ways according to their nature. When these thoughts take root, so to speak, they begin to have a transformative effect and thereby become existential passions. Both of these categories are morally neutral, since the esthetic and existential passions can seemingly be either positive or negative. The existential passions are based on action while esthetic passion is based on disinterestedness.⁷⁰ Existential passion is always ethico/religious, i.e., belonging to either the ethical sphere, focused on the *Sittlichkeit*, the common good, or the religious sphere, where it is focused on the existing individual.⁷¹ Existential passion, religiously speaking,

Passions: Enemy or Friend?" *In Communion* 17 (1999), accessed: 5/26/2015, <http://www.incommunion.org/2004/10/18/the-passions-enemy-or-friend/>.

⁶⁸ *CUP*, 387.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 388f.

⁷¹ Climacus' writings on "the ethical" differ in subtle ways from Johannes de Silentio's analysis of the category in *Fear and Trembling*. The two categories are much more separate for de Silentio due to the fact

is also always oriented towards the *telos* of the individual person, which is eternal happiness: “The pathos that corresponds to and is adequate to an eternal happiness is the transformation by which the existing person in existing changes everything in his existence in relation to that highest good.”⁷² This passion for the eternal affects *everything* in how one lives one’s life. It is impossible to truly seek after the eternal unless one significantly alters one’s relationship to finite goods. Religious passion is only possible by developing *apatheia* towards things of this world: “Existence is composed of the infinite and the finite; the existing person is infinite and finite. Now, if to him an eternal happiness is the highest good, this means that in his acting the finite elements are once and for all reduced to what must be surrendered in relation to the eternal happiness.”⁷³

The transformative elements of religious *pathos* find their fulfilments in works of love. Kierkegaard is not only advocating an individualistic asceticism in saying that the finite elements of our lives must be “surrendered,” though individual asceticism plays a pivotal role in the process. Our ability to overcome our passions is only a means to an end that finds its fulfilment in a religious passion that is always oriented outwards towards the other. In *Works of Love* Kierkegaard talks about the eternal “transforming” our love for one another due to the fact that it is no longer delimited by what is finite and contingent: “‘You shall love.’ *Only when it is a duty to love, only then is love eternally secured*

that he cannot begin to fathom what is meant by the religious (even though he admires it). Climacus, on the other hand, seems to have at least one foot in the religious (religiousness A). Both agree, though, that the primary difference between the ethical and the religious is the orientation of the self towards a *telos*. The ethical *telos* is that which is communicable to the crowd, e.g. the values of family, citizenship, and human rights. The religious *telos* is not communicable in the same manner and can only be fully made manifest through works of love. As I discuss in chapter 4, the religious manner of living does not preclude political or systematic action, but it is at the same time not reducible to such categories.

⁷² Ibid., 389.

⁷³ Ibid., 391.

against every change, eternally made free in blessed independence and happily secured against despair.”⁷⁴ The commandment of love is not a categorical imperative but rather a reorientation of the mind that allows us to enter into *agape*, an unconditional love. The love of the ethical person, though noble and beautiful, is always contingent upon finite categories (“I will love you as long as...,” “I will love you if...”) while the love of the religious person, grounded as it is in a passion towards the eternal, is completely unbounded and overflowing. The ethical person bases her love on notions of worthiness, measuring out her love in accordance with the extent to which the object of her love conforms to certain finite standards. The religious person, on the other hand, loves unconditionally. As Kierkegaard makes clear, religious love is always a kind of forgiveness: “Let the judges appointed by the state, let the detectives labour to discover guilt and crime; the rest of us are enjoined to be neither judges nor detectives—God has rather called us to love, consequently, to the hiding of the multiplicity of sins with the help of a mitigating explanation.”⁷⁵

I will have more to say about both the Kierkegaardian and Eastern Orthodox notions of love and communion in chapter four. It is immediately obvious that there are many discrepancies between what Kierkegaard and Eastern Orthodoxy say about love, on the one hand, and our common, everyday perceptions of the phenomenon, on the other. Is it not, after all, unrealistic to claim unconditional love as a human possibility? Is it even something we should be seeking after in the first place? Must love not be tempered by rationality? And what of unconditional forgiveness? Should we forgive those who harm

⁷⁴ *WOL*, 44.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 272.

us or others, hiding their “multiplicity of sin”? Must love, after all, not be combined with justice?

Good questions, all, many of which I cannot even begin to address. The most important thing to consider as we move towards a deeper understanding of these issues is to realize that, for both Kierkegaard and Eastern Orthodoxy, there is a very clear and important distinction made between love as an emotion and love as a state of being. The “love” of the musical-erotic, so beautifully described in *Either/or*, is a love that is pure affectivity, pure *pathe*. It is a passion that is beautiful and true but also dangerous in its intensity. The *pathos* of Don Juan is often astoundingly selfish and sometimes results in great harm to both himself and other people. The love of the ethical person, on the other hand, is grounded in a careful consideration of other people. But this love is always tempered by rational or emotional boundaries. The great ethical theories of Western philosophy, virtue ethics, deontology, and utilitarianism, are systematized expressions of our attempt to care for one another in the ethical sphere.

Religious passion and religious love, on the other hand, seemingly describe a state of being that transcends affectivity, even though it most certainly includes the affective dimension of the human person. In Dostoyevsky’s *Brothers Karamazov* the Elder Zosima describes Christian love in the following way:

Brothers, do not be afraid of men’s sins, love man also in his sin, for this likeness of God’s love is the height of love on earth. Love all of God’s creation, both the whole of it and every grain of sand. Love every leaf, every ray of God’s light. Love animals, love plants, love each thing. If you love each thing, you will perceive the mystery of God in things. Once you have perceived it, you will begin tirelessly to perceive more and more of it every day. And you will come at last to love the whole world with an entire, universal love.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ *The Brothers Karamazov*, 318–19.

It is obvious that Zosima's description is not (only) of an emotional state. It is hard to see how one could have strong feelings for "every grain of sand." Similarly, Kierkegaard's demand in *Works of Love* that our love be free of all preference cannot be applied to our feelings towards one another. It is not only natural but also good that we have stronger (preferential) feelings for those closest to us than complete strangers. But both Zosima and Kierkegaard seem to believe that our ultimate *telos* lies in our ability to love not only when it makes us feel good (as in the aesthetic sphere) or to love people based on abstract principles (as in the ethical sphere) but to love the poor, suffering individual right in front of us no matter what particular feelings they might invoke in us. This is especially important in relation to our dealings with the outcasts in society, the poor, the homeless, the mentally ill. These people often evoke feelings of contempt or even disgust in people, but Kierkegaard claims that Christian love lies in achieving a kind of *apatheia* in relation to such thoughts and emotions and to love our neighbors no matter how little we feel we may have in common with them. This does not mean that we ignore the wrongs that people commit.⁷⁷ We must hold people fully accountable for their actions. Nevertheless, at the same time, we can manifest true love in our relations to people based not solely on our emotions (fickle as they may be) or our adherence to abstract principles but rather because we realize that our *telos* is to *become* love.⁷⁸ All existential passion, and religious passion in particular, is a way of clearing away the

⁷⁷ This is particularly dangerous in cases of emotional or physical abuse. The point here is that even though we hold people accountable for their wrongdoings (or "sins") we do not reduce them to this behavior through the kind of categorization that occurs through the operations of the *noemata* in the human mind.

⁷⁸ See p. 94, n. 190.

noemata, the conceptual slicing and dicing by which we normally operate in the world. It is to achieve a state of egolessness and receptivity where we are not dominated by our emotions but rather incorporate them in a healthy, holistic manner into our dealing with other people.⁷⁹

Given Kierkegaard's characterization of the Christian life in *Works of Love*, I would contend that there is a great deal of overlap between his thoughts on the subject and the Eastern Christian views on *apatheia*. The fundamental distinction in Kierkegaard's writings between pathos as emotion (most often associated with the aesthetic sphere) and as a transformative power that enables us to fully love our neighbors is in many ways descriptive of the relationship between *agape* and *apatheia* in Eastern writers such as Evagrius. It is at least clear that what Kierkegaard means by "passion" is not reducible to *pathe*, as described in Christian and Stoic thought. Kierkegaard is not advocating for emotional fervor but rather for a kind of peace, perhaps most profoundly manifest in the evocative description of the Knight of Faith in de Silentio's *Fear and Trembling*. As de Silentio notes: "Faith is no aesthetic emotion, but something far higher, exactly because it presupposes resignation; it is not the immediate inclination of the heart but the paradox of existence."⁸⁰ The resignation in question is a form of *apatheia*, a state of letting go of those thought patterns and emotions that inhibit our love, which is the true pathos of the human person.⁸¹

⁷⁹ We might, for example, deeply love a person, but see through the clarity of *apatheia* that we need to distance ourselves from him or her.

⁸⁰ *F&T*, 76.

⁸¹ The literature on Kierkegaard's writings on the subject of love is incredibly varied. C. Stephen Evans reads Kierkegaard's writings on love largely in light of Kierkegaard's (supposed) divine command ethic in *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love*, a reading that I fundamentally disagree with, as should be apparent from the preceding analysis. Sharon Krishek analyzes Kierkegaard's views on love in light of his writings on faith and attempts to safeguard the importance of romantic (preferential) love in his works. The collection *Ethics, love, and faith in Kierkegaard* provides a variety of views on Kierkegaard's views on

3.4 - Crucifying the Understanding

I return now to a discussion of how Kierkegaard's epistemology parallels elements of the *nous/dianoia* distinction in patristic thought. One advantage to this approach is that it allows us to tackle the specter of irrationalism which has haunted readings of Kierkegaard since he was first introduced in the Anglo-American philosophical world.⁸² If Kierkegaard is indeed working with a distinction similar to the *nous/dianoia* distinction, operating in both ancient Greek and Eastern Christian epistemology, he is obviously not working within any framework that could be termed "irrationalist." If this were the case then one would have to label Plato and Aristotle as "irrationalists," which hardly seems like an intellectually defensible assessment.

If we view Kierkegaard's epistemology in relation to the *nous/dianoia* distinction then Climacus' claim that we must "crucify" the understanding⁸³ takes on interesting dimensions. Climacus always describes this process of "crucifixion" as a kind of *kenosis*, a self-emptying of the ego: "Dare to become nothing at all."⁸⁴ But this daring self-emptying is ultimately to "become what one is."⁸⁵ Self-emptying is self-discovery, to

love, many of which focus on the tension between love as a duty/commandment and more traditional Christian views of love as *agape*.

See C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love: Divine Commands and Moral Obligations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Sharon Krishek, *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Edward F. Mooney, ed., *Ethics, Love, and Faith in Kierkegaard, Philosophical Engagements* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

⁸² See C. Stephen Evans, "Is Kierkegaard an Irrationalist: Reason, Paradox, and Faith," *Religious Studies* 25, no. 3 (1989): 347-62. MacIntyre, Blanshard, and Hannay are examples of thinkers who understand Kierkegaard's epistemology, especially the Climacian writings on "paradox," as being irrationalist. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (2nd ed.) (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1984), 36-50; Brand Blanshard, "Kierkegaard on Faith," in *Essays on Kierkegaard*, ed. Jerry Gill (Minneapolis: Burgess Publishing Company, 1969), 113-25; Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 106-8.

⁸³ *CUP*, 98-106, 559.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 130.

become a person, a “spirit,” as Anti-Climacus puts it. This is a highly difficult task because “every human being has a strong natural desire and drive to become something else and more.”⁸⁶ Climacus relates this “something more” to the concept of the “world-historical.” This means that instead of seeking one’s true self through inwardness one instead formulates one’s self-identity in terms of the world, in terms of how one is situated in relation to other people. As Climacus points out, to view oneself in terms of the “world-historical” is to undermine the meaning of one’s life as it relates to one’s *individual* existence: “The way of objective reflection turns the subjective individual into something accidental and thereby turns existence into an indifferent, vanishing something.”⁸⁷ The irony in human existence is that we want to make our mark on the world, to stand out, to solidify our place in the universe, to *become real*. Yet we do this by trying to cling to external (“objective”) factors such as career, wealth, success, and fame which are ultimately accidental categories in relation to our true nature. The wealthiest, most talented, most successful human being can just as easily fall into despair (perhaps even more easily) than one who has not achieved the same objectively measurable qualities in life.⁸⁸

There are interesting parallels between the Climacian analysis of the self and the writings of the historical John Climacus (John of the Ladder⁸⁹) on the relationship

⁸⁶ Ibid., 130.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 193.

⁸⁸ Kierkegaard is, of course, not saying that there is anything wrong with pursuing success or talent or even wealth. His point, most forcefully expressed in the Climacian texts, is that these things ultimately have no bearing on one’s inner life or the state of one’s soul. The primary problem Climacus and Anti-Climacus return to again and again in their analysis of despair is the illusion of self-sufficiency; the notion that the human self is constituted primarily in relation to things it can control and master. The opposite turns out to be true. The human self only fully becomes real (becomes “spirit”) when it stands naked before that which it has no control over, that which it can never understand, that which it can never master, namely God.

⁸⁹ For simplicity’s sake I will refer to the Kierkegaardian pseudonym as “Climacus” and the historical John Climacus as “John of the Ladder.”

between *nous* and personhood (*prosopon*).⁹⁰ John Chryssavgis, in his analysis of John of the Ladder, writes: “There is some evidence in John’s writings that he identifies *nous* with *prosopon*... It is clear that *nous* is that which corresponds most nearly to the notion of the human person.”⁹¹ Yet John of the Ladder also makes a distinction between personhood as the “true self,” most clearly represented by the *nous* and our ability to commune with the divine, and the fallen aspects of our nature, what in some Eastern Orthodox literature is called “the ego self.”⁹² This is not to say that John of the Ladder, or Kierkegaard’s *Climacus*, advocate any sort of dualism where the body is the locus of appetites and desires and the intellect needs to be somehow detached from care of the body.⁹³ Rather, the relationship between the intellect and the body needs to be calibrated correctly through asceticism and contemplation. The intellect, according to John of the Ladder and the Eastern Orthodox tradition, can become distorted or “restless” because it becomes directed towards things that are unnatural to its true function (*telos*), namely gratification of our desires and appetites. The potentiality of the *nous* is only actualized in our relation to the divine. If the *nous* lies at the heart of human personhood, as John of the

⁹⁰ This is not to say that Kierkegaard was deliberately developing a philosophy of personhood in line with *Climacus*, or any other patristic writer. Kierkegaard’s first mention of *Climacus*, the 7th century monk and abbot of the Saint Catherine monastery in the Sinai, was in the autumn of 1839. These original entries compare Hegel to *Climacus*, mockingly referring to Hegel’s system as a modern version of the “ladder” to paradise (see Hannay, *Kierkegaard*, 128-9). Kierkegaard was at least somewhat familiar with *Climacus*’ original *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* as portions of it appeared in a theological textbook used in Danish seminaries (de Wette, W.M.L., *Lærebog i den christelige Sædelære og sammes Historie*, Copenhagen: 1835). See also Timothy Dalrymple, “The Ladder of Sufferings and the Attack Upon Christendom,” in *Kierkegaard’s Late Writings*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser, and K. Brian Söderquist (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 325-6. There is no indication that Kierkegaard’s knowledge or interest in the historical *Climacus* extended beyond his cursory readings of the *Ladder* in textbooks.

⁹¹ John Chryssavgis, *Ascent to Heaven: The Theology of the Human Person according to Saint John of the Ladder* (Brookline MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1989), 104.

⁹² See Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 59-62; Hieromonk Damascene, *Christ the Eternal Tao* (Platina, CA: Saint Herman Press, 2004), 279-82.

⁹³ This is, of course, the standard Neo-Platonic scheme, which, indeed, greatly influenced both Western and Eastern Christian writers in manifold ways. For an excellent analysis of the Plotinian heritage in Christianity see Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*.

Ladder proclaims, then its primary functions represents the ultimate function, purpose, goal, and passion of human existence.

The issue of directing the *nous* towards its proper function brings us back to Kierkegaard's views on *lidenskab*. To reiterate, the main difference between aesthetic pathos and ethical/religious pathos is that the former is focused on an external object or idea (e.g. a pleasure, system, or philosophy) while the latter is focused on the individual's existence: "If the absolute *telos* [end, goal] does not absolutely transform the individual's existence by relating to it, then the individual does not relate himself with existential pathos but with esthetic pathos."⁹⁴

For both Kierkegaard, as well as Eastern Christian writers such as John of the Ladder, a great deal of the spiritual life is centered on the notion of *silence*, which again can be fruitfully understood in light of the *nous/dianoia* distinction. In Eastern Christian spirituality, much of contemplative and ascetic spirituality revolves around gaining discernment over one's emotional states and discursive thoughts (*nepsis* – "awareness") and then reaching beyond these categories by entering into a state of stillness (*hesychia*).⁹⁵ Much emphasis is put on overcoming negative thought patterns, called *logismoi*, which can lead people into harmful behaviors.⁹⁶ Kierkegaard's triadic view of consciousness similarly emphasizes the importance of shutting down constant reflection as it leads the human person farther and farther away from herself. The "I" that is the event of the relation between our thoughts (ideality) and the world around us (reality)

⁹⁴ *CUP*, 387.

⁹⁵ For introductory texts on these issues see Markides, *The Mountain of Silence*, 115-31 and 194-212; Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 105-32. *Neptic* spirituality is well covered in the *Philokalia*, see esp. *Writings From the Philokalia: On Prayer of the Heart*. See also the Russian spiritual classic *The Way of a Pilgrim*, trans. Olga Savin (Boston & London: Shambhala Classics, 2001).

⁹⁶ E.g. *The Mountain of Silence*, 124-29.

must also be the event of overcoming the tension between these two realities. This happens when the “I” (the human self) stops trying to understand (analyze, systematize, philosophize) and instead simply *receives*.⁹⁷ This is why the “wise” person⁹⁸ has such a difficult time acquiring subjective knowledge, as Climacus points out in the *Postscript*. The learned, the scholars and the intellectuals (the “systematic thinkers”) are unable to *let go* of their systems, their calculations, and their philosophies. But this is precisely what they must do in order to understand themselves:

The more the wise person thinks about the simple (that there can be any question of a longer preoccupation with it already shows that it is not so easy after all), the more difficult it becomes for him. Yet he feels gripped by a deep humanness that reconciles him with all of life: that the difference between the wise person and the simplest person is this little evanescent difference *that the simple person knows the essential* and the wise person little by little *comes to know* that he knows it or *comes to know* that he does not know it, but what they know is the same. Little by little—and then also the wise person’s life comes to an end—so when was there time for the world-historical interest?⁹⁹

The parallels between Kierkegaard’s epistemology and philosophy of personhood with those of Zen Buddhist philosophy have been well noted.¹⁰⁰ Much like in Zen Buddhism, Kierkegaard sees the primary aim of the spiritual life as the reclaiming of our “original mind,” the mind that pristinely reflects the world around us instead of trying to break it apart via analysis and systematization, which ultimately creates discord and

⁹⁷ All of chapter II of *CUP* is centered on this theme: That subjective knowledge, which only occurs in inwardness, is a kind of *emptiness* where objective knowledge (theories, plans, systems) recede and ultimately fade away. This is not to say that they have no value. There are plenty of times when we absolutely have to rely on objective knowledge (science, academic endeavors such as writing dissertations). Yet these endeavors *tell us nothing* about how to live, how to even approach the existential categories of anxiety, despair, and joy. There is no figuring life out. One simply has to live it, which, as Kierkegaard points out, is a task for a lifetime.

⁹⁸ The term is used ironically by Climacus.

⁹⁹ *CUP*, 160.

¹⁰⁰ Giles, *Kierkegaard and Japanese Thought*.

despair within our consciousness. Interestingly, much less attention has been paid to the parallels between Kierkegaard's writings on these matters and the Eastern Christian patristic tradition that provides a similar emphasis on overcoming thought-patterns and entering into a more immersive and intuitive relationship with the world around us, other people, ourselves, and God. The tradition of *hesychasm* in Eastern Orthodoxy emphasizes interior prayer that quiets discursive thoughts, images, and emotional responses¹⁰¹ and aims at a kind of positive emptiness where the believer is able to receive God:

Be at peace and rest assured that until now you have been tested in the cooperation of your will with God's calling and have been granted to understand that neither the wisdom of this world nor mere superficial curiosity can attain to the divine illumination of unceasing interior prayer. On the contrary, it is the humble, simple heart that attains to such prayer, through poverty of the spirit and a living experience of it.¹⁰²

In Kierkegaard's sermon "The Lilies of the Field and the Birds of the Air," published under his own name in 1849, Kierkegaard offers a view of contemplation that is astoundingly similar to the hesychast tradition. Kierkegaard sees the beauty of the lily and the bird in the fact that they keep *silent* in the face of suffering and despair. Everything in life undergoes trials and pain. Yet the suffering of animals and plants does not seem nearly as horrendous as that of human beings because they do not obsess over it. Our ability to reason, to speak, to cry out, is an element of the transcendent and divine within us, but it is also the cause of our deepest pain:

Do not think that it is just a bit of duplicity on the part of the bird that it is silent when it suffers, that it is not silent in its innermost being however silent it is with others, that it complains over its fate, accuses God and humanity, and lets 'the heart in sorrow sin.' No, the bird is silent and

¹⁰¹ Which are, as previously stated, qualitatively different from a *passionate* response.

¹⁰² *The Way of a Pilgrim*, 5.

suffers. Alas, the human being does not do that. But why is it that human suffering, compared with the bird's suffering, seems so frightful? Is it not because the human being can speak? No, not for that reason, since that, after all, is an advantage, but because the human being cannot be silent. It is, namely, not as the impatient person, or even more intensely, the despairing person, thinks he understands it when he says or cries (and this is already a misunderstanding of speech and voice), 'Would that I had a voice like the voice of the storm so that I could voice all my suffering as I feel it!' Ah, that would be only a foolish remedy; to the same degree he will only feel his suffering the more intensely. No, but if you could be silent, if you had the silence of the bird, then the suffering would certainly become less.¹⁰³

The silence in question is the ultimate form of worship, of prayer: "And just because this silence is veneration for God, is worship, as it can be in nature, this silence is so solemn. And because this silence is solemn in this way, one is aware of God in nature."¹⁰⁴ In speech, in trying to analyze and understand our suffering, our place in the universe, human beings fall into despair because they distance themselves from themselves and from God. "Out there with the lily and the bird you are aware *that you are before God*, something that usually is entirely forgotten in speaking and conversing with other human beings."¹⁰⁵

We should be careful not to misunderstand Kierkegaard's intentions here. His appeal to the nature imagery of the gospels is not romanticism. Human beings are not lilies or birds. We are reason-endowed creatures who cannot help but wonder and worry. As Kierkegaard says, it is not the fact that we can speak (reason) that causes us despair, but rather the fact that we cannot keep silent. What the bird and the lily have to teach us

¹⁰³ In WA, 15.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 16.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 17.

is a sense of reverence and awe, a receptivity towards the essential mystery of things that cannot be reduced to analysis or systematization.

Noesis, as described in patristic literature and in Eastern Orthodox spiritual writings up to this day, is not primarily understood as a way to intellectually grasp the *eidos* of something but rather as a kind of communion, a receptive attitude towards the other that constitutes an intuitive, immediate, and experiential knowledge that supersedes any kind of objective knowledge available to us. The reason why we are normally unable to do this is because our emotions, appetites (“passions”), and thought patterns (*logismoi*), largely consisting of the functions of the *dianoetic* faculty, lead the *nous* astray. The patristic writers see this as an unnatural state of affairs, a result of the Fall. Gregory of Sinai, the fourteenth century theologian and teacher of *hesychasm*, writes:

None who are wise in words have ever had pure reason, because, from birth, they let their reasoning powers be corrupted by unseemly thoughts. The sensory and prolix spirit of the wisdom of this age, so rich in words, which creates the illusion of great knowledge but actually fill one with the wildest thoughts, has its stronghold in this prolixity, which deprives man of essential wisdom, true contemplation and the knowledge of the one and indivisible.¹⁰⁶

The achievement of *hesychia* is centered on stilling the mind. Nicophorus the Solitary writes: “Let us return to ourselves [...] for it is impossible for us to become reconciled and united with God, if we do not first return to ourselves, as far as it lies in our power, or if we do not enter within ourselves, tearing ourselves [...] from the whirl of the world with its multitudinous vain cares and striving constantly to keep attention on

¹⁰⁶ “Texts on commandments and dogmas, warnings and promises; also on thoughts, passions and virtues; as well as on silence and prayer,” *Writings from the Philokalia*, 17.

the kingdom of heaven which is within us.”¹⁰⁷ Chryssavgis points out that the practices of contemplative prayer (meditation) and ascetic discipline are always seen in patristic literature, including the works of John of the Ladder, as working in conjunction with the grace of God:

There is no way of concentrating on God, of looking upwards towards God, while at the same time subsiding into worldly cares. [...] The intellect is ‘pure’ (*katharos*) only when it beholds God. By purifying the intellect we see God, but also accept in humility that God’s grace alone can purify it. Total concentration is, in fact, a mutual, personal relationship with God; the intellect speaks to God, in prayer, ‘face to face’ into his ear.¹⁰⁸

Kierkegaard, much like the writers of the *hesychast* tradition, sees contemplation as being directly linked to our moral being. Our emotions and thought-patterns make it impossible for us to approach the other as other, to love the human being in front of us instead of an idol: “[Kierkegaard] noes that we are prone to love the image we want to have of the other person, but this is not loving the other at all.”¹⁰⁹ In *Works of Love* Kierkegaard writes: “*In loving the actual individual person it is important that one does not substitute an imaginary idea of how we think or could wish that this person should be.* The one who does this does not love the person he sees but again something unseen, his own idea or something similar.”¹¹⁰ This issue of loving the concrete, actual individual in front of us, instead of an abstract image or idea, is treated repeatedly in several works

¹⁰⁷ “A most profitable discourse...,” *Writings from the Philokalia*, 23.

¹⁰⁸ Chryssavgis, *Ascent to Heaven*, 105.

¹⁰⁹ M. Jamie Ferreira, “Moral Blindness and Moral Vision in Kierkegaard’s *Works of Love*”, in *Kierkegaard Revisited: Proceedings from the Conference “Kierkegaard and the Meaning of Meaning It” Copenhagen, May 5-9 1996*, ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn & Jon Stewart (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 219. Ferreira’s article does an excellent job of delineating the fine line Kierkegaard toes in *Works of Love* between love as manifest in particularity versus love that is focused on what is universal and shared. Ferreira convincingly argues that Kierkegaard synthesizes these two concerns successfully.

¹¹⁰ *WOL*, 164.

by Dostoyevsky, whose primary spiritual influence was the Eastern Orthodox tradition.¹¹¹ In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Ivan Karamazov, who represents *dianoia* run amok, the complete dominance of speculative thinking and neurotic despair, claims that he finds the Christian commandment of “Love thy neighbor” to be not only impossible but also absurd. “I could never understand how one can love one’s neighbors. It’s just one’s neighbors, to my mind, that one can’t love, though one might love people at a distance. [...] A man must be hidden for anyone to love him, for as soon as he shows his face, love is gone.”¹¹² This juxtaposition between the blindness that results from speculative (*dianoetic*) thinking and the “seeing” that takes place in *noesis*, an intuitive and immediate apprehension of the other as other, is the primary and essential theme of *Works of Love*. In Eastern Christian spirituality, the same emphasis is expressed in myriad ways in literature on prayer, *askesis*, and even the role of icons in worship. In Orthodox iconography, the focus is always on the face of the person depicted. Yet it is not the “face” of a purely material, earthly life, but rather a face that represents a life transfigured in spirit. In his work *The Icon: Window on the Kingdom*, Michel Quenot writes:

An icon is certainly not the image of disincarnate world in the sense that it would refuse creation. Rather, it is the image of a world transformed, transfigured, rendered transparent by a spiritualization which embraces the entire cosmos. The icon of Christ, ‘The Image not made by hands,’ is the basic model for every other representation of the human face. This face of God-become-man sanctifies the faces of all humanity.¹¹³

¹¹¹ See Richard Pevear’s introduction to the Vintage Classics edition of *The Brother’s Karamazov*, xi-xviii.

¹¹² “Rebellion,” *The Gospel in Dostoyevsky* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 43.

¹¹³ Michel Quenot, *The Icon: Window on the Kingdom* (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1991), 147

In chapter four I explore in detail Kierkegaard's philosophy on personhood and its relationship to the Eastern Orthodox tradition. It is worth mentioning here, in the context of his epistemology, that Kierkegaard's emphasis on seeing the "face" (the Otherness) of the person in front of you, and that it is only via this seeing that love can occur, is very closely aligned to patristic writings on personhood (*prosopon*). Bruce V. Foltz offers the following analysis of the contribution made by the Cappadocian fathers¹¹⁴ to the evolving philosophy of personhood in the Christian church:

What is revolutionary, then, in Cappadocian theology, is *first* the insight that what underlies (*hypostasis*) the Divine Being is *not* some prior and given nature (*physis*) but rather the very facing (*prosopon*) itself – i.e. their understanding that God is not first of all a self-same, fixed substance who subsequently enters into relations with others, but rather that the divine substance or being (*ousia*) itself derives from and is constituted by, the very event of relating or facing. And the *second* revolutionary character of this understanding of the person is just as surprising: it is that human beings, whom scripture had already described as created in the image (*eikon*) of God, possess this same radically relational character, and possess it just because – and realize it just to the extent that – they stand in relation to – find themselves defined by – the divine "facing that is carried on eternally, 'unto ages of ages.'¹¹⁵

This view of personhood aligns with Kierkegaard's insistence in *Works of Love* that we need to quiet the judgmental thoughts that invade our mind because they make us unable to *see* the person in front of us (i.e., his or her "face"). Kierkegaard's insistence on neighborly love as "universal" is not meant to point to some underlying, abstract essence but rather to the necessity that we still the discursive mind and emotions that lead us to

¹¹⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory Nazianzen and Basil the Great.

¹¹⁵ Bruce V. Foltz, "Being as Communion," in *Byzantine Incursions* (New York: Springer, forthcoming).

focus only on difference and preference. Jamie Ferreira, in his analysis on Kierkegaard's views on love, writes:

A sense of kinship and solidarity or connectedness is not achieved by imagining an identity that does not actually exist, but, rather, by not making those distinctions which *alienate* one from another. Such distinctions do more than particularize – they particularize in ways which disconnect us. Distinctions which merely particularize can thus be contrasted with distinctions which damage the soul.¹¹⁶

Our ability to see the “face” of the person, for Kierkegaard, primarily consists in our ability to accept a person's defects and shortcomings: “As soon as the relationship is made equivocal, you do not love the person you see; then it is indeed as if you demanded something else in order to be able to love. On the other hand, when the defect or the weakness makes the relationship more inward, not as if the defect should now become entrenched but in order to conquer it, then you love the person you see.”¹¹⁷

To see a person's true face, therefore, is to accept them even in their brokenness, but it does not mean that we excuse or ignore their moral failures. Rather, it is a loving response to a person in the grips of anxiety, pain, and despair. Kierkegaard's *Works of Love* provide a fascinating alternative to the philosophy of love presented by ancient Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, or to more modern (and post-modern) philosophies of the self. Plato's *eros* and Aristotle's *philia* both fail to provide a way for us to love the person him or herself, especially when the brokenness of their nature is taken into account. *Eros*, as described in the *Symposium*, lifts us up towards the transcendent and abstract, i.e., ideality, while *philia*, though more sensitive to

¹¹⁶ Ferreira, 214-15. See *WOL*, 69, 71, 74, and 85.

¹¹⁷ *WOL*, 167.

particularity, nonetheless only gives an account of love as a correct response to the manifestation of the beautiful (*to kalon*) in a person. As Foltz notes: “According to Aristotle, we are only to love the loveable.”¹¹⁸ Christian love, on the other hand, proclaims that we are to love *everyone*. Kierkegaard’s epistemology and philosophy of personhood and sin are always aimed at emphasizing and, to some extent, explaining this difference. It is not that Kierkegaard sees *agape* as an alternative to *eros* or *philia*, but rather a transfiguration of every kind of love. *Agape*, according to *Works of Love*, is ultimately a challenge, a call to love people *in a certain way*, namely selflessly and in a manner that embraces the brokenness of the human condition.

As we repeatedly see throughout his writings, Kierkegaard’s epistemology is always centered on the breakdown between ideality and actuality.¹¹⁹ Objective thought attempts to harmonize the two by achieving some kind of absolute, systematic truth,¹²⁰ which is nonetheless unattainable because speculative thinking always has to leave something out of the picture, namely the poor, existing individual. At best, then, objective truth amounts to probability, which is ultimately the only thing that academic and scientific pursuits afford us. They give us the possibility to predict certain behaviors (e.g. of material properties) and to understand them in the context of whatever system, natural

¹¹⁸ “Being as Communion.”

¹¹⁹ One can draw a direct line from Kierkegaard’s analysis of sin in *Concept of Anxiety* and *The Sickness Unto Death* to the epistemological analysis of the dissonance between actuality and ideality in works such as *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. The category of anxiety described by Haufniensis manifests itself primarily in this dissonance, i.e. the inability to synthesize the ideal and the actual. Adam and Eve in Paradise seem to live in pure actuality, or, rather, in the harmonious togetherness of the actual and ideal. This is due to the fact that they live in perfect communion with themselves, and with God, who presents himself as both perfect ideality and actuality (the “I Am He Who Is” in the burning bush as well as the cloud of darkness that envelops Mt. Sinai, both of which appear in *Exodus*). The serpent’s whisper to Adam and Eve is to create an ideality that is separate from their actuality (“You could be like gods”), an ideality which engulfs their consciousness after they eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. This creates resentment, which ultimately leads to despair, a misrelation of the self to itself.

¹²⁰ Hegel is, of course, Kierkegaard’s prime example of someone seriously attempting this.

law, or theory best explains them. Yet this manner of thinking precludes the possibility of any ethical or religious engagement. In *Judge for Yourself!* Kierkegaard writes that “Here is the infinite difference from the essentially Christian, since Christianly, indeed even just religiously, the person who never relinquished probability never became involved with God. All religious, to say nothing of Christian, venturing is on the other side of probability, is by way of relinquishing probability.”¹²¹

The infinite resignation described by Johannes de Silentio in *Fear and Trembling* as well as the crucifixion of the understanding described by Climacus in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* ultimately find their fulfilment in the “venture” described in *Works of Love*. It is important to synthesize Kierkegaard’s epistemology and ethical philosophy correctly lest we see him advocating either a divine-command ethic or an irrationalist relativism, both of which he goes to great pains to argue against in these works. In *Fear and Trembling*, for example, de Silentio makes it explicit that the point of Abraham’s resignation must be love, and nothing but love. If it is not, Abraham becomes monstrous: “The absolute duty can then lead to what ethics would forbid, but it can by no means make the knight of faith have done with loving.”¹²² Christ is, of course, the paradigmatic case for this approach, going against the *Sittlichkeit* of the Law, understood by the Pharisees as a fixed, static, and absolute moral theory, and instead promoting an ethic of love which engages with the human beings as existing individuals. Socrates, as he is related to Christian ethics in *For Self-examination*, is another representative of this

¹²¹ *JFY*, 99-100. This theme would, of course, become the central philosophical concern of de Silentio's *Fear and Trembling*, where the “relinquishing of possibility” takes place in light of the absurd. In section 3.5 I will detail how this does not mean that Kierkegaard is advocating for irrationalism and that his epistemology, rather, points towards relational knowledge and modes of knowing that extend beyond the purely rational.

¹²² *F&T*, 101.

way of life.¹²³ Both Christ and Socrates represent a kind of unknowing, a letting go of dogma and legalism and an embrace of the brokenness of the human condition. This is ultimately only possible through a kind of self-knowledge. In *Judge for yourself!* Kierkegaard describes objective knowledge as a kind of drunkenness, relating it to the escape from reality sought after by the alcoholic who turns towards the bottle whenever life becomes too complicated, too difficult, too much. Right after critiquing an approach to ethics based on systematic, objective thinking grounded in probability (which in modern philosophy is perhaps best exemplified by Utilitarianism) Kierkegaard writes: “A person becomes physically dizzy precisely when he has forgotten himself in strong drink; and he becomes spiritually dizzy when he has lost himself in a knowing of another kind, or, as he says, in objective knowing—call to him, and you will see that he will seem to be awakening from a dream; just like a drunk man, he must, so to speak, rub his eyes, collect himself, remember his name.”¹²⁴

Kierkegaard’s approach to an ethics of love is ultimately a contemplative one. The only way to truly *see* the face of the Other, the only way to *hear* the soft, quiet whisper of God in the gospels, is by achieving silence within. To achieve silence is to awaken: “Would that in silence you might forget your will, your self-will, in order in silence to pray to God: ‘*Your* will be done!’ Yes, if you could learn from the lily and the

¹²³ *For Self-Examination* (hereafter *FSE*), 9-12.

¹²⁴ *JFY*, 105. It is worth noting the parallels between Kierkegaard's critique of a systematic, utilitarian ethic and the famous critique later offered by Bernard Williams. Williams' main point is to show that the individual person has no place in the utilitarian calculus, qua individual. The calculus gobbles up individual human beings and spits out an impersonal cost-benefit analysis that misses the point of ethical thinking altogether. See J.J.C. Smart & Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

bird to become completely silent before God, in what then would the Gospel not be able to help you! Then nothing would be impossible for you.”¹²⁵

Similarly, in the writings of the fourth century Christian ascetics known as the Desert Fathers and Mothers, many of whom form the backbone of Eastern Christian spirituality, we find the connection laid out between stillness and love. In *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* we read of the ascetic Abba Poemen, who said: “Someone may seem to be silent, but if in the heart one is condemning others, then one is babbling ceaselessly. And there may be another who talks from morning till evening, and yet in the heart that person is truly silent. That person says nothing that is not profitable.”¹²⁶ As Kierkegaard notes, our inability to keep silent, to quiet the workings of the rational mind with its incessant need to analyze and judge, leads us to reproach others instead of engaging them with love. But the point of the Gospels, Kierkegaard notes, is to present a way of life for people to follow, and this can only be achieved through inner stillness. Echoing this sentiment is the following story from *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*: “Some of the fathers questioned Abba Poemen saying: ‘If we see a brother in the act of committing a sin, do you think that we ought to reprove him?’ The old man said to them: ‘For my part, if I have to go out and see someone committing a sin, I pass on my way without reproving him.’”¹²⁷

Silence, unknowing (the overcoming of *dianoetic* reasoning), and love are all intrinsically connected in Kierkegaard’s philosophy, much as they are in patristic writings. In chapter four I explore in an in-depth manner both the Kierkegaardian and

¹²⁵ WA, 19.

¹²⁶ Benedicta Ward, ed., *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers, The Alphabetical Collection* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publication, 1975), 27.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.

Eastern Orthodox views on personhood and communion. At this stage, it is worth noting that for both Kierkegaard and the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the focus on silence and contemplation is always tied to a sense of harmony and oneness. As previously noted, Eastern Orthodox epistemology often analyzes the function of the human mind in the ancient Greek terms of *dianoia* and *nous*. The human mind uses a conceptual schema, the *noemata*, to make sense of the world around it. In so doing, we are often assaulted by thought-patterns and emotions (*logismoi*) that affect us in various ways. One of the primary effects of these *logismoi* is to create fragmentation within the human soul, to set at war the discursive, intuitive, and affective elements of the human psyche.¹²⁸ The purpose of the spiritual life is to harmonize the various elements of the soul and to achieve oneness, which is only possible when the *nous* is directed towards God.

For Kierkegaard, a crucial element of despair and anxiety is our tendency towards “double-mindedness” (*Tvesindethed*). In the *Upbuilding Discourses*, Kierkegaard notes the subtle nature of this phenomenon, how we may aim to do the good but that we are continually being led astray in various ways by our selfish inclinations. Kierkegaard writes: “If it is to be *possible* for a person to be able to will one thing, he must will the good, because only the good is this unity (*Eenhed*); but if it is to become *actual* that he wills only one thing, he must will the good in truth.”¹²⁹ Kierkegaard gives various examples of people who will the good but who also will various other things (reward, wealth, fame, etc.). This will inevitably create despair since it creates a further mis-

¹²⁸ See *The Mountain of Silence*, esp. 118ff, and Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos, *Orthodox Psychotherapy* (Greece: Birth of Theotokos Monastery, 2005). It is also worth noting that Dostoyevsky's protagonist in *Crime & Punishment* is named Raskolnikov, from the Russian *raskolnik*, meaning fragmented and divided.

¹²⁹ *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* (hereafter *UD*), 36.

relation between the finite and the infinite. This is why resignation is such a crucial element for Kierkegaard (especially as described by Johannes de Silentio). We have to give up the world in order to reclaim it, to give up on our obsessions, desires, plans, and schemes. If we do not do this, then we are constantly at war with ourselves.

Kierkegaard claims that his discourse takes the form of a question: “*Are you living in such a way that you are conscious of being a single individual?*”¹³⁰ To be a “single individual” is to have harmony and oneness:

This consciousness is the fundamental condition for willing one thing in truth, because the person who even to himself is not a unity, is even to himself not something altogether definite, the person who exists only in an external sense—as long as he lives a number in the crowd, a fraction in a worldly complex—indeed, how would it even occur to such a person to occupy himself with the thought: to will one thing in truth!¹³¹

There is a fundamentally ethical dimension to Kierkegaard’s notion of oneness, of being able to achieve the “survival within the community” spoken of by the desert fathers.

Double-mindedness is an internal struggle that inevitably manifests itself externally. To achieve peace and oneness within oneself is to begin to make peace with one’s neighbors.

Kierkegaard writes:

Are you now living in such a way that you are aware as a single individual, that in every relationship in which you relate yourself outwardly you are aware that you are also relating yourself to yourself as a single individual, that even in the relationship we human being so beautifully call the most intimate you recollect that you have an even more intimate relationship, the relationship in which you as a single individual relate yourself to yourself before God?¹³²

¹³⁰ Ibid., 127.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid., 129.

For Kierkegaard, true goodness does not arise from *Sittlichkeit*, from morals or customs or laws. These are, rather, reflections in the ethical sphere of our devotion to the good. The good must first and foremost be sought in our relationship to ourselves, in achieving authenticity and oneness, which is only possible in and through our relationship to the eternal.

Kierkegaard may not have explicitly set out to form a Christian ethic based on patristic or Eastern Orthodox writings, but in crafting an approach to Christian living that offered an alternative to the anemic Christendom of his age, Kierkegaard unknowingly tapped into a spiritual and contemplative tradition that dates back to the earliest days of Christianity. Even though Kierkegaard never used such technical terminology as *nous* or *dianoia*, he nonetheless offers an epistemology that makes many of the same fundamental distinctions as the epistemological tradition of the early church, especially with regards to the distinction made between systematic, rational analysis and the immediate, experiential knowing that allows us to respond to the suffering of those around us.

All of this still leaves open the question of what exactly Kierkegaard meant by “subjective truth,” and how it relates to his existential analysis of human consciousness. In the next section I will compare Kierkegaard’s approach to the apophatic theology of the Eastern Church and examine the important question about the extent to which Kierkegaard believed in the possibility of us having knowledge of God.

3.5 - Subjective Knowledge in Kierkegaard

As previously stated, Marilyn Piety argues that both objective and subjective knowledge in Kierkegaard’s writings take two forms. In the case of objective knowledge, there is knowledge “in the strict sense,” which Piety argues is knowledge of “immanent

metaphysical reality” primarily expressed in ontology and mathematics.¹³³ The knowledge of ontological categories (more on these in a moment) and mathematics is *certain*, which means that ideality and actuality match up in some way. The problem is, though, that they can only match up *hypothetically*. Piety writes:

Ontological knowledge and mathematical knowledge are hypothetical for Kierkegaard. That is, they determine what thought says about how things must be *if* they have a reality that transcends thought reality, but not *that* they are real in that way. It may be, for example, that the idea of God includes perfection. That is, it may be that the idea of God and the idea of perfection are related in such a way that, if there were a God, then he would have to be perfect. But logic alone could never compel one to accept that there was a God.¹³⁴

As we can see, *ontological* knowledge for Kierkegaard corresponds with *logic*.¹³⁵ $2+2=4$, the Pythagorean theorem, and the law of non-contradiction are all certain, according to Kierkegaard, yet only hypothetically so because we cannot ascertain via any objective method whether or not they correspond to *actuality*, i.e., the reality that existing individuals inhabit. As Piety notes, certain kinds of objective knowledge can ultimately come to have subjective meaning for us (e.g. the question of whether or not God is perfect) but this can only come about by a kind of transference that occurs in human consciousness where the focus shifts from a purely subject/object relationship (between “the thinker” and the “object of thought”) to a union of the two (which manifests itself as a potential change in the knower). If treated as purely theoretical or philosophical issues, the objects of objective knowledge can never affect the thinker in

¹³³ Piety, 63-70.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 66. See also Gregor Malantschuk, “Søren Kierkegaard and Poul Martin Møller,” *Kierkegaardiana* 3 (1959): 105.

any significant way.¹³⁶ The famous ontological proof for the existence of God is a good example of the distinction Kierkegaard is emphasizing. Even though we can study the proof with great interest, devoting many hours in thinking and writing on it, we can do so in a purely abstract, academic fashion, where the issue at stake never affects *who* we are. Even though we could logically prove that there is, indeed, a God, this ultimately doesn't matter one iota, because this is a purely hypothetical knowledge, and therefore completely lacking in passion and inwardness.¹³⁷ It is therefore not surprising, and entirely justified, that “so what?” is a perfectly justifiable—and not at all uncommon—response from people who have studied the ontological proof and are convinced of its logical soundness.

Objective knowledge “in the loose sense” primarily relates to what is studied in the natural- and social sciences,¹³⁸ or anything having to do with what Climacus calls “world-historical” knowledge. Because such knowledge attempts to relate ideality to actuality (individual lived experience) it can never provide us with certainty, but rather only probability, given the fact that ideality and actuality can never match up perfectly. This means that objective knowledge of this sort is always provisional. The quality of a scientific theory is largely based on its ability to predict certain behaviors and to explain

¹³⁶ It is worth reminding the reader that interest (*interesse*) is always present in the form of a intentionality, i.e. a conscious engagement with the object in question. But this does not mean that passion is necessarily involved. Passion is a category of inwardness, where the thinker attempts to appropriate the truths being investigated in some way.

¹³⁷ The different approach taken by medieval scholars towards Anselm's version of the ontological proof and modern considerations of it provides another interesting example of Kierkegaard's point. Anselm's works were not only intellectually scrutinized in monastic communities in the medieval Latin Church, they were meditated upon as religious texts. Modern philosophers of religion, on the other hand, usually teach and study the proof as a purely objective, abstract issue. See Thomas H. Bestul, “Antecedents: The Anselmian and Cistercian Contributions,” in *Mysticism and Spirituality in Medieval England*, ed. William F. Pollard and Robert Boenig (Suffolk, UK and Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 1997), 3ff.

¹³⁸ Piety, 71-94.

certain material phenomena but it can always be replaced by a competing theory that performs these functions in a superior manner.¹³⁹ The same provisional, probabilistic criterion applies to the truths of history, anthropology, and even philosophy (at least as it is practiced in its modern, academic form).¹⁴⁰

As Piety points out: “All knowledge is interested according to Kierkegaard [...] and all knowledge thus has a subjective element.”¹⁴¹ Yet passionate inwardness only arises when a shift occurs in consciousness from an object of knowledge as an external (“third”) thing and the *interesse* of consciousness focuses instead on the knower herself who becomes transformed (or transfigured) by her relationship to the object of thought.¹⁴²

Even though Kierkegaard emphasizes the importance of a subjective appropriation of knowledge, he never goes so far as to argue for anything remotely resembling relativism. “There is, for Kierkegaard, a single ethical and religious reality in the sense that there is one set of eternally valid ethical norms for human behavior and one God who requires of every human being that he actualize these norms in his

¹³⁹ Kierkegaard almost always directs his critiques against *scientism*, as opposed to the natural sciences per se. Kierkegaard's primary worry with regards to the rising cultural influence of the natural sciences is that the “crowd” will begin to believe that science can give us *absolute* knowledge and that it will thereby become a new religion.

See *JP* 2, 2821 / *X*² A 362 and Piety, 80-81.

¹⁴⁰ Kierkegaard's position on objective knowledge “in the loose sense” probably explains the tendency to situate him within one skeptical tradition or another. Indeed, with regards to the possibility for objective (systematic) knowledge Kierkegaard is most definitely a skeptic, meaning that he did not believe that anything can be known with absolute certainty. It is worth remembering in this context that the ancient skeptical tradition often viewed itself as a corrective against an increasingly dogmatic and speculative philosophical tradition, which of course corresponds exactly with Kierkegaard's view of himself in relation to both academic philosophy as well as institutionalized religion. That being said, Kierkegaard's views on subjective knowledge, which obviously have no parallel in classical skepticism, differentiate his epistemology substantially from much of philosophical skepticism.

See Richard Popkin, “Kierkegaard and Skepticism,” in *Kierkegaard: A collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Josiah Thompson (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1972), 342-72; Terence Penelhum, “Skepticism and Fideism,” in *The Skeptical Tradition*, ed. Myles F. Burnyeat (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 287-318.

¹⁴¹ Piety, 95.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 96.

existence.”¹⁴³ The difference between objective and subjective knowledge lies not primarily in the justification of the knowledge in question (which in both cases has to do with the immediate relation between the knower and the object of knowledge) but rather in the difference between knowledge that is purely descriptive (objective knowledge) and knowledge which is prescriptive (subjective knowledge).¹⁴⁴ Subjective knowledge is a call, or a challenge, which becomes revealed to the knower in a moment of self-knowledge and which can only become fully actualized when the knower responds to that call by living his life in a certain way, namely according to the ethical/religious truths made manifest to him.

Truth, as defined by Kierkegaard, is “agreement between thought and being.”¹⁴⁵ With regards to objective truth, this agreement is only fully possible with regards to “immanent metaphysical truth,” i.e., the categories of mathematics and ontology (meaning primarily logical truths). Objective knowledge of actuality, the domain of science and the humanities, can at best give us probability, since thought (ideality) never fully maps on to reality (actuality). Similarly, with subjective truth, dealing as it does with the way in which ethical and religious prescriptions affect the life of the human person, full harmony between actuality and ideality remains impossible.¹⁴⁶ Piety writes: “Ethical, or religious, prescriptions are thus actualized not in the sense that a person succeeds in conforming his ‘historical externality’ (CUP, 382) to these prescriptions but in the sense that he has truly willed such a correspondence.”¹⁴⁷ In *Training in*

¹⁴³ Ibid., 96.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 97.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ St. Paul raises this issue in a very “existential” manner, so to speak, in Romans 7:19: “For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.”

¹⁴⁷ Piety, 101.

Christianity, Anti-Climacus writes that “No man, with the exception of Christ, is the truth; in the case of every other man the truth is something endlessly higher than he is.”¹⁴⁸ This occurs most markedly with regards to what Piety terms “pseudo-knowledge,” which is a category of subjective knowledge where the knower understands the ethical/religious truths in question in an entirely abstract manner and does not allow them to become actualized in his or her actions. Religious and moral hypocrisy is a common example of this phenomenon.

Subjective knowledge that falls under the heading of “pseudo-knowledge” is similar, then, to objective knowledge in the “loose” sense since it represents a lack of passion and inwardness in a subject’s relationship to the object of thought. It forms the nearest thing to a “disinterested” position, though given the structure of human consciousness, we are always ultimately interested in the object of thought. Pseudo-knowledge therefore represents a kind of existential falsity, of pretending to view ethical and religious truths from some kind of moral high ground or God’s-eye point of view, which is ultimately impossible.¹⁴⁹

The difference between objective and subjective truth, in this regard, lies in the nature of the object of thought. For both objective immanent metaphysical truths and an objective view on actuality (via science and the humanities) a dispassionate position is perfectly justifiable and, indeed, often necessary. The modern scientific method, for example, only becomes practicable when the knower (the scientist) takes up such a position in relation to whatever it is that he is researching. With regards to ethical and

¹⁴⁸ *Training in Christianity*, 183.

¹⁴⁹ A common theme in Christ’s teachings in the gospels. See esp. Luke 7:1-5: “Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye.”

religious truths, on the other hand, a dispassionate position is completely antithetical to the nature of the truths in question. The only *correct* way in which we *should* approach truths ethical and religious truths is to become deeply and personally passionate about them, to the very core of our being.¹⁵⁰ As previously discussed, this passion is not emotional fervor, but rather a unification of our faculties that is only possible in and through a kind of *apatheia*, a letting go of double-mindedness and obsessive thoughts. It is important to note that if this passion is not passionate *inwardness*, but rather a religious fervor that takes the form of moralism or judgment of others, then we fail to grasp the truths in question and instead enter into the realm of pseudo-knowledge.

Similar to objective knowledge, subjective knowledge is a relation between the knower, on the one hand, and either ideality (thought reality) or actuality on the other.¹⁵¹ Ideality, or “immanent metaphysical knowledge,” in this case, consists of “knowledge of God, self-knowledge, and ethical-religious knowledge.”¹⁵² With regards to the relation of the knower to ideality (our subjective knowledge of immanent, metaphysical truths) our self-knowledge consists of inward relation to the ethical/religious concepts of immortality and the notion that we have some kind of inner essence or soul, i.e., that our self extends beyond the purely physical. Subjective truths always have a normative dimension to them, according to Kierkegaard, so this knowledge needs to be appropriated and manifested by the knower in a particular way.¹⁵³ Subjective knowledge of actuality is not an inward relation to a specific ideality (e.g. the concept that God exists or the

¹⁵⁰ See *Piety*, esp. 115-31. Also, Hannay, 158-60 and *CUP*, 266-71.

¹⁵¹ *Piety*, 97.

¹⁵² *Ibid.* “Immanent metaphysical knowledge” in the objective sense had primarily to do with ontology, mathematics, and logic.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 99-113.

immortality of the soul) but rather an inward relation to my own consciousness. Subjective knowledge of actuality is what makes guilt-consciousness and sin-consciousness possible, both of which enable us to begin to understand some of the causes of the misrelation of the self to itself, described by Anti-Climacus in *The Sickness Unto Death*.¹⁵⁴

I will examine the issue of guilt-consciousness and sin-consciousness in more detail in a moment. For now, I would like to examine more closely the issue of justification, certainty, and the nature of what Kierkegaard calls “acquaintance knowledge.” Kierkegaard uses the words *Erkjendelse* and *Viden* interchangeably for propositional knowledge. Piety argues that he does so in an unsystematic fashion.¹⁵⁵ On the other hand, Kierkegaard’s discussion of subjective, or essential, knowledge often involves reference to acquaintance knowledge (*Kendskab*) rather than to propositional knowledge.

Erkjendelse is perhaps best translated as “recognition.” The English word “understanding” would also apply here, though in a qualified way. “Belønne én i erkendelse af hans dygtighed,” for example, would mean to recognize someone’s hard work. *Viden* is knowledge proper, often used if one wants to signify expertise (“hun har en stor viden på det område” would be “she has a great deal of knowledge in this area”). *Kendskab* is used when one talks of knowing a person. The noun *Bekendt* means an “acquaintance.” *Bekendt* can also be used as an adjective, meaning that one is becoming acquainted, or associated with something, e.g. “gøre sig bekendt med noget” which

¹⁵⁴ *SUD*, 13-14.

¹⁵⁵ Piety, 14-17 and 96.

means “to look into something.”¹⁵⁶ As Piety points out, *Kendskab* also has the connotation of “drawing near to something.”¹⁵⁷ Indeed, in relation to subjective knowledge, Kierkegaard uses the word *Tilnærmelse*, which means “approach.”¹⁵⁸ This is important because, as I have noted, subjective knowledge never allows for a full correspondence between ideality and actuality. In “drawing near” to ethical and religious truths, the knower begins to manifest and appropriate these truths, little by little. This points to an important distinction between subjective truth and objective truth, as Piety notes when she writes: “A person comes nearer to ethical or religious truth, according to Kierkegaard, ‘in the striving for it,’ in a sense in which he cannot come nearer to objective truth through probability.”¹⁵⁹ No matter how good at calculating probability we become, the knower is always intrinsically separated from the object of knowledge with regards to objective truth. The subject-object distinction, so pivotal to the development of the epistemological heritage of the West since the time of Descartes, belies an essential separation between the knower (the scientist, the academic, the speculative thinker) and the world that he or she attempts to know. Subjective knowledge, however, manifests a bridging of the gap between the subject and object, tenuous or temporary as it may be. Subjective knowledge, for Kierkegaard, always signifies a union of some sort, however imperfect or fragile.

Piety notes that: “Kierkegaard associates knowledge in the strict sense with certainty in the sense of the necessity of the correspondence of the mental representation

¹⁵⁶ The suggested phrases in quotation marks for *Kendskab*, *Bekendt*, *Erkjendelse* and *Viden* are found in *Dönsk - Íslensk Orðabók* (Reykjavík: Mál og Menning, 2004).

¹⁵⁷ Piety, 103.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

in question to reality.”¹⁶⁰ This necessity is an existential one in relation to subjective/essential knowledge. In trying to understand what it is to be good we cannot help but realize that a part of the truth inherent in ethical/religious reality is a call of duty, a demand on us that we not only understand goodness but rather *become* it.

This relates to Kierkegaard’s notion of how we justify truth. In the case of subjective truth this justification takes place through the transformation of the individual person. Knowledge is justified by “an insight on the part of the knower into the essence of the object of knowledge, an insight that is generated by contact with the reality in question.”¹⁶¹ This is simply another way of saying that knowledge is justified by the correlation of actuality and ideality. But it is important to note that Climacus in the *Postscript* claims that actuality “*is* ideality.”¹⁶² Ethically speaking, this means that “ideality is the actuality within the individual himself.”¹⁶³ Travis O’Brian writes:

The intellectual individual relates ‘disinterestedly’ to possibility while the ethical individual relates interestedly and asks ‘am I able to do it?’ Since, once again, actuality and not thought is the medium of synthesis, the ethical ideal is not in itself an object available for contemplation, but only for action. Put most succinctly, the ethical ideal is the ‘eternal’ or ‘absolute’ synthesis of thought (possibility) and being (the ‘actuality’ of the existing *I*)—but not in thought and rather in actuality—a synthesis

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 104.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. Piety reference to “essence” corresponds to Kierkegaard’s use of the Danish word *Væsen*. On p. 106, n28, she argues that this is primarily to be understood as “essence” rather than “being,” given the fact that essence was “the preferred translation in the first half of the nineteenth century.” Hannay, in his translation of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, tends to translate *Væsen* as “being.” I will primarily be using “being” for the reason that it corresponds more directly to both the everyday Danish usage of the word as well as the way in which Kierkegaard prefigures the later phenomenological tradition, especially via the influence of Heidegger. The epistemological implication of this distinction is that Kierkegaard never makes the claim that human beings can fully and absolutely know the essence (nature) of anything except perhaps those things that fall under objective knowledge in the strict sense (math, geometry, logic). This becomes especially important in relation to the possibility of knowledge of God.

¹⁶² *CUP*, 325. Emphasis mine.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

Climacus speaks of as the ‘concrete eternity’ or the ‘absolute continuity’ of the self.¹⁶⁴

All of the stages of existence Kierkegaard delineates represent different attempts, and failures, to synthesize the poles of existence, including the aforementioned poles of thought and being. The philistine and aesthete are both so engulfed in immediacy that they fail to truly become a self. The aesthete is in a somewhat better position than the philistine, at least insofar as he is able to approach everyday existence with a sense of irony and detachment. As Vilhjalmur Arnason points out: “The aesthetic stage of existence is not truly a solution to the existential crisis of the philistine but rather a way to sustain a bourgeois (spiritless) lifestyle while being fully conscious of how pointless such a manner of living truly is.”¹⁶⁵ Subjective knowledge remains minimal in both of those spheres given the fact that there is very little attempt made by either the philistine or the aesthete to align their lived existence with ethical/religious truths since there is so little consideration of what the *telos* of one’s individual existence might be. The aesthete, in fact, removes himself from all commitment and responsibility, and guards himself from all vulnerability, by never deeply considering what it truly means to be a human being, or to live a “good” life (which, as Kierkegaard goes to great pains to point out, is a deeply personal question).

Subjective knowledge is, as I pointed out, ultimately self-knowledge. This is an important point to consider since Kierkegaard is not admonishing his readers to deeply

¹⁶⁴ Travis ‘Obrian, “Being and Givenness in Kierkegaard’s Pseudonymous Authorship,” *Philosophy Today* 50, no. 2 (2006).

¹⁶⁵ Vilhalmur Arnason, “Ad Velja Sjalfan Sig,” *Timarit Mal og Menningar*, no.4 (2000): 21. Translation mine.

contemplate ideality in any way apart from their lived existence.¹⁶⁶ Rather, to contemplate and appropriate ideality is to live one's life in a certain way, much of which has to do with self-acceptance. This is because ideality, considered in the context of ethical and religious truths, takes on a deeply existential meaning. In relation to objective truth, ideality is largely viewed in the context of abstractions that have reality as an idea but do not exist in "factual being."¹⁶⁷ In relation to subjective truths, i.e., the truths of the ethical and religious spheres, ideality is considered by Kierkegaard as a kind of *telos* that takes the form of a *personal* essence: "The ethical person chooses himself as an existing individual. This does not mean that one can choose oneself however one wants; on the contrary, the ethical decision entails that the individual chooses himself as he is and wills himself as he is. This means that one accepts oneself and takes responsibility for oneself."¹⁶⁸ This self-acceptance is deeply challenging, though, since it manifests the dissonance between who one is and who one ought to be. "God, according to Kierkegaard, has a plan for each individual. The difficulty is that no one's life actually represents the actualization of this plan. Thus, it is not *this* plan that comes to be in the concrete existence of the person."¹⁶⁹ This is why subjective truth must be understood as *Kendskab* rather than as *Erkjendelse* or *Viden*. If it was one of the latter, there would be no hope for human beings. Ethical and religious truths cannot be fully understood or comprehended nor can they be viewed in terms of probability. Rather, we must "draw near" to them, which means that we must "draw near" to who it is that we are ultimately

¹⁶⁶ Which would reduce ideality to conceptual and abstract notions. As previously discussed, objective knowledge, especially having to do with mathematics, logics, and geometry, allows for an "ideality" in the sense of giving us access to unchanging and necessary truths. But such an ideality never fully maps on to human experience, despite the best efforts of the defenders of scientism to convince us otherwise.

¹⁶⁷ Piety, 21-24.

¹⁶⁸ Arnason., 23. See Piety, 107-13.

¹⁶⁹ Piety, 106.

to become. To draw near to our true self, our “spirit,” the self that God wants us to be, is the *telos* of human existence. In his collection on Hasidic mysticism Martin Buber recounts a quote by a Hasidim named Rabbi Zusya, who on his deathbed said: “In the world to come I shall not be asked, ‘Why were you not Moses?’ I shall be asked, ‘Why were you not Zusya?’”¹⁷⁰ This is basically the central tenet of both Kierkegaard’s moral philosophy as well as his epistemology. Essential knowledge is knowledge of who we truly are, and who we are to become.

3.6 - Second Interlude: Essentialism and Existentialism in Kierkegaard and Maximus the Confessor

Such an analysis of Kierkegaard’s view of the human *telos* as “becoming who one truly is” raises important metaphysical questions. It is difficult to imagine Kierkegaard, the progenitor of Western existentialism, as veering towards anything akin to essentialism. There is also the concomitant question of the status of free choice in Kierkegaard’s philosophy. If, after all, we are essentially created to be and live as a certain kind of person, to what extent can we be considered to be free?

The philosophy of Maximus the Confessor, the (580-662) can illumine important aspects of Kierkegaard’s thought. Maximus’ anthropology and metaphysics center around the notion that union with God is the *telos* of human beings and that the fulfilment of this function can only be achieved via the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Blowers and Wilken, writing on Maximus, note that:

¹⁷⁰ Martin Buber, *The Way of Man According to the Teaching of the Hasidim* (New York: Citadel, 1994), 17.

In Maximus' vision of the world, the incarnation of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity in Jesus of Nazareth holds the secret to the foundation—the architectural *logoi*—of the created cosmos, its destiny after the fall of created beings (the mystery of *redemption*), and the transcendent end (*telos*) of creation (the mystery of *deification*) wherein the prospect of ever more intimate communion with the Trinity is opened up.¹⁷¹

Christ, the *Logos*, the divine, ordering principle of the entire cosmos, is manifest in and through the *logoi* of created things, the individualized, essential characteristics of the created order: “For Maximus the Confessor, the world – the natural world and the ‘world of the scriptural revelation – is the broad and complex theater in which God’s incarnational mission is playing itself out to full completion.”¹⁷²

Maximus' *Logos* theology is marked by his insistence that theological discourse must take place simultaneously on two levels: the metaphysical and the existential. G.C. Tympas, in his study on correlations between Maximus and 20th century psychotherapy, writes: “Maximus does not blindly support a doctrinal system remote from the psyche [...], but applies an anthropological view open to a metaphysical perspective, or more precisely to a personal God, whose characteristics are imprinted in the human soul.”¹⁷³

This binary way of doing theology is also applied to Maximus' understanding of the human person. Much like Kierkegaard, Maximus sees the human being as existing within two opposite dimensional “poles:” On the one hand, human beings are *persons*

¹⁷¹ Paul M. Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken, introduction to *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ: Selected Writings from St. Maximus the Confessor* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 20.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁷³ G.C. Tympas, *Carl Jung and Maximus the Confessor on Psychic Development: The Dynamics between the “Psychological” and the “Spiritual”* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 60. The same qualification could easily be applied to Kierkegaard. Even though Kierkegaard, unlike Maximus, never explicitly flips his philosophical viewpoint towards a purely metaphysical perspective (which would, after all, undermine his whole philosophical agenda), the metaphysical and ontological dimensions of his philosophy are always at least implied in and through the existential perspective.

(*hypostasis*), i.e., unique and individual, but they also exist as a manifestation of an essence or nature (*ousia*). Maximus' anthropology therefore borrows heavily from the Trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian fathers that was grounded in just such a polar tension between similarity and difference, personhood and essence.¹⁷⁴

Maximus, like all of the Eastern patristic fathers, understands salvation in terms of *theosis*, the transformation of the human person in union with God: "Maximus adopts the biblical tradition that man is a 'composite nature' of body and soul. According to *Genesis*, man was made in God's image and likeness, which means that uniqueness and communion are present in both God and man. Man acquired not only a direct resemblance to God's image but also the potentiality to become 'God's likeness.'"¹⁷⁵ The deification of the human person, whereby we become increasingly *like* God, differs considerably from several of the Western Christian models of salvation. First and foremost, the Eastern patristic notion of deification, especially as it appears in writers such as Maximus, sees salvation as occurring not only through the soul, or a particular part of the soul (namely reason)—as per the emphasis in the Augustinian and Thomistic traditions where union with God is understood primarily in terms of the beatific vision—but is rather understood as encapsulating the *whole* human person, including the body. Salvation, therefore, can only be manifest in and through the particular psychosomatic reality of each individual person. "Essence" in Maximus' anthropology can therefore be understood in universal terms, as denoting the essential nature of human beings and certain attributes and characteristics (including our reason and free will) that make union with God possible, but also as the personal *logos* that denotes the individual expression

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

and manifestation of these universal attributes. The salvation offered by Christ through the incarnation and the resurrection is, according to Maximus, a hypostatic reality, a *personal* act of love and communion that at the same time has immense metaphysical and ontological implications for not only human beings but also the entire cosmos.

But Maximus' view of salvation also differs considerably from the Protestant model of personal salvation through faith alone. Much like Kierkegaard, Maximus sees salvation in terms of a collaboration between God and the individual human person. This synergy is primarily expressed through the human will, which must be *synergized* with God's will. Tympas writes: "Maximus' analysis of 'synergy' is based on the model of the two wills in Christ: the human will and the divine will, according to his dual nature as a person."¹⁷⁶ Similarly, the human person has two wills:

The 'natural will,' which is man's ability/will to act that belongs to and is 'disposed by nature', and the 'gnomic will' that belongs to the person/hypostasis as a result of the way one acts or wills. [...] This distinction cannot apply to Christ, because he is sinless and therefore cannot have a gnomic will opposing the will of his divine nature. Following the prototypical pattern of the two wills in Christ, man has to abide by his inner free choice/will that follows the *logos* of his nature, or the *logoi*-as-virtues, within which divine love bears supremacy.¹⁷⁷

Anti-Climacus, in *The Sickness Unto Death*, similarly situates individuality with the gnomic will, i.e., with our inclinations and desires that lead us to sin: "The category of sin is the category of individuality."¹⁷⁸ The conversion towards Christianity, according to Anti-Climacus, begins when the individual discovers that his or her own individuality,

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 88.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ *SUD*, 119.

what sets us apart from other people, ultimately results in despair.¹⁷⁹ No matter how much we try to align the poles of existence (which, in Maximus' terminology, would be to synergize the gnostic and natural wills), we will always encounter an essential misrelation between what we want and desire and what is truly good for us. This is why we must entirely "give up" our gnostic will by orienting it entirely towards eternity. In the *Upbuilding Discourses* Kierkegaard writes: "Temporality, as it is knowable, cannot be the transparency of the eternal; in its given actuality, it is the *refraction* of the eternal. This makes the category 'to accomplish' less direct. The more the eternal is in motion in the witness, the greater the refraction."¹⁸⁰

For Kierkegaard, the aforementioned double-mindedness is the condition of wanting your cake and eating it too, of not wanting to let go completely of our obsessions, to be continually embroiled in the temporal. In the discourse entitled "What Happiness in Being a Human Being," Kierkegaard sees the glory of the human condition primarily in our ability to choose: "A choice. My listener, do you know how to express in a single word anything more glorious! If you talked year in and year out, could you mention anything more glorious than a choice, to have choice!"¹⁸¹ It is the ability to choose ourselves by choosing God that fulfils the human *telos* and Kierkegaard sees this as a joyous thing. But this choosing only finds its fulfilment when we achieve a synergy with what God chooses, which is that we become who we truly are. This choice must be absolute. We have to be "all in" or otherwise we will always be nagged by double-mindedness, by doubt, worry, anxiety, and despair: "The human being must choose

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 122ff.

¹⁸⁰ *UD*, 90.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 206.

between God and mammon. This is the eternal, unaltered condition of the choice' there will be no escape, never in all eternity."¹⁸² To choose God is to choose one's self because the Kingdom of God is within us.¹⁸³ Authenticity, for Kierkegaard, can therefore be understood in terms of an essentialism but it is a highly personal essence that he is pointing to, the alignment of the human will with the will of God. Actuality (*Virkiligheden*) is, as Anti-Climacus puts it, the "unity of possibility and necessity."¹⁸⁴ As Piety points out, Kierkegaard does not believe that anyone can achieve this unity completely (to do so would make them equal to Christ, i.e., they would be completely without sin) but he clearly believes that the spiritual life is centered on the transformation of the person that makes this unity increasingly possible. God's plan (the individual *logos*-essence) for each person is an ideality that we are to actualize in our lives through our choices. This means that I cannot choose who the "real me" truly is, but I can choose whether or not to become this person. To become oneself, as Piety points out, is "the free appropriation of that self that it has been eternally determined one *ought* to become, or the actualization of that self that it is necessary to actualize in order to actually exist."¹⁸⁵

But even if we accept that Kierkegaard's notion of essence is grounded in personhood rather than a universal nature the question nonetheless remains to what extent we are free to choose our own path in life given this particular framework. After all, how delimiting is the "true self" that God has ordained me to be? Kierkegaard never addresses this issue directly, nor does Maximus the Confessor. The details of what exactly is meant by an individualized *logos*, when translated into personal terms, is left unanswered.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 207.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹⁸⁴ *SUD*, 36.

¹⁸⁵ Piety, 107.

Perhaps wisely so, since we are touching upon one of the more mysterious aspects of what it means to be a human being. After all, if God's essence is entirely unknowable and human beings are created after the image and likeness of this God then the essential qualities of the human person must also remain deeply mysterious.

Two things do become immediately apparent when considering Kierkegaard's notion of authenticity in light of Maximus' framework of an individualized *logos*: First, Kierkegaard's (proto-) existentialism differs considerably from the existentialist framework that was developed in the twentieth century by writers such as Sartre and Camus. For Kierkegaard, it simply is not true that existence precedes essence. Even though Kierkegaard revolutionized Western philosophy by shifting the focus from abstract metaphysical questions to the categories of individual, lived experience—such as anxiety and despair—he nonetheless did not abandon the Christian notion of an essential self or the metaphysical concept of an immortal essence or soul.

Second, Kierkegaard's view of the soul is a deeply personal one. The soul, for Kierkegaard, is always understood in terms of an eternal *telos*. This *telos* manifests itself in and through personal choice, which primarily has to do with our ability to freely accept sacrifice and pain, rather than primarily orienting our lives towards self-satisfaction. This means that even though our authentic (“essential”) self, our *logos*, is always to a large extent shrouded in mystery it is nonetheless at least partially revealed to us in the life of the *Logos*, the son of God. When Kierkegaard and Maximus claim that God intends me to become a certain person, this does not necessarily mean that God specifically ordains me to get married or stay single or that he wants me to have a certain profession or live in a

certain place. Rather, it means that God intends for me to manifest, in my own, individual, free manner, the life that Christ manifested to us, a life of sacrifice and love.

Given Kierkegaard's antipathy towards the religious institutions of his time, there is not a great deal of thought in his work given over to the connections between Christian liturgical life and the notion that the human *logos* is primarily manifest through sacrifice. Such connections abound in the Eastern Orthodox tradition. As Alexander Schmemmann noted in his work *For the Life of the World*, the human *telos* is ultimately *Eucharistic* in nature. The offering of bread and wine in the liturgy is a way for the individual believer to enter into the sacrifice of Christ, the new life that Christ opens up to the human person. The offering of the liturgy, Schmemmann writes, is:

The movement that Adam failed to perform, and that in Christ has become the very life of man: a movement of adoration and praise in which all joy and suffering, all beauty and all frustration, all hunger and all satisfaction are referred to their ultimate End and become finally *meaningful*. Yes, to be sure, it is a *sacrifice*: but sacrifice is the most natural act of man, the very essence of his life. Man is a sacrificial being, because he finds his life in love, and love is sacrificial: it puts the value, the very meaning of life in the other and gives life to the other, and in this giving, in this sacrifice, finds the meaning and joy of life.¹⁸⁶

3.7 - Suffering as a form of knowing

I move now to a further analysis between this connection between sacrifice and love, love and meaning in the works of Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard unequivocally says that self-knowledge ultimately manifests itself as consciousness of sin, which is a consciousness of our brokenness, of our inability to truly conquer our existential despair on our own steam. This kind of deep feeling of helplessness and dread only begins to

¹⁸⁶ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973), 35.

manifest itself in the transition from the ethical stage to the religious stage. The ethical stage, the stage of commitment and love and public duty, is a beautiful thing indeed, but given the fact that a human being has an *absolute telos*, is oriented towards *absolute* meaning and *absolute* good, despair ultimately always comes creeping back in. No matter how wonderful our family life, how fruitful our careers, how rewarding our artistic and intellectual pursuits, we are always faced with the consciousness of our death and of our limitations as mortal, fallible beings. “The individual that seeks to fully shoulder the burden of his duties with full commitment will inevitably and increasingly realize that he cannot do so absolutely. The demands of the ethical are so immense that the individual lies crushed before them. This becomes increasingly more clear the more seriously one approaches these duties.”¹⁸⁷

Yet Kierkegaard is not promoting any kind of fatalistic determinism. In the *Postscript Climacus* writes: “The essential existential pathos relates itself to existing essentially, and existing essentially is inwardness, and the action of inwardness is suffering, because the individual is unable to transform himself [*skabe sig selv om*]. It becomes, as it were, a feigning [*Skaberi*] of self-transformation, and that is why the highest action in the world is to suffer.”¹⁸⁸ This suffering is *not* an end in itself, but is rather the necessary component in the process of self-becoming that lies at the center of Kierkegaard’s spiritual anthropology: “Essentially, the religious address has [the task] of *uplifting through suffering*. Just as the faith of immediacy is in fortune, so the faith of the religious is in this, that life lies precisely in suffering.”¹⁸⁹ The reason for suffering being

¹⁸⁷ Arnason, 25.

¹⁸⁸ *CUP*, 433.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 436.

an essential component of coming-to-be is that the human person, in synthesizing the poles of eternity and finitude, comes to experience the dialectic between his “higher” rational nature and his “lower” animal nature, i.e., the passions and emotions, as intrinsically painful. This is what Kierkegaard calls “guilt-consciousness.”¹⁹⁰ This is also why Kierkegaard obviously saw *askesis* as an essential element of the Christian life.¹⁹¹

The distinction between guilt-consciousness and sin-consciousness is representative of what Climacus sees as the fundamental difference between religiousness “A” and “B.”¹⁹² The religious stage becomes manifest in an individual’s life when he realizes that the things of this world, no matter how committed we are to them and no matter how beautiful they truly are, can never provide us with eternal happiness. Religiousness “A” is the realization that we have an absolute and eternal *telos*, that our despair can only be overcome when we seek meaning, truth, and beauty in something that extends over and beyond the trials, tribulations, and joys of the everyday. This is not to say that Kierkegaard is advocating for any sort of transcendentalism. The move towards religiousness “A” and then religiousness “B” is ultimately an attempt to reclaim the everyday and the earthly, to transfigure it so that it enters into a dialectical relationship with the eternal. Abraham must sacrifice Isaac in order to reclaim him in a transfigured

¹⁹⁰ See Piety, 133; *JP* 4, 3834 / XI¹ A 271; *JP* 4, 4712 / XI¹ A 377.

¹⁹¹ As I will continue to argue, Kierkegaard’s aim here is to promote a view of the human person as being essentially directed towards the other. The human person only finds meaning and fulfillment by loving other people. Even though Kierkegaard developed a considerable amount of his philosophical output to this view, there is nonetheless a tendency in the literature to reduce his views of guilt-consciousness to a “guilt-trip” such as one finds in certain kinds of Protestant pietism. As Christopher Hamilton has noted: “There is, then, I believe, a tendency in Kierkegaard towards asceticism through the *cultivation* of guilt and a sense of one’s sinful condition.” He goes on to add that “this carries with it the great danger of issuing in a loathing of self” (Christopher Hamilton, “Kierkegaard on Truth as Subjectivity: Christianity, Ethics and Asceticism,” *Religious Studies* 34, no. 1 (1998): 78). This negative view of asceticism focuses on an atomized individualism that completely ignores the commandment to love one’s neighbor, a commandment that Kierkegaard devoted an entire book to, namely *Works of Love*.

¹⁹² See especially *CUP*, 555-61.

manner. It is only after the double movements of resignation and faith that Abraham is in a position to fully love Isaac because his love is no longer contingent upon anything (upon Isaac fulfilling the promise that God gave to Abraham, upon Isaac's role in the *Sittlichkeit* of the community) but has rather become an unconditional, God-like love.

Guilt-consciousness then, is consciousness of the struggle between our lower, animal nature and the higher elements of reason. Plato's *Republic* is a fine example of a philosophical work that deals with religiousness "A" and its concomitant guilt-consciousness. As Climacus points out, the dialectic that occurs in guilt-consciousness allows for an "inward deepening"¹⁹³ where the individual can harmonize these disparate elements of himself. Religiousness "A" is marked by a belief in the ability of human beings to master their condition. In Plato's philosophy this mastery occurs through a combination of social arrangement and an inward, spiritual process whereby the individual human person is transformed.

Sin-consciousness, which arises as we enter upon religiousness "B," i.e., Christianity, occurs when the absolute paradox of the human condition becomes apparent to us: Our *telos* is eternal and absolute, we are indeed to accomplish the actualization of this *telos* through inward deepening, suffering and pathos, yet it is ultimately *impossible for us to do so*. Just as the ethical person found himself stranded upon the jagged rocks of meaninglessness and despair upon realizing that everything that he strives for will ultimately fade and wither away, the person in religiousness "A" has a sudden realization, a moment of clarity, where the horrifying truth of human corruption becomes fully apparent.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 556.

Climacus describes the move from guilt-consciousness to sin-consciousness as a “break,” a kind of rebirth of the human person.¹⁹⁴ The complete breakdown of the human person as she is faced with the infinite distance between herself and God (the eternal, the absolute) becomes an upbuilding of the person. For Kierkegaard, as I argued in the previous chapter, to become a person means ultimately to undergo an act of *kenosis* where the self stands “transparent” before God, before “the mirror of the Word.” To realize that we have fallen away from God is a necessary component in coming to know God. The fullness of subjective knowing is ultimately revealed to be a kind of unknowing. “We left the religious person in the crisis of sickness,” Climacus writes, “but this sickness is not unto death. We shall now let him be strengthened by the very same conception that destroyed him, by the conception of God.”¹⁹⁵

The “break” that occurs between guilt-consciousness and sin-consciousness creates a new paradigm of the self. The deepening inwardness of the dialectical relationship between the poles of existence exhausts itself and the human person stands completely naked and vulnerable in the face of this despair. This would, of course, be a terrifying concept, but Kierkegaard thinks that the realization of the “break” that occurs ultimately brings about the ultimate “drawing near” towards God. This is important because, as I previously noted, subjective/essential knowledge (*Kendskab*) is primarily understood *as* acquaintance knowledge, i.e., as “drawing near” to *someone*. The relationship with the eternal ceases to be an abstract one (as in a Platonic, guilt-consciousness of religiousness “A”) and becomes a personal relationship of love. This is

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 532.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 488. This “conception of God” is the highest form of ideality in subjectivity, i.e., the eternal *telos* of the human person.

only truly and fully possible because God draws near to human beings at the same time that they draw near to him:

A break, in which the paradoxical accentuation of existence consists, cannot intervene in the relation between an existing person and the eternal, because the eternal embraces the existing person everywhere, and therefore the misrelation remains within immanence. If a break is to establish itself, the eternal itself must define itself as a temporality, as in time, as historical, whereby the existing person and the eternal in time have eternity between them. This is the paradox.¹⁹⁶

It is ultimately Christ (the paradox)—the God-Man, the eternal made finite, the divine made man—who bridges the gap infinite gap between humankind and God. Kierkegaard's religious philosophy is deeply and profoundly incarnational. Without the incarnation, humankind would forever be mired in full and absolute despair, unable to ever fulfill its *telos*. What is especially important here, and what I will now examine in full detail, is the implication that Kierkegaard sees the paradox as being a) primarily a deeply personal relationship rather than any sort of intellectual grasping, and b) primarily taking place in the context of an *apophatic* unknowing. These two elements of Kierkegaard's epistemology place him strikingly near the epistemological tradition of the Eastern Orthodox Church. In fact, Kierkegaard's philosophy of *kenosis*, apophaticism, and communion place him firmly on the Eastern side of an epistemological debate that reaches centuries back into the history of the Christian tradition.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 532.

3. 8 - Apophaticism and Communion

One of the most seminal and influential works on Eastern Orthodox epistemology is undoubtedly Vladimir Lossky's *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*.¹⁹⁷ Lossky's analysis draws primarily on the works of Dionysius the Areopagite (who in the Western Christian tradition is often known as Pseudo-Dionysius), the 6th century Syrian mystic and theologian.¹⁹⁸ Eastern apophaticism is also heavily indebted to the works of the Cappadocian fathers, especially St. Gregory of Nyssa, as well as the epistemological developments made by St. Gregory Palamas in the 14th century.¹⁹⁹ Eastern apophaticism is centered on the metaphysical distinction made between God's essence (*ousia*) and his energies (*energeia*). God's essence is completely and utterly unknowable and unapproachable by the human mind, both in this life as well as in the next.²⁰⁰

All knowledge has as its object that which is. Now God is beyond all that exists. In order to approach Him it is necessary to deny all that is inferior to Him, that is to say, all that which is. If in seeing God one can know what one sees, then one has not seen God in Himself (since the essence cannot be known and is above all that which is) but something intelligible, something which is inferior to Him. It is by *unknowing* that one may know Him who is above every possible object of knowledge.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷ Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*.

¹⁹⁸ For more information on Dionysius, see Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London & New York: Continuum, 2001).

¹⁹⁹ See Alister McGrath, *Historical Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 22; John McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology*, 152-53; John Meyendorff, *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974).

²⁰⁰ For a detailed examination of this issue emphasizing the divergent views on the East and West on the issue of the "beatific vision" see John D. Jones, "(Mis?)-Reading the Divine Names as a Science: Aquinas' Interpretation of the Divine Names of (Pseudo) Dionysius Areopagite," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (2008): 143-72.

²⁰¹ Lossky, 25.

One of Lossky's primary goals is to differentiate Eastern apophaticism from the Western conception of the *via negativa*, primarily as it appears in Aquinas. Aquinas, according to Lossky, had attempted to merge together the apophatic and the cataphatic, using the former as corrective for the latter. Lossky's point is that Aquinas, immersed as he is in a Western Christian epistemology that emphasizes rational comprehension of God, is unable to fully grasp the implications of Dionysius' apophaticism.²⁰² As Jones points out, Aquinas holds to a rational theology as *scientia*:

[Theology as *scientia*] is able to substitute knowledge of created beings for a knowledge of the divine essence given the causal relation between God and them. That is, on the basis of a demonstration of the existence of God from created things, divine simplicity, and that all created things exist in a preeminent manner in God as first cause, we can establish a demonstrative knowledge of God – the divine essence – based upon the analogical knowledge that exists between created beings and God.²⁰³

Lossky and Jones both contend that Aquinas attempts to interpret the Dionysian corpus in such a way that it will fit into this rationalistic approach and that this misses essential elements of Dionysius' apophaticism.

As I have shown throughout this chapter, Kierkegaard went to great pains to differentiate the possibility of knowledge of God from anything resembling the rationalistic model presented by Aquinas (which has its roots in Augustine's theology on the divine simplicity of God). Kierkegaard, of course, is decidedly silent on the possibility of a "beatific vision," i.e., the possibility that human beings could somehow

²⁰² See Lossky, 26, also his *Theologie Negative et Connaissance de Dieu chez Maître Eckhart* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1998), 37-39; Aristotle Papanikolaou, *Being With God: Trinity, Apophaticism, and Divine-Human Communion* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 13-24; Jones, "(Mis?)-Reading the Divine Names as a Science: Aquinas' Interpretation of the Divine Names of (Pseudo) Dionysius Areopagite."

²⁰³ Jones, 145.

grasp the essence of God in the next life. But given the fact that Kierkegaard thinks that human beings can only fully know and understand the essence of things that are absolutely certain (e.g. mathematical equations)²⁰⁴ it seems that in his epistemology God would effectively need to be reduced to a kind of “formula” that the human being “gets” for such a vision to be a possibility, even in the next life.²⁰⁵ Furthermore, “ontological knowledge”—knowledge of necessary and eternal concepts—is always hypothetical for Kierkegaard.²⁰⁶ It refers to the way objects must be *if* they indeed exist outside of thought. This is why meditations on God’s essence are always hypothetical for Kierkegaard; abstract considerations that have little to do with any real knowledge we may have of God which is always subjective.²⁰⁷ Kierkegaard rarely refers to the essence (*Væsen*) of God in his writings and when he does it usually refers to God’s *personal* essence, which is ultimately revealed to us in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.²⁰⁸

The fact that Kierkegaard most likely does not allow for any knowledge of the essence of God may have influenced the charge of irrationalism against him.²⁰⁹ Indeed, if viewed from a purely Western Christian standpoint, Kierkegaard would seem to fit much

²⁰⁴ Piety, 65.

²⁰⁵ In an unpublished portion of *CUP*, Kierkegaard notes that to be an existing individual (i.e., a human being) means that one exists in time, i.e., within finitude. Kierkegaard’s critique of Hegel can be easily related to his suspicion of the notion that one can understand God (i.e. have knowledge of the essence of God). From the perspective of the eternal, there is indeed no paradox in Christianity (which Kierkegaard sees Hegel attempting to do, i.e., achieve the position of the eternal, with his dialectic towards the Absolute). But human beings cannot existentially situate themselves absolutely within the eternal, given the fact that we are always existing within the tension of the eternal and the finite. Even though Kierkegaard never muses on what the reality of the eschaton might be like one can surmise that he believes that the poles of the eternal and the finite are not limited to life on this earth. Any created being (i.e., anything that is a *being*) will always coexist within the spheres of the finite and the infinite (even though “time” will mean something entirely different in the next life). This means that human beings can never have full and absolute knowledge of God, not even in the next life. God’s essence will always remain unknown. Christianity is *eternally* a matter of *living* the paradox, as opposed to understanding it. See *CUP* II, 48-51.

²⁰⁶ Piety, 67.

²⁰⁷ *CUP*, 280.

²⁰⁸ *JP* 3, 3262 / II C 56.

²⁰⁹ See 133, n. 81.

more neatly into a tradition such as pietism than the more rationally oriented Roman Catholic tradition, especially as it is represented by Aquinas. But this may be a false dilemma. In fact, as I argued throughout the past two chapters and as Piety contends throughout her book, Kierkegaard firmly holds to the possibility of a knowledge of God, one that cannot be limited to a purely emotional response nor to an irrational leap of faith. By situating Kierkegaard nearer to the Eastern Orthodox position, as represented by writers such as Lossky, we can begin to understand his position in a clearer light.

Kierkegaard's dialectical development of subjective knowledge reaches a kind of apotheosis in his incarnational theology. It is ultimately in and through Christ that knowledge of God becomes possible as a form of communion. Similarly, for Lossky, Dionysian apophaticism finds its fulfilment in the incarnation. Papanikolaou, in his analysis of Lossky, writes: "Divine-human communion is the center of all theological discourse and the central significance of the Incarnation. Lossky's theology is thus Christologically grounded, but in a particular understanding of Jesus Christ as the person in whom is realized the event of divine-human communion."²¹⁰

I noted earlier that immanent metaphysical knowledge in the subjective sense, for Kierkegaard, primarily relates to our experience of such things as the immortality of the soul (which, it should yet again be pointed out, is an existential reality just as much as it is a metaphysical proposition, according to Kierkegaard).²¹¹ Such knowledge is always a

²¹⁰ Papanikolaou, 14.

²¹¹ Just as a reminder, these are categories that appear throughout Kierkegaard's works but are never systematized. My analysis here is based on Piety's formulations. For a discussion of Piety's use of "immanent" in this context, see p. 51 and Piety pp. 99-113. Though it is strange to talk about our relationship to such things as the immortality of the soul as "immanent" it makes considerable sense in the context of an inward relation to the existential reality of immortality. Plato's *Phaedo* is an excellent example of a discussion of the subject that is "objective" throughout much of the dialogue, i.e. treating it as a philosophical problem, but which nonetheless has an important "subjective" and "immanent" undercurrent, given the fact that Socrates is discussing the issue right before facing his own death. This is

kind of self-knowledge, much of which is equally accessible through religiousness “A” as well as “B” (Christianity). But it is only via sin-consciousness and the “break” that occurs in the self that we can begin to access a subjective knowledge that is not immanent, i.e., that we cannot gain from our deepening awareness of our own self and the despair therein. This is the “transcendent” knowledge accessible only via revelation, the knowledge only available within religiousness “B,” that reveals to the believer that he is a sinner and that the only way to overcome this state is through the salvation of Jesus Christ who is God incarnate. As Climacus so succinctly puts it in *Fragments*: “Christ is the truth.”²¹²

As Piety notes²¹³ Kierkegaard always uses the Danish word *Kjendskab* “or some form of the verb *kjende*, rather than *Erkjendelsen* or *Viden* or their associated words” when referring to our knowledge of Christ. To “know” Christ, then, is to have a relationship with Him. Christ represents the final end of the epistemological dialectic that runs throughout the Kierkegaardian corpus because Christ represents the ultimate union between knowledge and existence: “Only in Christ, according to Kierkegaard, are truth and existence combined in such a way that they are indistinguishable from each other.”²¹⁴

Piety sees an essential gap remaining between subject and object, even at this height of Christian knowledge: “A person meets Christ in the moment of faith. This meeting is what is meant by ‘knowledge’ of Christ, hence acquaintance knowledge of Christ precedes *genuine* Christian knowledge in the propositional sense.”²¹⁵ This

an apt example given the fact that Kierkegaard thinks that there is always a “subjective” and “interested” element to all knowledge, even objective knowledge, even though we sometimes pretend that this is not the case.

²¹² *Fragments*, 205.

²¹³ Piety, 149.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 152.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 149. Emphasis mine.

propositional knowledge primarily consists of doctrinal knowledge, of understanding the Christian *teaching* that one is a sinner and needs Christ to be saved. Of course, as subjective knowledge, one must then conform one's self to this knowledge, i.e., live it. There remains, though, a kind of unbridgeable chasm between the self and the mental representation that it attempts to conform to. All human beings, due to their sinfulness, are unable to conform their self perfectly to the ideal of Christian knowledge (which Christ Himself is able to do). Ultimately, Piety sees the appropriation of this gap (between the ideality and the actuality of the self) as being an essential component of Christian knowledge:

Christian knowledge is not 'knowledge,' in the approximate sense, of what has historically been referred to as Christian doctrine, or, more specifically, 'knowledge' in an approximate sense, that the proposition that God became man in Christ is part of this doctrine. Christian knowledge proper is the mental representation of this doctrine in the sense of '*the objective uncertainty maintained through appropriation in the most passionate inwardness*' as well as the wise person's insight that the only way one can properly relate to this 'knowledge' is subjectively, in the passion of faith.²¹⁶

There are interesting parallels here between Piety's reading of Kierkegaard and the aforementioned Thomistic account of the Dionysian corpus. Piety sees Kierkegaard's apophaticism (his "skepticism," for lack of a better word) as being a kind of corrective with regards to our ability to appropriate the doctrines of Christianity. The dual movements of resignation and faith are only possible insofar as we become aware of our inability to truly comport our life to the teachings of Christ (accomplished through our growing consciousness of sin) which in turn is only possible if we are deeply and

²¹⁶ Ibid., 155.

passionately aware of our inability to understand the Christian paradox. Whenever we think that we have Christ, and Christianity, “figured out” (as Kierkegaard accuses so many of his contemporaries of doing), the reality of the paradox comes crashing back into us, correcting our “kataphatic” attempts at making Christianity a speculative affair. For Piety, the relationship between the mental representation (the ideality) and the self (actuality) in Kierkegaard’s epistemology is always a dialectical one, a dance between subject and object where the self becomes ever more comported towards the reality of the paradox it encounters. This gives rise to a certain kind of epistemological *certainty*, made possible through faith:

The knower’s certainty that his mental representation of Christian truth corresponds to reality is equivalent to his appreciation of the subjective necessity of the correspondence of his existence to this mental representation. Such an appreciation, and the certainty to which it gives rise, is made possible through belief in Christ. Belief in Christ transforms guilt consciousness into sin consciousness; this transformation is equivalent to the revelation of the subjective necessity of making one’s life an expression of Christian truth in order to obtain authentic human existence.²¹⁷

Apophatic knowledge (our inability to comprehend our own self and the absolute paradox) forms a corrective to kataphatic knowledge (Christian doctrine and our understanding that we must conform our life to it).

Kierkegaard’s fate on this reading is not dissimilar to the way in which the Dionysian corpus was received in the Latin West in the scholastic era: “For both Albert the Great and Aquinas, negation functioned as a logical corrective to the theological discourse, a ‘fine tuning’ of what fundamentally was an *affirmation*, thus enabling us ‘to

²¹⁷ Piety, 153.

approach God with better certainty.”²¹⁸ As Bogdan Bucur has pointed out, Albert and Thomas both saw apophaticism as an intellectual exercise, a part of a “legitimate *scientia*,” while the Eastern tradition always understood Dionysius in a much more radical way, espousing not a conceptual “fine tuning” of the intellect but rather an experiential (mystical) process that leads “beyond concepts into the darkness where God dwells.”²¹⁹

There is much to indicate that Kierkegaard’s apophaticism similarly proposes a radical union between the human self and God, one that is not limited to a dialectical engagement between a mental representation and the self but rather involves a profound experience of the self entering into the life of God. The rest of this chapter, therefore, will be devoted to a critique of Piety’s reading of Kierkegaard’s views on subjective knowledge. I will contend that even though Kierkegaard’s views on subjective knowledge of God include the aforementioned attempt to inwardly appropriate (actualize) Christian doctrine and teachings (ideality) it is nonetheless not reducible to such an epistemological framework. Ideality and actuality are always held in tension, in Kierkegaard’s framework, meaning that the human person can never fully actualize the ideality of Christian truth.²²⁰ Nonetheless, I will argue that Kierkegaard points towards

²¹⁸ Bogdan Bucur, “The Theological Reception of Dionysian Apophatism in the Christian East and West: Thomas Aquinas and Gregory Palamas,” *The Downside Review* 439, no.125 (2007): 139.

²¹⁹ Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 192.

²²⁰ As I have repeatedly noted, ideality can be understood in reference to both objective and subjective knowledge. In reference to Christianity, an objective way of viewing Christian ideality is by understanding it solely in terms of a moral code or theological doctrine. Christianity, when reduced to objective categories, is “untruth,” according to Kierkegaard (*Training in Christianity*, 184). Viewed subjectively, Christianity represents ethical/religious ideality, i.e., the eternal telos of the human being in his or her attempt to acquire the likeness of God.

To say that human beings can never fully actualize the ideality of Christian truth can be understood in terms of both the objective and subjective understandings of Christianity. Objectively speaking, human beings can never fully conform themselves to every single doctrine and moral precept that points the way to holiness. This is, after all, the primary theme of Christ’s teaching in the gospels, namely that blind

the possibility of union with God himself in and through the incarnation of Christ, a union that in fundamental ways transcends the epistemological categories delineated by Piety. Kierkegaard's notion of "knowing" God is not just an epistemological one but rather an existential reality that has significant ontological implications, even though Kierkegaard is not focused on an ontological analysis. This reading of Kierkegaard is heavily influenced by the apophatic tradition in Eastern Christianity and I will now flesh out key aspects of the notion of "union with God" in this tradition and then relate it to Kierkegaard's philosophy.

In his analysis of the apophatic tradition in the Christian East, Lossky emphasizes a synergy of human free will and divine grace (similar to the previously discussed framework of Maximus the Confessor):

Grace is a presence of God within us which demands constant effort on our part; these efforts, however, in no way determine grace, nor does grace act upon our liberty as if it were external or foreign to it. This doctrine, faithful to the apophatic spirit of the Eastern tradition, expresses the mystery of the coincidence of grace and human freedom in good works, without recourse to positive and rational terms.²²¹

The union of human beings with God is accomplished through the appropriation of divine grace via the concomitant efforts of action (*askesis*) and contemplation. Similarly, for Kierkegaard, correct ascetical struggle and worship allow the believer to transcend the

adherence to the law is to be supplanted by the new covenant. The life presented by Christ is not one of religious adherence but rather a life marked by inner repentance, transformation, and love.

But even if we do not make the mistake of the Pharisees and indeed manage to focus on this ideality in a subjective manner (as our personal *telos*) we will nevertheless never fully actualize this ideality. Given the fact that human beings still struggle with sin, we will never achieve a perfect likeness to God in this life (or, for that matter, in the next), hence the need for continual repentance and struggle. Subjectively speaking, it is the struggle towards actualizing the ideality that marks true Christianity rather than the claim that one has achieved that ideality (which is always an impossibility).

²²¹ Lossky, 198.

false dualism of grace (understood as an external force, the “ideal” to which the self must comport itself) and the human will.²²² As Podmore notes on Kierkegaard’s epistemology of grace: “The struggle of prayer is actually a humble expression of the infinite qualitative difference in which the human and divine are brought into intimate relationship.”²²³ As previously noted, prayer is primarily a form of *kenosis* for Kierkegaard where the self becomes “nothing” before God, and in this nothingness a true union is achieved. The self of the believer must become “transparent” before God²²⁴ so that the Spirit may “illuminate him so that he resembles God.”²²⁵

In the Western Christian tradition the emphasis on the issue of grace has traditionally been on the relationship between free will and grace and less of an emphasis on the nature of grace itself.²²⁶ The Latin tradition, following from Augustine’s influence, focused on the transactional nature of grace as a supernatural influence or force created by God in relation to his creatures in order to influence them towards righteousness and redemption.²²⁷ The extent to which human beings could work in harmony with this grace became a central facet of Western Christian soteriology. The Greek tradition, on the other

²²² See esp. *JP* 2, 1472 / X² A 198. Here Kierkegaard notes that even when we receive the grace of the forgiveness of sins, “grace is needed in relation grace.” Kierkegaard points to a continual dialectic of human striving and freely given grace whereby we attempt, each and every moment, to appropriate the grace given to us. Kierkegaard ends this journal entry with the words: “This means that life is a striving.”

²²³ Podmore, 178.

²²⁴ *SUD*, 14.

²²⁵ “One Who Prays Aright Struggles in Prayer and is Victories - in that God is Victorious,” *EUD*, 399. It should be noted that “illuminate” is a translation of *gjennemlyse*, which means to “shine through.” It is interesting to note that Kierkegaard, especially in the *Upbuilding Discourses*, often uses imagery connected to light. The Eastern Orthodox tradition is replete with imagery of “the divine light,” where believers experience God’s *energeia* as both a figurative and literal illumination. For a detailed discussion of the divine light, especially as it relates to Eastern iconography and its connection to the feast of the Transfiguration, see Andreas Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis: The Transfiguration in Byzantine Theology and Iconography* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2005).

²²⁶ James R. Payton, *Light from the Christian East: An Introduction to the Orthodox Tradition* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 156.

²²⁷ McGuckin, “Grace,” *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology*, 150.

hand, viewed grace more in terms of God's immanence in the world. The essence/energies distinction that became central to Eastern Orthodox theology was, at least in part, an attempt to "defend the reality of grace."²²⁸ The Greek Fathers did not view grace as a supernatural reality created by God that somehow transcends the reality of fallen or corrupted nature but rather as the experience of the divine energies, i.e., as God's immanent presence in nature which is always suffused with the divine.²²⁹ As Payton notes:

According to Orthodoxy, the divine energies are eternal. They are not part of creation, and they were not brought into being at the time of creation. The divine energies reside within God; better put, the divine energies *are* God. [...] God brought the universe into existence through the divine energies and through them he continues to sustain it. The divine energies are God dealing with the creation. All God's involvement with creation—in providence, protection *and salvation*—is through his energies, which are God.²³⁰

An essential element in the Eastern Orthodox essence/energies distinction is the idea that the *energeia* in question always flow from the *hypostases*, i.e., the three persons of the Trinity, and not from God's *ousia*.²³¹ The energies are always understood in terms of the *personal* relationship and communion between the three persons of the Trinity and human beings. Payton writes:

God is never at a distance from his creation, and he never deals with it at arm's length. When he acts upon or with his creation, he is not merely exerting some 'influence' on it: he is dealing intimately with it, through his energies—which are God himself. This is true for all God's dealings

²²⁸ Payton, 163. See Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, ed. John H. Erickson and Thomas E. Bird (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 59, 68.

²²⁹ McGuckin, 149-50.

²³⁰ Payton, 163-64.

²³¹ See especially Basil the Great, "Letter XXXVIII," *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Volume 8*, accessed 10/18/2015, <http://www.stnicholasoca.org/files/basil.pdf>.

with his creation—and certainly and especially in salvation. Thus, the grace in which we are deified is not some immaterial or spiritual influence exerted upon us from afar, or something poured out upon or into us at arm’s length. Grace is God himself working within us, effecting our deification within us.²³²

Kierkegaard never deals explicitly with the nature of grace in his writings. Often, Kierkegaard views grace primarily as forgiveness and mercy.²³³ Much of Kierkegaard’s struggle with the notion of grace as forgiveness has to do with our ability (or inability) to accept and appropriate that forgiveness.²³⁴ This appropriation is always a matter of inwardness, of a deepening realization of one’s existence as a *person*, i.e., as an existing individual, and this realization only occurs in our deepening awareness of God’s personal relationship to us. This personal relationship is then to be extended to other human beings. In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard writes: “Christianity’s view is: forgiveness is forgiveness; your forgiveness is your forgiveness’ your forgiveness of another is your forgiveness’ your forgiveness of another is your own forgiveness.”²³⁵ The grace of God, manifest in and through our personal relationship with him, is to flow through us to other people. We are to become conduits for God’s grace. But this is only possible if we become “transparent”, if we become completely still and quiet and allow God’s grace to “shine through us.”²³⁶ Even though Kierkegaard never uses the technical terminology of *energeia* he nonetheless gives an astoundingly poetic view of human appropriation of grace that is centered on the person’s ability to “reflect the image of God,” which can

²³² Payton, 164.

²³³ *JP* 2, 1472 / X² A 198; *JP* 3, 3581 / XI² A 295; *JP* 3, 3773 / X⁵ A 68; *Christian Discourses*, 297ff.

²³⁴ See Hinkson, *Kierkegaard’s Theology: Cross and Grace*, esp. 121-44.

²³⁵ *WOL*, 348.

²³⁶ *EUD*, 399-400.

only occur as one attempts to come “face-to-face” with God Himself in a personal encounter of inwardness and prayer.²³⁷

This inwardness is achieved primarily in worship, according to Climacus:

“*Worship* is the maximum for a human being’s relationship with God, and thereby for his likeness to God, since the qualities are absolutely different. But worship signifies that for him God is absolutely everything, and the worshiper is in turn the absolutely differentiating one. The absolutely differentiating one relates himself to his absolute *telos*, but *eo ipso* also to God.”²³⁸ In an important passage, Climacus stresses that this differentiation between the believer and God must involve a complete abandonment of our understanding of God. Apophaticism, for Kierkegaard, cannot be limited to serving as a corrective to the kataphatic. God’s goodness is not simply a “supercharged” version of human goodness but rather a mystery to be entered into: “There is no merit at all for an existing person in wanting to approach the equality that possibly exists for the eternal. For an existing person, the passionate decision is precisely the maximum.”²³⁹

²³⁷ *EUD*, 383ff. Podmore, 178-79.

²³⁸ *CUP*, 413. Climacus here uses the word *Distingverende* (“differentiating one”) to speak of a human being that enters into a relationship with God. This is a peculiar word indeed, a noun created out of the verb *distingvere*, meaning “to distinguish” (between something). Throughout the Postscript Climacus usually uses the word *Forskjel* (*forskel* in modern spelling), meaning simply “difference,” to refer to the qualitative difference between the human being and God. There are two possible reasons for the use of *Distingverende* here: One is that the word is very close to the adjective *distingveret*, meaning “distinguished,” which is especially apt given its connection to the act of worship, reverence, and awe that are essential to our establishing a relationship with God. The second is that Kierkegaard is pointing towards an *action* that is enacted through the human will and therefore chooses to use a descriptive noun that is derived from a verb. Human beings have to *choose* to manifest the essential difference between themselves and God if they are to establish a relationship with God. What usually separates us from God is precisely the fact that we pretend that we are actually not that different from God at all, that we ourselves are in control and that we have the power to overcome our shortcomings and our despair. This is, after all, the classical formulation of the original sin in the Garden of Eden. The serpent whispers to Adam and Eve that they can become “like God” and they thereby choose to separate themselves from God. In doing so they also separate themselves from each other. In returning to God we must therefore become the “differentiating ones,” i.e., manifest in our actions our complete reliance upon God and upon each other. *Distingverende* therefore denotes vulnerability, openness, and communion.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

Furthermore, when we enter into the darkness of this unknowing, we are drawing near to God. Worship and prayer are two primary elements in clearing the path between the human self and God, and this can only be done by letting go of all of our images, thoughts, concepts, and ideas about *what* God is: “The absolute distinction is equipped to clear the way just as a policeman does in a procession; it clears away the crush, the mob of relative ends, in order that the absolutely differentiating one can relate himself to the absolute.”²⁴⁰

I have already touched on the contemplative elements of Kierkegaard’s epistemology, especially his indebtedness to the *nous/dianoia* distinction which is so pivotal to the development of Eastern Christian epistemology. With regards to the notion of action in the spiritual life (asceticism), Kierkegaard’s philosophy again finds many correlations to the Eastern tradition. Climacus’ repeated warnings of the externalization of the Christian faith in modernity and his suspicions about monasticism in the medieval world²⁴¹ might lead to a superficial reading of Kierkegaard’s philosophy as being a matter of *sola fide*. As I repeatedly noted in the previous chapter, Kierkegaard obviously had severe reservations about Luther’s condemnation of the *praxis* of the spiritual life and did indeed hold that *askesis* is an essential component of the path towards God.

In *The Mystical Theology* Lossky writes:

The beginning of the spiritual life is conversion, an attitude of the will turning towards God and renouncing the world: ‘The world’ has here a particular ascetical connotation. [...] ‘The world’ signifies here a dispersion, the soul’s wandering outside itself, a treason against its real nature. For the soul is not in itself subject to passions, but becomes so when it leaves its interior simplicity and exteriorizes itself. Renunciation

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ See chapter 1 for a detailed discussion of Kierkegaard’s views on these issues.

of the world is thus a re-entering of the soul into itself, a concentration, a reintegration of the spiritual being in its return to communion with God.²⁴²

In *Training in Christianity* Anti-Climacus writes that the purpose of the Christian is to achieve absolute “introversion,” i.e. to gather all the disparate elements of himself in his inner life and to focus these on living in accordance with Christ. This living primarily consists of self-denial and asceticism: “Endless introversion teaches a man to understand to the utmost what the task is (if to the utmost he is introverted), that to be a Christian is to believe in Christ and to suffer for the sake of this faith, in other words, that it is self-denial in the Christian sense.”²⁴³

Much of *Training in Christianity* is a long polemic against what Kierkegaard (in the voice of Anti-Climacus) sees as the insipid and vapid Christianity of his age, especially the preaching of such figures as Bishop Mynster. In section III, Anti-Climacus argues at length against sermons that are intended as reflections (*Betragtninger*) because they create a distance between the believer and the teaching, i.e., they maintain a subject-object distinction that Kierkegaard wants to overcome.²⁴⁴ Anti-Climacus maintains that a reflection is a proper attitude to have when one is looking at a painting, since it is proper that one, to some extent, go “out of” oneself as one observes the painting. Christianity, on the other hand, is like a painting that “looks back” at the observer.²⁴⁵ It draws the viewer

²⁴² Lossky, 200.

²⁴³ *Training in Christianity*, 204.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 211.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 212. There is an interesting echo in Anti-Climacus’ view of Christian truth as a painting that “looks back” at you in the tradition of iconography in the Christian East. Orthodox icons are painted using an inverted perspective, drawing the viewer in, rather than utilizing the naturalistic perspective that became increasingly prevalent in Western religious art, especially after the Renaissance. See Leonid Ouspenski and Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, trans. G.E.H. Palmer and E. Kadloubovsky (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Press, 1982); Michel Quenot, *The Icon: Window on the Kingdom*, trans. by a Carthusian monk (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1991).

in and demands a kind of communion that transcends the relationship between knower and the object-to be-known. Anti-Climacus' repeated admonishments that the Christian must learn how to suffer is not a pessimistic glorification of suffering for its own sake but rather an epistemological meditation on the nature of the I-Thou relationship between the believer and God. Both *Works of Love* and *Training in Christianity* present a spirituality that attempts to combine *theoria* and *praxis* by presenting *kenosis* as the ultimate goal of the spiritual life. Kierkegaard's apophatic "unknowing" finds its correlation in Anti-Climacus' emphasis on martyrdom where the self enters into the life of God.

Many readers could indeed be forgiven for finding much of Anti-Climacus' polemic as being overly harsh and off-putting in *Training in Christianity*. It is undoubtedly one of Kierkegaard's most difficult and challenging works. Yet themes of union and transformation abound in the work. In explaining the distinction between an "admirer" of Christianity (one who finds it beautiful and true but does not attempt to change herself in accordance with the teaching) and a "follower" (someone whose self is changed via her exposure to Christian teaching and to the reality of Christ) Anti-Climacus writes: "The admirer is not willing to make any sacrifices, to give up anything worldly, to reconstruct his life, to be what he admires or let his life express it [...]. The follower, on the other hand, aspires *to be what he admires*—and so (strange to say!) even though he lives in established Christendom he will encounter the same danger which once was involved in confessing Christ."²⁴⁶

In the previous chapter I discussed various ways in which Kierkegaard's philosophy presents salvation as a kind of *theosis*, a deification of the human person. In

²⁴⁶ *Training in Christianity*, 230, Emphasis mine.

the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the doctrine of *theosis* is deeply connected to the epistemological and ontological distinction of God's essence and energies. God's essence, as has been previously noted, is completely unknowable, the "divine darkness" that lies at the center of so much of Eastern Orthodox theology. The divine energies, God's outpouring grace and connection to humankind, are considered not as a created "effect" but rather as a manifestation of God Himself.²⁴⁷ This means that the energies reveal something real and knowable about God, indicating that human reason has an important and positive role to play in our relationship to God. The heavy emphasis on apophaticism in writers such as Dionysius (and later theologians such as Lossky) is not an attempt to turn theology into some kind of irrationalism but rather to shift the focus away from theology as a *scientia* to a view of theology as having primarily to do with practice, experience, and communion. For writers such as Lossky, all of these elements are grounded in the experience of the Incarnation: "The problem for Lossky is not so much the role of thought and positive theology, but the failure to recognize the limits of thought in the face of the Incarnation."²⁴⁸

Johannes de Silentio's account of the inward movement from resignation to faith, Climacus' account of the "crucifixion of reason" and Anti-Climacus' exhortations are all an attempt to show that Christianity, viewed solely from a rational perspective, can equally be seen as a "teaching" that is quite beautiful (the humanist appropriation of Christianity) or something that is "madness" and the "greatest horror" (the point of view

²⁴⁷ For a detailed discussion of the divergence between the Augustinian understanding of theophanies as created effects in the Western tradition versus the Eastern understanding of these as Christological and manifestations of divine *energeiai* see Bogdan Bucur, "Theophanies and Vision of God in Augustine's *De Trinitate*: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (2008): 67-93.

²⁴⁸ Papanikalaou, 16.

of one who understands, and perhaps even believes, the doctrine and the law, but does not humble himself in sin-consciousness and enter into communion with Christ, the one who forgives the sin).²⁴⁹ As Piety argues, Kierkegaard fully believed in both “acquaintance knowledge” (*Kjendskab*) as well as propositional knowledge of Christian truth.²⁵⁰ Yet the knower remains forever separate from the object known (meaning that it is not essential knowledge at all, which requires the appropriation of the knowledge in question) until the eye of reason “closes” and the knower realizes that God truly is “the unknown.”

Climacus in the *Fragments* writes that “the individual, if he is truly to come to know something about the *unknown* (God) must come to know that it is different from himself, absolutely different. The understanding cannot come to know this by itself (because, as we have seen, this is self-contradictory). If it is to come to know this, it must come to know this through God.”²⁵¹

As Papanikalaou writes: “The goal of apophaticism is not to conclude that nothing can be known of God; it is rather to propel the aspiring Christian to a deeper union, which lies beyond being and thus beyond thought.”²⁵² Podmore sees Kierkegaard’s writings on prayer as being profoundly reflective of this sensibility. Human despair, the misrelation of the self to itself, reaches a dialectical apotheosis at the moment when we become acutely aware of the chasm between ourselves and God. Reason can in no way, shape, or form bridge this chasm. In fact, to try to “figure out” a way to God, or to overcome sin, is to fall ever deeper in to despair.²⁵³ Prayer for Kierkegaard (as previously argued in this

²⁴⁹ See esp. *Training in Christianity*, 61-62.

²⁵⁰ Piety, esp. 154-60.

²⁵¹ *Philosophical Crumbs* (trans. Piety), 199. Emphasis mine.

²⁵² Papanikalaou, 18.

²⁵³ This echoes the sentiment that sometimes appears in both the Gospels and the epistles that it is better to live in ignorance of the *Logos* than to have come to know the Truth and to turn one’s back on it because one is not strong enough to follow the Way. See, for example, 2 Peter 2:21: “For it had been better

chapter) is a form of unknowing, of *silence* as the drawing-near to God. Commenting on a passage from *The Sickness Unto Death* where Anti-Climacus speaks of the height of despair as one who says “No” to the possibility of the forgiveness of sin (which ultimately reflects an attempt to rationally understand sin)²⁵⁴ Podmore writes:

If this offensive and combative speech is contrasted with the surrendering intimacy of prayer, it is discovered that, unlike the despair which wants to grapple with God but only does so by becoming qualitatively distanced, prayer is actually a silent waiting upon God: an unknowing expression of self-surrender through faith. [...] Prayer signifies an act of silence: an act which breaks the silence of despair in the face of human impossibility; and the same time also a silence which listens to God at the moment when despair would pronounce its offence. The silence of prayer for Kierkegaard... does not struggle at a distance with God in its despairing defiance, but rather it transcends, as it were, the infinite distance by its submission to faith.²⁵⁵

Lossky sees this demarcation between “struggling with God” and the apophatic way of union as being emblematic of the division between the Western and Eastern Christian traditions in the way in which they understand the possibility of union with God. The Western tradition, according to Lossky, emphasizes *gnosis*, the attempt to understand God (albeit noetically) with the Eastern conception of “mystical experience,” a union

for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known *it*, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.” This reflects Kierkegaard’s notion that despair is actually at its highest in the religious stage of existence, especially in that moment when one shifts from religiousness “A” to religiousness “B.” It is only via the existential moment (*Øjeblik*) of faith (which must be repeated ad infinitum throughout our lives) that we overcome this despair and the chasm is bridged. But when we are unable to do so, we are, at least to some extent, in a worse place existentially than the philistine or the aesthete, who at least find solace in their existential ignorance and can drown their sorrows in the sweet waters of immediacy. Plato echoes the same sentiment in the Cave Allegory, since the heightened consciousness of the lover of wisdom who escaped the cave is obviously cause of no little despair and suffering, compared to the blissful (though ultimately destructive) ignorance of those who are perfectly fine with continuing their existence within the safe confines of the shadows.

²⁵⁴ See *SUD*, 114: “When the sinner despairs of the forgiveness of sins, it is almost as if he walked right up to God and said, ‘No, there is no forgiveness of sins, it is impossible,’ and it looks like close combat.”

²⁵⁵ Podmore, 150.

between the human person and God that incorporates all elements (both spiritual and bodily) of the human being.²⁵⁶ The inexpressible and ineffable union of the *via negativa* in Eastern theology represents the union of “knowledge and love”²⁵⁷ where the mind ceases to understand the “what” of God and draws near to God as the beloved. For Kierkegaard this type of knowledge represents the height of *Kjendskab*, of knowing through communion, of union through love: “Prayer is thus the leap of faith into the silence of unknowing: the self-surrendering intimacy that overcomes the infinite abyss of offence that has served as the battlefield between God and humanity.”²⁵⁸

This is an altogether deeper and more profound knowledge than what Piety proposes we can find in Kierkegaard, i.e., the attempt to conform the self to a mental representation. Subjective (essential) knowledge, for Kierkegaard, reaches completely beyond mental representations and becomes a pathway towards union. Prayer, contemplation, and asceticism (accepting suffering) are the essential components of the human being, in mind, soul, body, and spirit, ceasing to attempt to “figure out” either his own sinfulness or the gap between himself and God, instead emptying himself in the face of the absolute mystery (the ultimate Paradox) of God’s eternal love.

²⁵⁶ See Papanikalaou, 20-24; Lossky, 8, 221, 224.

²⁵⁷ Papanikalaou, 22.

²⁵⁸ Podmore, 150.

Chapter 4 – Being as Love: Personhood and Communion

In this chapter I will examine Kierkegaard's views on personhood and the self. A primary consideration in this chapter will be to defend Kierkegaard against two common critiques aimed at his philosophy: a) that his views on personhood often constitute a form of individualism with little or no consideration of relationships, community, and communion, and b) that Kierkegaard's philosophy is largely devoid of a critical examination of social and political issues, especially given his critique of Hegelian *Sittlichkeit*. I will argue that this negative appraisal arises out of reading his philosophy as falling within standard accounts of personhood found within the Western philosophical and religious traditions, which I contend Kierkegaard wanted to break away from. Though there are important differences between Kierkegaard's view and the philosophy of personhood espoused in Eastern Christianity, there are fascinating parallels between the two that highlight the revolutionary break Kierkegaard wanted to make between his views of the human person and the philosophical views of the human person found in both the Western Christian tradition as well as in the humanist Enlightenment philosophies (the "speculative philosophy") of the time.

In section 4.1 I begin by examining Kierkegaard's writings on the relationship between paradox and personhood. My focus in this first section will be on the connection between Kierkegaard's epistemology (extensively discussed in chapter three) and his philosophy of personhood. This discussion will include an analysis of Climacus' distinction between the objective truths (perhaps most clearly represented by speculative philosophy) and subjective truth that must be appropriated by the individual person. As we will see, Kierkegaard's philosophy of personhood is primarily founded on the notion

of *becoming* a person (or “spirit”), a process that primarily revolves around our ability to manifest certain kinds of ethical/religious truths in ourselves. This section then proceeds to an analysis of personhood in Eastern Orthodox philosophy with a focus on various elements that coincide with Kierkegaard’s analysis. My focus will be on the notion of personhood as being grounded in communion, a view of the human person that dates back to the patristic era but which finds its clearest expression in later theological writers such as Vladimir Lossky and John Zizioulas.

Section 4.2 will further flesh out Kierkegaard’s view of the person as a process of becoming, while also examining parallels between Kierkegaard’s debate with the Hegelianism of his time and the differing philosophies of personhood between Eastern and Western Christianity. It also includes an analysis of relationality in Kierkegaard’s writings, with an emphasis on the difference between religiousness “A” and “B” in Climacus’ *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. This is an important consideration in any analysis of Kierkegaard’s writings on the person because Kierkegaard sees Christianity (religiousness “B”) as opening up a profoundly revolutionary view of human personhood, one that cannot be accessed via any other philosophical model or theory.

Section 4.3 offers a comparative philosophical analysis of the concept of deification (*theosis*) in Eastern Orthodox spirituality, especially as it relates to the issue of personhood, and Kierkegaard’s view on the possibility of universal love (*Kærlighed*). This section will also offer a preliminary analysis of the social and political implications of Kierkegaard’s philosophy of personhood, especially when it is considered in light of similar socio-political concerns in the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Though time and space

preclude an extensive analysis of this matter I hope to at least provide a glimpse into the potential of Kierkegaard's philosophy as it relates to systemic and political realities.

4.1 - Paradox and Personhood

Kierkegaard's views on personhood have already served as the background for much of the preceding discussion. Anti-Climacus' view of human personhood as essentially consisting of the tension between the poles of human existence; finite/infinite, temporal/eternal, determined/free, biological/ensouled, etc. This tension informs the process of personhood as a state of *becoming* and it informs all of Kierkegaard's writing on the human self (this equally applies to his pseudonymous works as well as the Christian discourses written in his own name). As I discussed in chapter 2, the experience of both anxiety and despair reveals the basic structure of what it means to be an existing individual. Human *telos* for Kierkegaard primarily revolves around facing up to despair and achieving an authentic existence. The way in which this is done depends upon which stage of existence one is in and upon one's ability to move closer towards the religious sphere (specifically religiousness "B," i.e., Christianity). This is because Kierkegaard obviously believed that Christianity offered the kind of subjective truth that allows human beings to fully understand and appropriate their condition (sinfulness) and to overcome it (via the salvation made possible through the incarnation of Jesus Christ).

Even though the aesthetic and ethical spheres offer ways in which one can face up to despair in various ways, they are nonetheless limited insofar as the human being within these spheres fails to realize the extent of the effects of sin upon his or her own self. The aesthete and ethical person are both attempting to lift themselves up to heaven, so to

speak, through their own efforts. The religious sphere, however, marks the realization that the human understanding simply does not allow us to save ourselves, and that we must therefore seek transcendence and salvation through other means. Self-knowledge is directly linked to coming face-to-face with the absolute paradox (the “absurd,” as Silentio, calls it) and deepening introspection correlates with a deepening awareness of our absolute dependence upon God.¹

As an entryway into Kierkegaard’s complex views on the self, I will begin with a discussion of how his epistemology and focus on paradox affect his views on human personhood. As we will see, the realization that we cannot solve the problem of the human self through the power of the understanding opens us up to a new kind of knowledge and a new self-realization, one which is primarily grounded in communion with other people and with God.

One of the primary discussions of “the paradox” appears in Johannes Climacus’ *Philosophical Fragments*. Climacus differentiates between three different modes of trying to understand the truth: a) Speculative philosophy,² b) Socratic philosophizing, and

¹ This chapter presents a somewhat tricky issue in how to correctly present the concept of *Guden*. When it is clear that Kierkegaard, or one of the pseudonymous authors, is referring to the Christian God in the context of religiousness “B,” I have chosen to capitalize the word. When the writings refer to the divine entering into immediacy in the moment, especially in the context of Socrates and Religiousness “A,” I have chosen to keep the word in the lower case. This is not just a stylistic choice but rather an attempt to allow the reader to situate herself more firmly in the development of Kierkegaard’s (and Climacus’) thought as we move back and forth between these two different modes of entering into a relationship with the divine.

² There is quite a bit of scholarly debate on exactly what this means and at whom Climacus’ critique is primarily aimed. Stewart (*Kierkegaard’s Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003)) contends that all of the pseudonymous works, as well as those penned under Kierkegaard’s own name, are primarily aimed at his Danish contemporaries. If *Philosophical Fragments* are viewed in conjunction with the unpublished work *Johannes Climacus*, which details the early biography of the author of *Fragments* and the *Postscript*, then it becomes clear that Climacus’ aim is much broader. Hegel, and Danish Hegelians, may represent a certain kind of apotheosis of “speculative” thinking but it is obvious that Climacus’ aim is to critique objective thinking in general, i.e., the tendency to analyze reality solely in terms of systems, theories, and abstract arguments, which are never related back to the living individual.

c) faith. Dispassionate, objective thinking fails to tell us anything meaningful about the human condition because it does not take the synthesis of the poles of existence into account, making it impossible for living human beings to personally appropriate the truths of speculative thinking.³ Truth regarding the human self must be “impassioned” and subjective. It is “higher” because it not only expresses the synthesis but allows us to develop as human beings.⁴ Climacus calls speculative philosophy laughable because it is completely untethered from the earth, i.e., the lived reality of human existence.⁵ This means that purely objective, dispassionate thinking is always inherently dehumanizing, even to such an extent that the speculative thinker runs the risk of losing touch with his humanity entirely.⁶

This image of the speculative philosopher is juxtaposed with Socrates who was constantly attempting to elevate his consciousness to the level of transcendent, divine truth, but who nonetheless always understood his own self and his philosophizing in the context of lived experience.⁷ Furthermore, Socrates’ philosophical quest is primarily characterized by a passionate inwardness, of constantly relating his quest of philosophical truth to his own person. This, as it turns out, is “the truth” that Climacus makes the primary focus of his *Fragments*.⁸ In his analysis of Climacus’ relationship to Socrates, Jacob Howland writes:

³ This does not mean that objective thinking or speculative philosophy are without their value. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Kierkegaard’s aim is never against academics or scientists per se, but rather against the inimical reductionism of the modern age that sees this manner of thought as being the *sine qua non* of understanding reality.

⁴ *Fragments*, 56.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 50-51.

⁷ The pivotal passage at 516e in the *Republic* where the philosopher returns to the Cave after glimpsing the divine *eidos* is central to Climacus’ reading of Socrates.

⁸ *Fragments*, Chapter one, “A,” see esp. 9, where Climacus explicitly calls “the truth” he aims at a “Socratic question.”

In the Platonic dialogues, Socrates seeks the truth about virtue, about how we should live and what will make our souls as excellent as possible, and therefore the truth essentially embraces self-knowledge as well as knowledge of the good. Needless to say, this kind of truth will be useless to anyone who is not willing to conduct his life in accordance with it. The inquiry in *Fragments* relies on this Socratic notion of the truth, as it defines, at least in general terms, the goal of learning with which Climacus is concerned throughout.⁹

The synthesis of ideality and actuality, which forms the centerpiece of Kierkegaardian epistemology, is primarily found in subjective inwardness where a person not only attempts to understand the truth but to actually *become* it. In *Johannes Climacus*, Kierkegaard sees such passionate inwardness as being the hallmark of the “old” philosophy, meaning philosophy as a way of life as practiced by such Greek thinkers as the Stoic philosophers and Socrates.¹⁰ This stands in stark contrast to thinkers such as Hegel whose primary aim it is to achieve an objective, impersonal, absolute synthesis. This explains why Climacus, throughout both the *Fragments* and the *Postscript*, is not primarily interested in providing logical arguments for one theory or another but rather attempts to provide a kind of Socratic “space” where the reader can engage with questions of self-identity, knowledge, and faith in a deeply personal manner.¹¹ In the *Postscript* Climacus mentions Socrates’ arguments for the immortality of the soul in Plato’s *Phaedo* as having limited worth, objectively speaking, given the fact that it is impossible to give a completely successful argument for the immortality of the soul. This is because the issue at hand, our relation to eternity, is not an objective question but rather

⁹ Howland, *Kierkegaard and Socrates: A Study in Philosophy and Faith* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 41.

¹⁰ *Johannes Climacus*, 117.

¹¹ See Anthony Rudd, “The Moment and the Teacher: Problems in Kierkegaard’s *Philosophical Fragments*,” *Kierkegaardiana* 21 (2000): 92-115; Howland, 42.

a subjective one. But this is exactly Socrates' genius, according to Climacus, namely that he "stakes his whole life" on this question and "dares to die" as if he is immortal, appropriating his arguments completely into his being.¹² Socrates' aim in dialogues such as the *Phaedo* is not to give some abstract proof for the immortality of the soul (because such a thing is altogether impossible¹³) but rather to allow his interlocutors, in this case his friends and loved ones, to meditate on the issue in a spiritually beneficial way. The *Phaedo* represents, for Climacus, a hallmark of Socrates' philosophical role as a "midwife," i.e., as one who does not impart any teaching of his own but rather motivates others to engage in philosophical questioning through passionate inwardness.¹⁴

A central theme in the Climacian texts is this difference between objective and subjective truths. The latter primarily consist of ethical and religious teachings, i.e., truths that must be appropriated by the knower in order for any kind of real understanding of them to emerge. But Climacus is also very interested in the spectrum that leads us from the ethical sphere into the religious, and in trying to pinpoint important differences between religiousness "A" and "B." This theme is extensively treated by Johannes de Silentio in *Fear and Trembling*. Silentio sees the movement from the ethical to the religious as revolving around the relationship of the individual to the community. Silentio sees the ethical as revolving primarily around those aspects of the individual self which

¹² *Postscript*, 173-174 and 201.

¹³ It is worth reiterating Kierkegaard's concern that the problem with a purely objective mode of thinking and philosophizing is not primarily that it is ineffective but rather that it is spiritually dangerous. Kierkegaard's position is different from that of classical skepticism, where one withholds a position given the fact that an equally valid argument can be given for and against any given position. Kierkegaard most definitely sees these philosophical questions as having a definite answer, one way or another. His skepticism primarily revolves around the *kind of* truth we are trying to get at in our philosophizing, i.e., whether it is primarily systematic and abstract or inward and personal.

¹⁴ See also *Theaetetus*, 149A-151D.

are commensurable with the universal.¹⁵ There are essential elements of the human self, though, which simply are not commensurable with the universal, represented by Abraham's inability to communicate anything about his decision to sacrifice Isaac. This incommensurability takes the form of a paradox that becomes manifest in the life of the person who enters into the religious sphere:

Faith is just this paradox, that the single individual as the particular is higher than the universal, is justified before the latter, not as subordinate but superior, though in such a way, be it noted, that it is the single individual who, having been subordinate to the universal as the particular, *now by means of the universal* becomes that individual who, as the particular, stands in an absolute relation to the absolute. This position cannot be mediated, for all mediation occurs precisely by virtue of the universal; it is and remains in all eternity a paradox, inaccessible to thought. And yet faith *is* this paradox.¹⁶

¹⁵ See especially Problema I, 83-95. Although it does not fall within the boundaries of this study, Kierkegaard's notion of "the ethical" differs in important ways from Hegelian *Sittlichkeit*, though the two share important elements. As revealed in the dialectic between "A" and "B" in *Either/or*, the ethical for Kierkegaard is not a stage in the ultimate synthesis towards the absolute but rather an important step towards self-realization. The initial way in which we overcome our obsession with individualistic immediacy is via commitments to other people, which include our commitments to certain societal institutions, including marriage, family, political structures, etc. The failure of this move to alleviate despair, given the fact that despair can only be faced through an inward appropriation of ethical and religious truths, necessitates the teleological suspension of the ethical, which in no way shape or form suggests that the ethical is "overcome" or done away with. It is, rather, appropriated anew in the religious. This new appropriation includes a radical rethinking of societal structures and institutions, as I will discuss in the final sections of this chapter.

¹⁶ *F&T*, 85, emphasis mine. This passage points out a difficult issue in Kierkegaard's authorship, namely the conceptual term "paradox" (*paradoks*) and its varying meanings. In *Fragments*, for example, Climacus offers a dialectic of paradox, beginning with his discussion on "the ultimate paradox of thought: to want to discover something that thought itself cannot think" (37) and moving to a discussion of the paradox of "the absolute difference of sin, and positively, by wanting to annul this absolute difference in the absolute equality" (47). Later, Climacus identifies paradox with "the moment" (51) and with the qualitative difference between the eternal truth and the limits of human understanding (50ff). This understanding of the paradox, the basis for religiousness "A," gives rise to the "absolute paradox," the notion that the eternal (God) enters into time as the single individual (Christ) in order to give "the condition" to individual human beings that enables their salvation (62ff).

One of Kierkegaard's most interesting meditations on paradox is found in the *Journals* (*JP* 3, 3076 / IV A 64) where he claims that the Incarnation represents "the highest metaphysical and religious paradox" but not "the deepest ethical paradox." This is because Christ was "as carefree as the birds of the air and the lilies of the field." He did not have to "submit to all [of life's] triviality." Kierkegaard's point seems to be that if Christ had become a regular Joe, a guy with a wife and kids and the usual worries of working a job and doing the dishes, he would have not only represent the absolute paradox of the eternal entering into time but also the absolute paradox of imbuing the ethical (the realm of "church and state") with some sort of absolute meaning. This passage is particularly striking in light of Kierkegaard's inability to commit to a "regular" kind of life.

It cannot be overemphasized how important it is to Silentio's meditation that the movement towards the religious happens "by means of the universal."¹⁷ The individualism of the aesthetic sphere is overcome in the ethical sphere through the absolute commitment one makes to the community (family, nation, political institutions,

The above passage from *Fear and Trembling* relates to several different conceptions of paradox, though presented from the point of view of de Silentio, who claims that he is not a Christian. De Silentio's main claim is that there is a way in which the demands of the religious sphere, the paradox of God's call to Abraham, somehow redeems our efforts in the ethical sphere. Though De Silentio does not explicitly address the "absolute paradox" of the Incarnation in the way that Climacus does, one can nonetheless make a connection between the paradox presented to Abraham and the absolute paradox of the Incarnation. In and through the "metaphysical and religious" paradox of the Incarnation, each and every individual must face up to the ethical paradox of his own life, i.e., the fact that the ethical sphere of "church and state"—of work and marriage and children—seemingly leads us to despair because of the inevitability of death, failure, and the general absurdity of human existence. Yet through faith in the Incarnation, including the paradoxical reality of God's forgiveness for the individual's sinfulness, we are able to imbue the ethical with meaning, to reclaim it as something beautiful. De Silentio's description of The Knight of Faith is of a person who has resigned himself to the absurdity of his day-to-day life and by that resignation reclaimed it as something wondrous through faith. As Kierkegaard himself wrote in his journal in 1843: "If I had had faith, I would have stayed with Regine" (*JP* 5, 5664 / IV A 107).

¹⁷ I am presenting the tension between the ethical/universal and religious dimensions in light of Kierkegaard's critique of Hegelian *Sittlichkeit*. I have not, due primarily to constraints of time and space, devoted any attention in this work to the difficult issue of Kierkegaard's relationship to Kant, especially with regards to how de Silentio's critique in *Fear and Trembling* relates to the Categorical Imperative. Recent scholarly work (see Ronald M. Green) on Kierkegaard's relationship to Kant reads the two as being in much closer agreement than previously thought and that Kierkegaard's view of the ethical is greatly indebted to Kantian morality. Some writers, perhaps most notably John E. Hare, have argued that Kant's ethics is actually a thinly-veiled divine command theory that is only slightly removed from de Silentio's notion of the absurd in *Fear and Trembling*. Though Hare's view is problematic in many ways, he nonetheless makes a convincing case for viewing Kant and Kierkegaard as having many of the same philosophical aims in their formulations of ethical decision-making. My primary reason for focusing so intently on Hegel, rather than Kant, is that I fundamentally agree with the view espoused by Robert Stern that Kierkegaard's critique is centered not primarily on the ethical as grounded in a transcendent rationality (Kant's view) but rather on the ethical as grounded in society (Hegelian *Sittlichkeit*). Throughout the Kierkegaardian corpus, Kierkegaard's aim is to critique and dismantle the view that goodness can be construed as revolving primarily around our ability to accept our "station and its duties" (to use Stern's phrase) since this undermines the absolute (and positively shocking) demands of true love. The astoundingly demanding and difficult nature of the Categorical Imperative, though fundamentally different from Kierkegaard's view of goodness as love (*Kærlighed*), places Kant much closer to Kierkegaard's philosophical position than Hegel's.

See Ronald M. Green, *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992); John E. Hare, "Kant on Recognizing our Duties as Divine Commands," *Faith and Philosophy* 17 (2000): 459-478; John E. Hare, *God's Call: Moral Realism, God's Commands & Human Autonomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); John E. Hare, *The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God's Assistance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); and Robert Stern, *Understanding Moral Obligation: Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

etc.) but these commitments are not exhaustive of the human self, given the fact that they do not adequately address the synthesis of the poles of existence. An example of this tension is the fact that a human being is both mortal and immortal, both finite and infinite.¹⁸ Starting a family and having children, not in the unthinking manner of the philistine but with absolute commitment, allows a human being to reach towards a certain kind of immortality, given the fact that one hopes to live on in one's children. Yet this immortality is not commensurate with the *individual self*. It is an immortality of the species, i.e., the universal itself, and it fails to give proper meaning, in and of itself, to the life of the individual person. But this does not change the fact that our yearning towards individual immortality is always understood in light of our earlier commitments to the universal, i.e., to other people, which means that our religious life should always be considered in light of our relationships and communion with others.

The movement from the ethical to the religious, even though it consists of a highly nuanced dialectical relationship between the individual and the universal, nonetheless means that, at least initially, the individual will set himself in opposition to the universal: "But now when the ethical is thus teleologically suspended, how does the single individual in whom it is suspended exist? He exists as the particular in opposition to the universal."¹⁹ Even though we should develop a healthy relationship to the universal, the universal can nonetheless take on a nefarious role when it sees true individuality expressed. On the isolation of the individual in opposition to the universal, Silenzio writes: "A hero who has become the scandal of his generation, aware that he is a

¹⁸ I again hasten to remind the reader that these are existential categories, experienced through our everyday lived reality, no matter what particular religious or metaphysical views we may hold.

¹⁹ *F&T*, 90.

paradox that cannot be understood, cries undaunted to his contemporaries: ‘The future will show that I was right!’²⁰

There is a very important distinction to be made here between Kierkegaard’s description of the individual entering into religiousness, and thereby setting himself up in opposition to the universal, and the later existentialist romanticism of the lone-wolf Übermensch. Silentio’s Abraham is certainly not beyond good and evil, nor is he to be seen as some kind of tortured, Sisyphean genius. This difference between Kierkegaard’s philosophy and the later existentialist tradition becomes all the clearer when one considers the way in which Johannes Climacus picks up the project where it is left off by Silentio, namely in the *Philosophical Fragments* where Socrates takes the place of Abraham as the exemplary individual who manifests the paradox in his being, the hero who became “the scandal of his generation.”

Howland points out the parallels between the young Johannes Climacus, described by Kierkegaard in the eponymous biography, and Plato’s Socrates. Both are presented as following the way of the “older philosophy,” i.e., of appropriating philosophical truth in inwardness that sets them apart from their contemporaries: “Climacus’s inwardness, however, meant that he ‘was and remained a stranger in the world’—much like Socrates, whose philosophical intensity gave him an air of ‘strangeness’ (*atopia*) that is often remarked upon in the dialogues of Plato.”²¹ Unlike

²⁰ Ibid., 91. Nietzsche’s allusions to the “herd instinct” abound in his works. See especially section 116 of *The Gay Science*. See *Being & Time*, 170, 177, and 254 for some of Heidegger’s most pointed writings on “the they.” For an example of Sartre’s position on “Bad faith,” see *Essays on Existentialism* (New York: Citadel, 1993), 167-69

²¹ Howland, 18. The quote from *JC* is on 119.

speculative philosophers who only appropriate truth objectively,²² both Climacus and Socrates aim to manifest ethical and religious truths in their being.

Yet Climacus differs from Socrates in one fundamental way: Socrates taught that each individual human being has the condition for truth within his or her soul via the theory of recollection.²³ This is an essential element of Socrates' view of himself, and his philosophy, as simply manifesting the space (*topos*) for philosophical inquiry and that each and every person must come to the truth through their own philosophical meditations. The philosopher, therefore, is primarily a mid-wife, helping the truth be borne into the world. Climacus, on the other hand, spends most of the *Fragments* juxtaposing this view with the Christian view that the human being is essentially *untruth*.²⁴ Climacus himself does not hold to this view²⁵ but is interested in exploring the

²² Including what are essentially subjective truths, i.e., ethical and religious teachings. In the previous chapter I outlined Piety's view that this mistake of viewing essentially subjective truth objectively constitutes a kind of "pseudo-truth," which often manifests itself as a kind of hypocrisy or moralism. It is also worth reiterating that Kierkegaard did not see this mistake as being relegated to the domain of speculative philosophy since Christians (the denizens of "Christendom") are often guilty of this sort of behavior. Also, pointing out the spiritual failure of those who view subjective truth in an objective manner seems to be the primary concern of Jesus Christ in all four Gospels, especially in his dealings with the Pharisees.

²³ Esp. *Phaedo*, 73c-75.

²⁴ *Fragments*, chapters 2 and 3; Howland, 30. Climacus, Anti-Climacus, and Haufniensis all analyze sin primarily in terms of its effects on human consciousness. Anti-Climacus explicitly states that the ability to understand our spiritual ailments as "sin" is already to grow closer to the truth since "sin" is a category that only arises when one becomes aware of existing before God. The "untruth" of the pagan is to live as if there is no God and it is this attitude that Socrates begins to challenge (which, ironically, leads to his death on the charge of impiety). Nonetheless, Socrates, as presented in the Platonic dialogues, seems to indicate that human beings can heal themselves and know the highest truths (the *eidos*) via their own steam, so to speak, while all of the pseudonymous voices clearly state that it is only through God's grace that healing becomes possible. It is this difference that becomes the boundary between religiousness "A" and "B."

See *SUD*, 80ff.

²⁵ Climacus in the Appendix to *Postscript* denies that he is a Christian. See John Lippit, *Humor and Irony in Kierkegaard's Thought* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 95 for a further discussion of how seriously we can take this claim. Whether or not Climacus is actually a Christian is not an important issue for my analysis in this work, though I will say that there seems to be a clear distinction made between the inability to believe expressed by Silentio in *Fear and Trembling* and Climacus' (often ironic) remarks that he is not a Christian in the *Postscript*. It seems clear, at least, that Climacus can easily be situated within religiousness "A" (hence the correlations with Socrates) while Silentio stands on the precipice between the ethical and the religious spheres.

implications of these two positions, the Socratic and the Christian. After all, if the most important truths for human beings are ethical and religious truths, and the way in which these truths are appropriated depend upon one's ability (or inability) to hold onto them in passionate inwardness, then this question of whether human beings have the condition of truth within themselves or must seek it from some external source (i.e., "the god") becomes the single most important question of the philosophical life.

Howland's study of *Fragments* offers two important points that had heretofore not been well developed in the scholarship:²⁶ First of all, Climacus begins his study by setting up philosophy and faith as essentially being in tension with each other, highlighted by the fact that faith is essentially an appropriation of paradox while philosophy aims at understanding.²⁷ But Climacus then begins to show how the philosophical life as exemplified by Socrates involves a great deal of faith and paradox and indeed manifests a kind of precondition of the spirit that is necessary for religious faith.²⁸ Conversely, faith is not diametrically opposed to philosophical inquiry or to the human understanding but rather represents a new mode of approaching the truth, one which is deeply related to the philosophical life.²⁹

Second, Howland contends that, far from offering a view of the human person as an isolated individual, the exploration of philosophy and faith in *Fragments* reveals a

²⁶ For other analyses of *Fragments*, see Louis Mackey, *Kierkegaard: A kind of Poet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), esp. 168; Josiah Thompson, *Kierkegaard* (New York: Alfred. A Knopf, 1973), esp. 146; Henry E. Allison, "Christianity and Nonsense," *Review of Metaphysics* 20, no. 3 (1967/2002) 39-58; Stephen Mulhall, "God's Plagiarist: The *Philosophical Fragments* of Johannes Climacus," in *Philosophical Investigations* (22), 1-34. All of these authors hold that philosophy and faith in the Climacian writings are pretty much diametrically opposed while Howland presents a much more nuanced and complex view of the relationship between the two.

²⁷ Howland, 30.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 43-48.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

philosophy of personhood that is primarily communal and ecstatic.³⁰ This second point will be of pivotal importance in my analysis.

To return to the cause of the tension between philosophy and faith, it is important to keep in mind the differences between the philosophical teacher (represented by Socrates), on the one hand, and the religious teaching (represented by Christ), on the other. First of all, the philosophical teacher is primarily the instigator of self-knowledge, insofar as the truth is available to all human beings through their own effort:

Socrates advances the principle that ‘all learning and seeking are but recollecting.’ [...] We stand in the middle ground between ignorance and wisdom: we neither know the truth (because we have temporarily forgotten it) nor are we simply ignorant of it (because we can call it to mind once again. It follows that all learning takes place through one’s independent efforts to bring the truth to mind.³¹

Socrates’ primary goal, in the Platonic dialogues, is therefore to reveal his interlocutors’ ignorance to themselves by showing that they themselves are the *potential* condition for the truth. The starting point for the religious teaching, according to Climacus, also centers on intellectual humility, i.e., the discovery that one is not in full possession of the truth. But instead of then revealing to the learner that he is potentially the condition for the truth, the religious teaching reveals that the learner is incapable of having the condition for the truth, due to sin.³²

Climacus’ meditations on subjectivity are obviously deeply related to the writings of Anti-Climacus in *The Sickness Unto Death*. In the writings of Climacus (“John of the Ladder”) we get a description of how the human person can begin to “ascend” towards

³⁰ Ibid., 113, 125.

³¹ Howland, 43. This passage refers to the paradox in the *Meno*, 80d.

³² See section chapter 2, section 2.5.

self-realization and authenticity by entering deeper into a relationship with the absolute paradox. Anti-Climacus offers a parallel analysis of the nature of the despair that is potentially overcome through religiousness “B.” Anti-Climacus, therefore, charts the path “down” towards ever increasing despair and spiritual torment while Climacus points to a potential way “up” out of this despair.³³

Climacus’ analysis of personhood is, at heart, negative (apophatic), insofar as it resists any kind of positive (kataphatic) approach towards analyzing subjectivity. But it is extremely important to correctly construe what is meant by “negative” in this context. It is here that an overview of patristic and modern Eastern Orthodox views on this subject can further our analysis.

The philosophy of personhood in modern Orthodox theology and philosophy is primarily indebted to the works of Vladimir Lossky and John D. Zizioulas. Each grounds his philosophy in the patristic tradition, primarily the writings of the Cappadocian fathers. According to Aristotle Papanikolaou, a primary concern of the Greek fathers, as Christianity began to develop a theologically mature view of the Trinitarian God, was to avoid the influential heresies of tritheism and Sabellianism.³⁴ In order to do this, the Greek fathers—especially the Cappadocians—wanted to avoid using the Greek philosophical concept of *ousia* to explain the Trinitarian nature of God. This was due to

³³ One could view the entirety of Kierkegaard’s authorship in this light, i.e., as providing an image of spiritual descent and ascension. The torments of the musical-erotic in *Either/or*, as well as the detailed descriptions of despair in *The Sickness Unto Death*, lead to the challenge of the absurd in *Fear and Trembling* and ultimately to the beginning of true personhood (self/spirit) in the Religious sphere, as described in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Kierkegaard’s authorship under his own name provides the height of the “ladder,” the culmination of the person’s striving for God. It is also worth remembering that the movement through the spheres describes a view of the human being that is increasingly *personal* in nature. The aesthetic sphere is pure superficiality and the ethical revolves around the universal. It is only in the religious sphere that the human person can ground herself in a manner that is lasting and authentic.

³⁴ Aristotle Papanikolaou, *Being With God: Trinity, Apophaticism, and Divine-Human Communion* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 130.

the fact that focusing on *ousia* seemed to inevitably lead to one of the two aforementioned heresies. Either there are three *ousia*, and thereby three Gods (tritheism), or there is only one *ousia* and the persons are only manifestations or modes of the monistic Godhead (Sabellianism). The only way out of this dilemma was to focus on the *persons* of the trinity, as opposed to the *ousia* that they share in common. Yet the problem with this approach was that there was no robust philosophy of personhood available in the Greek speaking world, at least not to the extent that these Trinitarian considerations demanded. The Greek fathers therefore set about in developing a new philosophy of personhood, one that utilized the Greek philosophical concepts of *hypostasis* and *prosopon*.

According to Papanikolaou, Lossky and Zizioulas differ slightly in their analysis of how the Cappadocian's developed this new philosophy of the person:

For Lossky there were two moves: the rejection of *prosopon* and the selection of *hypostasis* to express the threeness of God, since the latter was a synonym of *ousia*; and the reconceptualizing of *hypostasis* to express irreducibility to nature. [...] Even though each of the three *hypostaseis* is identical to the common *ousia*, they are not reducible to this essence. The Christianizing of *hypostasis* protects the doctrine of the Trinity from a reductionistic monism.³⁵

For Zizioulas, on the other hand, “the genius of the Greek fathers comes in the form of an ontological revolution that unites the concepts of *hypostasis* and *prosopon*.”³⁶ Zizioulas stays faithful to the apophatic tradition that forms the core of Lossky's theology but he also moves beyond it in an attempt to provide some account of *who* God is in His Trinitarian being. Lossky's focus on *hypostasis* and his rejection of *prosopon* is due to his

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

immense apophatic focus and the aforementioned issue of avoiding Sabellianism.³⁷

Hypostasis allows for a philosophical understanding of three persons in one nature but it does not allow for a great deal of philosophical reflection on the “content” of the personal dimensions of the Trinity. *Prosopon*, meaning the “face” or outward projection of the personal reality of the individual, was and is a necessary component, according to Zizioulas, for Christian theology to make sense of the tripartite reality of God.

But perhaps the most philosophically significant result of these theological debates in early Christianity was that this new appropriation of *hypostasis* and *prosopon* by Christian authors allowed for a completely new understanding of the ontology of the human being. As Zizioulas points out, all of the ontological “weight” of the *hypostasis* in Greek philosophy was not put on the kind of personal *energeia* that *prosopon* signified but rather on substance or essence. This, Zizioulas claims, was due to Graeco-Roman cosmology, which due to its “framework of a self-authenticating cosmic or state harmony” was bound to delimit both the ontological and political importance of the individual.³⁸ Greek metaphysics and political philosophy were, of course, deeply intertwined, focusing as they did on the universal (metaphysics of *eidos*) and the political (the *polis*) over and beyond the particular or individual. The metaphysical and ethical writings of Greek philosophy largely reveal a worldview, later inherited by the Roman world, where the individual person is always primarily understood in terms of his or her function in the state while the particular thing is always understood in terms of its sharing

³⁷ Papanikolaou, 91-93.

³⁸ John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002), 35. Zizioulas’ claim is that *harmonia* forms a central theme in ancient Greek philosophy and that the metaphysical harmony of the cosmos is reflected in the social harmony of the *polis*, and vice versa. Plato, of course, attempts to provide a similar mirroring between the *polis* and the individual in the *Republic*, though he does not provide a robust philosophy of personhood in this context.

in a universal nature.³⁹ This is readily apparent in the writings of Plato and Aristotle on the subject of human relations and love. Platonic *eros*, especially as described in the *Symposium*, is the yearning of the human intellect (*nous*) that initially is drawn to individual people or things but which only finds its ultimate fulfillment in universal forms (*eidos*).⁴⁰ Aristotelian *philia*, as described in Nicomachean ethics books VIII and IX, is a description of virtuous love as the interplay of nature and an active condition (*hexis*) that is oriented towards the beautiful (*to kalon*). Yet the “beautiful” is not really an expression of the personal reality of the individual but simply the complex interplay of nature and nurture as expressed in and through virtuous actions. This is why Aristotle so adamantly declares that evil (“vicious”) people cannot be loved nor are they likely to ever change.⁴¹ What is loved is not the person him or herself but rather the beautiful nexus of *hexis* and *physis* which becomes increasingly solidified as we mature into adulthood. As Bruce V. Foltz notes:

There is no love here, nor is there freedom in the personal sense, and there is no love precisely *because* there is no freedom. Bad characters will like other bad characters, and good characters will like other good characters, according to their respective natures: their goodness or badness is substantial. There is no inner freedom, because there is no inner ‘person’ over and beyond the natural and empirical.⁴²

As we shall see, the expression of love as *agape* proclaimed by Christ in the gospels, a self-emptying care for the personal (as opposed to the substantial) reality of the

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 27-34

⁴⁰ *Symposium*, 210a-212c.

⁴¹ See especially Book IX, chapter 3, 1165b - 1166a on why vicious people should not be loved. On Aristotle's skepticism about vicious people changing their ways see the beginning of Book VII, chapter 8, 1150b.

⁴² Bruce Foltz, “Being as Communion.”

individual, is intrinsically connected to a new understanding of the human person, one that identifies *hypostasis* with *prosopon* rather than *ousia*. It is this understanding that allows the Church fathers, and especially the Cappadocians, to develop a philosophy of personhood that allows for both a robust Trinitarian theology but also an ontology that is grounded not in a deterministic sense of nature but rather in a free expression of communion and love. The Greek fathers, Zizioulas contends, did this by maintaining an apophatic approach to any discussion of God's essence (it being completely and absolutely unknowable to the human intellect) and instead focusing on God's free *energeia*, i.e., the relational aspects of God's personal reality: "Not only was the being of the world traced back to personal freedom, but *the being of God Himself* was identified with the person."⁴³

It is important to note the difference in emphasis that occurs between Eastern and Western Christianity on this point. "The idea took shape in Western theology that that which constitutes the unity of God is the one divine substance, the one divinity; this is, as it were, the ontological 'principle of God.'"⁴⁴

The difference between the way the Latin tradition (beginning with Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas) and the Eastern tradition read the works of Dionysius the

⁴³ Zizioulas, 40. Zizioulas' terminology is not exactly a paradigm of technical precision. His use of the word "being" and the way it differs from "substance" or "essence" is not always clear. The primary issue at stake is that Zizioulas contends that communion is a *primordial* ontological category for the Trinity and "not a notion which is added to the divine substance or rather which follows it, as is the case in the dogmatic manuals of the West." He goes on to say that "the substance of God, 'God,' has no ontological content, no true being, apart from communion" (17). "Being," for him, therefore, is the "what it is" of the thing in question, it's ontological reality. In the case of God, this ontological reality is primordially and intrinsically communal.

⁴⁴ Ibid. This critique, of course, does not solely stem from Eastern Orthodox sources. The critique of onto-theology, originated by Heidegger and later developed by writers such as Marion and Westphal, highlights many of the problematic elements of this tradition. See Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Merold Westphal, *Overcoming Onto-Theology: Toward a Postmodern Christian Faith* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001).

Areopagite, one of the most formative theological writers of the patristic era and a primary influence on modern Orthodox theologians such as Lossky, reveals some of the essential differences between the two traditions. While Western thinkers such as Aquinas saw Dionysius' *Divine Names* as indicating a theological *scientia* where apophaticism serves as a corrective for a kataphatic approach for understanding *what* God is (culminating in the beatific vision where the divine essence essentially becomes an *eidos* that is graspable by the human *nous*), the Eastern tradition saw the Dionysian corpus as pointing towards an apophasis that shifts the ontological focus of theology from God's essence to God's *personal* energies.⁴⁵ Eastern Orthodox writers such as Golitzin have argued that the epistemology found within the Dionysian works does not focus on an autonomous intellect grasping God as essence or substance, which tended to be the focus in scholastic epistemology, but rather that works such as the *Divine Names*, *Mystical Theology*, and perhaps especially the *Ecclesiastical* and *Celestial Hierarchies* point to a profoundly negative epistemology where all intellectual grasping must ultimately cease so that the individual person can approach God "face to face," i.e., in a deeply personal and holistic manner.⁴⁶

As can be plainly seen, the epistemological differences between the Eastern and Western Christian traditions are easily transposed to the divergent philosophies of personhood that appeared in these traditions. Since the Western tradition emphasized a theological vision of God that identified *hypostasis* with *ousia*—where God's essence

⁴⁵ See Jones, "(Mis?)-Reading the Divine Names as a Science: Aquinas' Interpretation of the Divine Names of (Pseudo-) Dionysius Areopagite."

⁴⁶ Alexander Golitzin, "Suddenly Christ: The Place of Negative Theology in the Mystagogy of Dionysius Areopagites," in *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*, ed. Michael Kessler & Christian Sheppard (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 8-37.

was considered as the locus of God's being—the human person was similarly understood in terms of a fixed substance rather than in more dynamic, interpersonal terms. This in turn led to the development of subjectivism and the analysis of the human being in terms of consciousness/subject-ego (Descartes' *cogito* and Kant's categories) rather than in terms of relationality.⁴⁷

It is only with the advent of late 19th century existentialism and 20th century phenomenology that the reduction of subjectivity to a disembodied ego-consciousness begins to be truly challenged. Kierkegaard, of course, is a pivotal figure in this development, prefiguring not only the later existentialist movement but also writers such as Heidegger. But little attention has been paid to the way in which Kierkegaard came to develop such a position, many years before other influential writers such as Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky began to offer alternative models for considering the human person. Looking over the history of Western philosophy, Kierkegaard seems to pop up out of nowhere, a dissenting, revolutionary voice that offers a paradigm shift in philosophical thinking. But when viewed in context of the theological divergence between Eastern and Western Christianity it becomes apparent that Kierkegaard tapped into currents in both philosophy and theology that ran back all the way to the earliest days of the Church.

The reason why Kierkegaard came to develop a position that can more easily be aligned with the Eastern, apophatic focus on the person as opposed to the more “essence based” view of the West⁴⁸ is because Kierkegaard's contemporaries, especially writers

⁴⁷ Heidegger's critique of the world Descartes presents to us, a world with its “skin off,” is an especially powerful analysis of this development. See esp. *Being and Time* 20: 132.

⁴⁸ These are, of course, generalizations. There have been several strands of both Protestant and Roman Catholic thought that resist the kind of “essence-based” thinking that Kierkegaard wanted to critique. Pietism, which greatly influenced Kierkegaard, and Roman Catholic personalism are two examples of “Western” attempts to combat the scholastic focus on theology as *scientia* and God understood in terms of an *ousia*. Nonetheless, what I hope to show in this analysis is that there is a strain of systematization and

such as Martensen and Mynster, were in many ways in the intellectual heirs of the onto-theology of scholastics such as Aquinas, though their particular brand of theology had been filtered through the speculative philosophy of Hegel which, if anything, made it much more “objective” and dehumanizing, in Kierkegaard’s view, than anything found in scholastic writers such as Aquinas and Scotus.

Heiberg, undoubtedly the most influential proponent of Hegelian philosophy in 19th century Denmark, viewed Hegelianism as the only possible recourse against the growing tide of nihilism and relativism in modern Europe. An integral part of this salvific mission of Hegelianism was its ability to usurp religion as a primary mode of accessing truth. Heiberg relegated religion to a secondary role behind Hegel’s *Wissenschaft*, writing that “while religion grasps the truth of the world only in terms of concrete particulars, thus mistakenly taking the particular for the universal, philosophy grasps the universal or the essential as it is in itself.”⁴⁹ This emphasis on grasping the “universal or the essential as it is in itself” originates, of course, in Greek philosophy but would be developed in different ways in the Latin West than in the Greek speaking East. The scholastics viewed the beatific vision, the grasping of God’s essence in an activity of human *nous*, as a distinct possibility, albeit one that can only be realized in the context of the eschaton.⁵⁰ The Eastern theologians and philosophers, on the other hand, viewed the notion of the “universal or the essential as it is in itself” as being the ultimate *mysterion*.⁵¹

“objective thinking” (to use Kierkegaard’s terms) that is much more prevalent and dominant in Western Christian thought, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, than in the Eastern Orthodox tradition.

⁴⁹ Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, 53.

⁵⁰ E.g. *Summa Theologica*, I, Q. 12, A. 1 and 11.

⁵¹ E.g. *Life of Moses*, 163 (Paulist Press, 95); *Mystical Theology* I, 3, 1000C-D (Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names and The Mystical Theology*, trans. John D. Jones (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1999), 213-14).

It is important to note that even though Hegel was often highly critical of the efficacy of religious thought, especially in comparison to the true science of philosophy, he nonetheless saw religion as an essential element in the unfolding of the Absolute and therefore as an essential topic of inquiry for philosophy. In the *Lecture's on the Philosophy of Religion* and in the *Encyclopedia*, Hegel clearly states that religion, as a topic of scientific inquiry, must include an inquiry into the nature (essence) of God.⁵² This is partly due to Hegel's appropriation of Aristotelian teleology. If God is the end goal of the religious life then God himself must be understood if we are to understand religion.⁵³ Danish Hegelians connected this view of knowledge of God with Hegel's notion of absolute knowing. Martensen used the term to mean *a priori* knowledge of God:⁵⁴ "The goal of speculative thinking [for Martensen] is to gain an outlook or overview of the whole and not to dwell on the individual parts. Martensen seems to imply that this speculative approach can come to an understanding of 'every divine mystery.'"⁵⁵

Jon Stewart makes much of the fact that Kierkegaard's polemic against this view is largely focused on Danish Hegelians such as Martensen rather than Hegel himself. In fact, Stewart claims, much of Kierkegaard's epistemological terminology is indebted to Hegelian philosophy.⁵⁶ The demarcation between Hegel and his interpreters falls outside of the scope of my study but it is strikingly clear—especially in works such as *Johannes Climacus*, *De Omnibus*, and *Fragments*—that Kierkegaard wanted more than anything to

⁵² G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, Vol. 1*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. R.F. Brown, Peter C. Hodgson, and J.M. Stewart (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984-87), 163 (*Vorlesungen*, Teil 1, 72-73); *The Encyclopedia Logic*, trans. T.F. Geraets, W.A. Suchting, and H.S. Harris (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 1991), 109-11 (*Werke*, vol. 8, 149).

⁵³ Martin J. De Nys, *Hegel and Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 61-63.

⁵⁴ Stewart, 257.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 258.

⁵⁶ See esp. 269-75.

retain an apophatic distance between human rationality and God. Stewart notes that Kierkegaard saw this project as offering an alternative to Martensen's view, which saw Christianity as "purely immanent" and which viewed the divine as "being continuous with the human."⁵⁷ To view the incarnation in terms of the absolute paradox rather than in light of mediation is Kierkegaard's way of breaking religious discourse away from a prevalent rationalism that extends all the way back to Augustine and which reaches its culmination in the writings of Kierkegaard's theological contemporaries, whose primary influence was Hegelian philosophy.

Interesting as the theological debate between Kierkegaard and his contemporaries may be, it is important to keep in mind the existential import of Kierkegaard's polemic. Kierkegaard did not engage in these debates solely for academic or intellectual reasons, but primarily because he saw these issues as having essential importance for the possibility of individual self-knowledge and even for salvation. Even though Kierkegaard and Hegel may have agreed on various epistemological issues, such as the category of immediacy (qua Stewart⁵⁸), the significance of these epistemological categories were entirely different for the two. Kierkegaard always views philosophical and theological issues in light of their significance for lived individual experience. In *Training in Christianity*, the paradox inherent in the incarnation is important not for its philosophical import or its relation to a system but rather because it offers an opportunity for two coexisting and codependent existential realities to emerge: The self's relation to the absolute paradox (Christ) and the self's relation to itself. The incarnate Christ offers an opportunity for the individual person to become aware of himself in a new light, to be

⁵⁷ Ibid., 376.

⁵⁸ Stewart, 98-105.

reborn into a new consciousness, and it is only with the advent of this leap or change in the human self that the possibility for fully addressing the reality of despair becomes manifest. Anti-Climacus writes on the experience of coming “face to face” with the contradiction of the incarnation:⁵⁹

There is something which makes it impossible for one to desist from looking—and lo! While one looks, one sees as in a mirror, one gets to see oneself, or He, the sign of contradiction, sees into the depths of one’s heart while one is gazing into the 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. It is a riddle, but while he is guessing, what dwells within him is revealed by how he guesses. The contradiction puts before him a choice, and while he is choosing, he himself is revealed.⁶⁰

God’s unknowability, then, translates into the essential mystery of the human person who is made in his image. As Arne Grøn has pointed out, Kierkegaard’s philosophy of subjectivity is also always a philosophy of negation.⁶¹ Anti-Climacus in *The Sickness Unto Death* analyzes despair in terms of a self that fails to be a self, i.e., a self that is essentially a non-self.⁶² This is, of course, in itself paradoxical. How can something (the self) fail to be what it is (a self)? The primary reason why this is possible is because Anti-Climacus does not construe the thing in question (the self) in terms of substance (or a fixed nature/essence) but rather as a relation.⁶³ The primary element of this relation has to do with the constitution of the self in terms of a synthesis between the poles of existence. But there are two other relational elements that are equally important

⁵⁹ Not to be taken literally. As discussed by Climacus in *Fragments*, contemporaneity with Christ is not necessarily an advantage in the “face to face” relation to the Absolute Paradox.

⁶⁰ *Training in Christianity*, 111.

⁶¹ Arne Grøn, *Subjektivitet og Negativitet* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1997).

⁶² *SUD*, 15-16.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 13.

in the constitution of the self: there is, on the one hand, the self's relation (as this actual or potential synthesis) to itself, and then there is the relation of this self to other selves.

These three relational aspects of the self are all themselves interrelated. Grøn writes that “Anti Climacus [claims] that one is not oneself precisely because one does not want to be oneself. To be a self, for Anti-Climacus, is to be the definitive (*bestemte*) self that one is. To not want to be oneself is to refuse or miss the decision (*bestemmelse*) to be spirit or a self.”⁶⁴

It is worth highlighting the use of the word *bestemmelse* (decision) and *bestemte* (decisive, definitive). To be one's authentic, definitive self (“spirit”), according to Kierkegaard, means to choose oneself. The act of choosing oneself makes one's self clearly defined, as opposed to the vague, ghostly, non-self that many people become settled with. Kierkegaard's writings on the “stages” correspond to this notion of an increasingly defined self. The philistine is basically a non-self, an instantiation of the “they” (Heidegger's *Das Man*) rather than an actual individual. The aesthetic, ethical, and religious stages represent the increasing commitment to being true to one's self, i.e., to being an actual person, much of which revolves around the ability to accept suffering in one's life. Paradoxically, though, increased authenticity is ultimately revealed to be an increase in self-emptying (*kenosis*). The decision to be oneself is the realization of the relational nature of the self. The philistine is in despair because his relation to other people is entirely misguided, due to the fact that his self is primarily formed in opposition to other people.⁶⁵ The aesthete, having become aware of the despair in the life of the

⁶⁴ Grøn, 14. Translation mine.

⁶⁵ This is not to say that these relations are always explicitly antagonistic. Rather, Kierkegaard is here prefiguring Sartre's notion of “bad faith,” which ultimately reveals the “other” to be a threatening force in my life. The philistine may want nothing more than to please people, but in doing so he creates an

philistine, rebels against the status quo of society and individualizes herself by drawing into herself.⁶⁶ This is a positive response and the beginning of authenticity, an increase in inwardness, though it soon leads to a new development of despair.⁶⁷ The ethical sphere consists of reclaiming and transfiguring one's social relations through thought-out commitments (as opposed to the herd mentality of the philistine) which are authentic to oneself. One ceases to live entirely for oneself and begins to live for others. This involves a decision/leap that defines the self in a new manner.

The leap towards authenticity takes place in "the moment," a category Climacus introduces in the *Fragments* as an alternative to Platonic *anamnesis*.⁶⁸ The moment represents a break or interruption in the way in which one experiences one's life and has to do with a reorientation of the self (and primarily the will) towards how one sees one's life as a whole.⁶⁹ This is only possible in light of the self's relation to eternity.⁷⁰ If one's self is in pure immediacy then one does not have the ability to understand oneself in any sort of holistic sense. The philistine and aesthete are thus constantly running from themselves because introspection seems too painful and demanding. But the eternal keeps

inauthentic self. It is worth reminding the reader that Kierkegaard never explicitly analyzes this stage/sphere of the philistine. I am indebted to Sløk's analysis in drawing out this sphere and wholeheartedly agree with him that this stage is the unspoken assumption of the entirety of Kierkegaard's philosophical output. The reason why Kierkegaard never analyzes the philistine stage is, as Sløk points out, that it isn't a real *self* at all (*Kierkegaard's Universe*, 32), but rather the complete failure to be a self.

⁶⁶ See especially part I of *Either/or*. The "Seducer's Diary" is an especially poignant depiction of aesthetic inwardness and how essential it is to self-development, though it is also a frightening depiction of the accompanying despair, bitterness, and cynicism that results from isolating oneself in this manner. Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground* is a fascinating development of this theme.

⁶⁷ See *SUD*, 50-60, where Anti-Climacus develops the movement from the philistine to the aesthete which corresponds to a deepening awareness of despair.

⁶⁸ *Fragments*, 11-13. On "the moment," see George Pattinson, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard* (Montreal & Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005); Niels Grønkjær, "The Absolute Paradox and Revelation: Reflections on *Philosophical Fragments*," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* (2004), 263-74; Rebecca Elleray, "Kierkegaard, Socrates, and Existential Individuality," *Richmond Journal of Philosophy* 16 (2007): 1-12.

⁶⁹ See Pattinson, *The Philosophy of Kierkegaard*, 71.

⁷⁰ See esp. Grønkjær, 265-68.

breaking through,⁷¹ causing despair, demanding that we face up to what it is that gives meaning to our lives (or what *fails* to give meaning to our lives).

As Johannes de Silentio points out in *Fear and Trembling*, the reason for this intrusion is that the *telos* of human experience manifests itself in the “absolute.”⁷² The search for gratification in the immediate fails to provide any kind of absolute meaning for the aesthete, which leads to a deepening awareness of despair, which in turn creates a new moment (break/interruption/intrusion) where a decision must be made about what kind of life we want to live and what kind of person we want to become. The commitments we make in the ethical sphere are an attempt to overcome this despair by relating ourselves in a more profound and ethically responsible way to other people, and thereby to the absolute, but even this must ultimately fail.

The reason for this failure, according to de Silentio, is that the inclosing inwardness that was discovered in the aesthetic sphere manifests itself in a new and transfigured way in the ethical sphere: “The paradox of faith is this, that there is an interiority that is incommensurable with the exterior, an interiority which, it should be stressed, is not identical with the first [that of the child], but is a new interiority.”⁷³ My role as a father, husband, and a member of society (to name some of the manifestations of my commitments in the ethical sphere) do not allow me to fully actualize the absolute in my life. Despair is bound to reappear as I come face to face with my limitations, which

⁷¹ This is an existential category and therefore has no relation on what intellectual position we hold towards “eternity” as an abstract concept. An atheist is just as much forced to relate to eternity as a believer, though the way they deal with this intrusion/interruption on their lives will probably be very different.

⁷² The whole book is a meditation on this subject but de Silentio's analysis of human teleology is primarily found in *Problemata I* and *II*.

⁷³ *F&T*, 97. De Silentio here reveals how there are essentially religious elements in the aesthetic sphere that need to be reappropriated as we enter into the religious sphere.

inevitably includes coming face to face with suffering and death in my life. In *Works of Love* Kierkegaard states that “despair is to lack the eternal”⁷⁴ and de Silentio’s meditation in *Fear and Trembling* is an attempt to conceive of faith as a possible response to this lack. The moment, for Kierkegaard, is always deeply related to our experience of suffering. It either causes a person to fall deeper into despair in an unhealthy, almost “demonic” inwardness,⁷⁵ or it creates the opportunity for transformation, for moving forward towards authenticity.

As I have argued, the moment for Kierkegaard, the decision to be a self/spirit, always has to do with our relationship to a) ourselves, b) other people, and c) God (the “eternal”). These different types of relations are all deeply intertwined with each other and their correct interrelations are what constitute personal authenticity. Grøn points out that Anti-Climacus’ apophatic philosophy of personhood points towards an understanding of authenticity in terms of a “horizon of ideal possibilities” as opposed to any sort of fixed substance or essence.⁷⁶ This relates to Haufniensis’ philosophy in *The Concept of Anxiety*, namely, that individual human existence consists of becoming a self (“spirit”) in light of personal responsibility and freedom. As freedom is appropriated during the development of the self, the self becomes increasingly aware of the immense possibilities inherent in being a self. This creates anxiety and turmoil, what Haufniensis calls “dizziness.”⁷⁷ As he points out, anxiety is “freedom’s actuality as the possibility of

⁷⁴ *WOL*, 55.

⁷⁵ De Silentio’s writings on the Merman in *Fear and Trembling* are among Kierkegaard’s most beautiful and incisive meditations on this issue. See 120-27.

⁷⁶ Grøn, 14-16. Grøn does a good job of pointing out how this more “existential” and dynamic notion of personhood is not necessarily diametrically opposed to a more “traditional” notion of a substance or essence.

⁷⁷ *COA*, 61.

possibility” and a “sympathetic antipathy and an antipathetic sympathy.”⁷⁸ In realizing that we can choose to be our-self, we can simultaneously realize that we can choose to be our not-self, which is what Anti-Climacus calls “despair” in *The Sickness Unto Death*.

In Haufniensis’ account of the fall of humanity, it is only in the moment, the blink of an eye when eternity “intrudes” upon our temporal, day to day existence, that this choice becomes fully manifest. In *Genesis*, Adam and Eve’s “moment” is manifest in the prohibition to not eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.⁷⁹ It is clear that Haufniensis sees this moment as being a poetic account of individual personal development. The movement (leap) from Adam and Eve’s preternatural innocence to the choice they make is reenacted in the life of every single human individual, as we develop from the innocence of childhood to becoming authentic, mature persons. This development, by necessity, demands a kind of rebellion. Adam and Eve in innocence are described by Haufniensis as having a self/spirit that is “asleep.”⁸⁰ They follow God’s path not by their own choosing but rather out of a blind obedience, like a small child that does whatever her parents tell her to. But in order for that child to become an authentic person in her own right she needs to break free from her parents. God, similarly, wants Adam and Eve (humanity) to be free, to be their own people, but he also wants them to be authentic individuals, i.e., to be who they are created to be.⁸¹ This authenticity is not an acquiescence to a pre-programmed mode of being but rather the ability to manifest the horizon of ideal possibilities, all of which revolve around our ability to live in

⁷⁸ Ibid., 42.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 43-46.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 35-38.

⁸¹ See chapter 3, section 3.6, for a discussion of Kierkegaard’s “essentialism,” i.e., the notion that human beings are created by God to manifest a particular *kind* of self.

communion and interdependence.⁸² Throughout all of the pseudonymous writings, but especially in the works of Haufniensis and Anti-Climacus, inauthenticity is always revealed to be a misrelation of the self to itself where the human person views herself as being an isolated individual, cut off from God and from other people.⁸³ This is why Anti-Climacus states that being a true self is only possible once one becomes aware that one exists in relation to God, which ultimately means that one becomes aware of one's existence as being *essentially relational*. As Anti-Climacus puts it, the self often makes the mistake of viewing God as some external reality, a kind of cosmic policeman (a view that Nietzsche similarly mocked), instead of understanding God as the ground of one's being.⁸⁴ Sin should therefore not be understood as a discrete action, or a series of such actions, but rather as a choice to view oneself as unable to exist as a relational being. Both Anti-Climacus and Haufniensis describe sin as a kind of demonic inwardness, an inclosing reserve, where the self is unwilling to reach out to others (to God and to other people) and, thereby, fails to live in any sort of authenticity or happiness.

It is worth pointing out how incredibly revolutionary Kierkegaard's philosophy of personhood was (and still is). In opposition to the prevalent view of the time (and what may still be considered the prevalent view today) of the human person as a discreet, autonomous, rational, individual, Kierkegaard puts forth a philosophy of personhood that is much more closely related to notions of personhood in such later traditions as post-modern philosophy, existentialism, and feminism, a view that focuses on interdependence, community, and care. The difference between Kierkegaard and these

⁸² See 180, n. 221 on different meanings of "ideality" in Kierkegaard's authorship.

⁸³ See especially *COA*, 118-36 and the description of the self in defiance in *SUD*, 67-74

⁸⁴ *SUD*, 80.

later traditions is that there is an ontological dimension to Kierkegaard's philosophy that I would now like to explore further, one which raises many questions about what exactly he means with regards to our relationship to eternity and to the notion that these relational aspects of individual existence constitute the very fabric of our existence and human persons. It is here that I would like to again turn to the Eastern Orthodox tradition in order to better understand Kierkegaard's position.

4.2 - The Relational Self

As I have noted, Kierkegaard's notion of the self is relational and this relationality is expressed in three ways: a) the self's relation to itself, i.e. the synthesis of the poles of existence, b) the self's relation to other selves, i.e., other people, and c) the self's relation to God, who is manifest not just as *a* self but rather as the self that grounds selfhood (i.e. personhood) itself. All of these relations manifest themselves in terms of a horizon of possibilities. As the individual relates himself to himself, other people, or God, the possibilities of his personhood open up. Some of these are authentic ways of being and doing that enable the human person to face up to anxiety and despair and to live a life grounded in communion and love. Others are essentially inauthentic, a refusal to be who one truly is.⁸⁵ The double effect of despair, especially as it becomes manifest as sin, is that it not only causes us and those around us pain, but also that it clouds our ability to realize our self as a horizon of possibilities. All of Anti-Climacus' meditations on the different forms of despair in *The Sickness Unto Death* describe varying levels of self-ignorance, the inability and unwillingness to come to terms with those deeds, words, and

⁸⁵ See chapter 3, pp. 56-61,

thoughts that are harming to oneself and others. The horizon of possibilities only becomes clear in “the moment” when eternity intrudes upon the immediacy of lived experience. Kierkegaard’s writings on what exactly constitutes the moment when the eternal (the god) enters into human consciousness form an essential part of his philosophy of personhood. Among Kierkegaard’s most insightful writings on this subject are the Climacian meditations on Socrates’ response to the call of the god to live an examined life, a response that Climacus sees as being representative of the religious sphere in general, though falling short of the full appropriation of religious wisdom that is only offered in and through a relationship with Christ.

I would now like to turn to a more detailed examination of Climacus’ writings on Socrates. Climacus sees Socrates’ response primarily in terms of the three dimensions of relationality previously mentioned. In picking up the mantle of philosophy, Socrates enters into a new relationship with himself, other people, and with the god who has called upon him to lead a certain kind of life. His previously closed-in way of existence is shattered as new possibilities of thinking, doing, and being are opened up to him, all of which represent the most beautiful and authentic elements of his self. To help us understand Climacus’ meditations on these issues I will be referring back to the Eastern Orthodox tradition, especially the writings of Zizioulas. The Eastern Christian tradition has developed a philosophy of personhood that stands closest to the philosophical aims of Kierkegaard (though also differing from him in significant ways) and a dialogue between the two can highlight elements in Kierkegaard’s writings that have heretofore been dismissed or ignored. Most significant among these is the heavy emphasis Kierkegaard puts on social responsibility and interpersonal relationships in our development of an

authentic self. These have perhaps not received their due in Kierkegaard scholarship simply for the fact that Kierkegaard has traditionally been historically situated as a champion of a very individualized existentialism. By instead viewing Kierkegaard as belonging to a very ancient Christian way of understanding the human person, one that runs all the way back to the patristic era and which has a deep focus on mercy and social responsibility, one is able to get a very different picture of Kierkegaard's philosophy.

As previously discussed, Climacus in the *Fragments* notes several important differences between the philosophical path of Socrates and the religious stage represented by Christ. There is, first and foremost, the fact that philosophically speaking, we have the condition of truth within us, as explored in the Platonic concept of *anamnesis*. On the religious hypothesis, we are untruth, and as we come face to face with the eternal we are increasingly made aware of this untruth, of our essential inability to heal ourselves and our complete dependence upon God. As Howland points out, both of these movements are essentially erotic in nature, though in markedly different ways:

Climacus [...] presents Socratic philosophizing as a flight from temporality to eternity [...]. Yet Socrates is always en route to wisdom, which is to say that he is essentially an erotic being. Driven by eros, and with an eye toward a truth that is always beyond his grasp, he lives in dialogue with others and in engagement with the life of his community.⁸⁶

The god grants Socrates the "space" (*topoi*) of being able to philosophize by jolting him out of his complacency, a role that Socrates will then pick up as he renders the same service to the city of Athens. The invitation that Socrates receives is borne out of his deep need to transcend his earthly condition and the suffering that it entails. It also demands

⁸⁶ Howland, 77.

that Socrates utilize his understanding and philosophical faculties and engage in philosophical conversation with other people in order to fully manifest the eternal and divine which he has begun to glimpse in his life. This is ultimate an act of love on Socrates' part, though it is always a love that emerges out of a mutual need between human beings, a manifestation of *eros* that pulls two people together and allows them to transcend their atomized individuality.

The religious hypothesis (religiousness "B") is quite different. God does not have any need of the believer, being completely and absolutely self-sufficient. The ecstatic movement of the God arises not from any need but out of pure self-emptying and sacrifice, of wanting to commune with the poor, suffering, individual. God responds to the need of the other by making himself vulnerable (which, of course, gives rise to the Absolute Paradox as the eternal, invulnerable, and all powerful becomes a finite, vulnerable, fragile human being). Climacus writes: "But if he moves himself and is not moved by need, what moves him then but love, for love does not have the satisfaction of need outside itself but within. His resolution, which does not have an equal reciprocal relation to the occasion, must be from eternity, even though, fulfilled in time, it expressly becomes *the moment*."⁸⁷

Kierkegaard's word for "love" here is *Kærlighed*, signifying the Christian notion of *agape*, a love that differs from both *eros* and *philia* in being borne out of pure *kenosis* (self-emptying).⁸⁸ *Eros* and *philia* are both ways in which the individual person both

⁸⁷ *Fragments*, 25.

⁸⁸ *Kærlighed* is used for a variety of relationships but it is the preferred word by far for describing any kind of spiritual or religious (and especially Christian) love. It has the connotation of a kind of reality that people enter into, as opposed to the more immediate, emotional expressions that the word *Elskov* denotes. It is also worth pointing out that *Lighed* means "equality," "resemblance," or "similarity" (e.g. *Han har en slående lighed med hende* - He bears a striking resemblance to her). In *Works of Love* Kierkegaard aims to show the essential difference between the nefarious, soul-crushing "equality" that occurs in levelling, where

transcends and reinforces the self, both a gift-love and a need-love.⁸⁹ The “need” found in *eros* and *philia* arises out of an inequality between the lover and the beloved.

Religiousness “A,” for Climacus, is represented equally by the Platonic model as well as Judaism, since on both of these accounts there remains a fundamental chasm between the learner and the eternal (“the god”). The love in question remains “unhappy” because even though the learner may bask in the glory of the divine the god does not seek his own glorification, primarily, but rather that of the beloved.⁹⁰ Religiousness “A” represents an attempt on the part of the learner to ascend to the divine via either philosophy or the law. Yet neither manifests true *Kærlighed/agape* since such a love is only possible as a manifestation of equality, an equality that can only be brought about by the lover *becoming* the beloved. But Socrates can never become “the god,” nor can the children of Israel ever look upon the face of the divine, because to do so is to “die.”⁹¹

Religiousness “B,” then, represents the possibility of the bridging of the chasm between the lover and the beloved. The learner does not attempt to “ascend” to the divine but is rather transfigured in and through God’s love. This is because God’s love,

one person becomes just like any other person, and the life-giving equality of Christian love that allows us to relate to one another in terms of our shared humanity while still retaining (and even celebrating) our status as unique individuals.

Also, as I discuss in some detail in the following few pages, *eros* and *philia* at first seem more “equal” than *agape* because they describe a relationship between equals while *agape* has an “unhappy” quality due to the essential inequality between human beings and God. But the whole point of both Climacus’ meditations on love in the *Fragments* and Kierkegaard’s in *Works of Love* is to show that *agape* is ultimately revealed to be the ultimate equality because of the incarnation, i.e., the fact that God allows himself to become just like us so that we can become just like him, in and through his love. *Kær-Lighed* is therefore especially apt: The love that makes us equal to the beloved.

⁸⁹ C.S. Lewis’ *The Four Loves* is a beautiful meditation on this difference (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1988).

⁹⁰ *Fragments*, 28.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 30; Exodus 33:20: “But, he [the Lord] said, ‘you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.’” See also *JP* 2, 2045 / X⁵ A 97, where Kierkegaard notes the difference between the Judaic notion of a “chosen people,” which he believes Christendom has copied, and the Christian notion of transformation where the emphasis is on the single individual rather than on the status of a specific group of people (the church, the tribe, etc.).

according to Climacus' understanding of the Christian account, is not "assisting" the learner but is rather "procreative," opening the learner up to a new life, a new way of being a person that constitutes a transformation of the human person as the old self dies and a new self comes alive. According to Climacus, this new self is the authentic self of the individual. It is who he was all along, though he had heretofore been unable to realize this authenticity in his being. Climacus writes: "The person who is born by dying away more and more can less and less be said to be born, since he is only reminded more and more clearly that he exists, and the person who in turn gives birth to expressions of the beautiful does not give them birth but allows the beautiful within him to give them birth by itself."⁹² This transfiguration is not accomplished by the noetic ascent of the believer, but rather by the self-emptying of God, done purely out of a selfless, ecstatic love: "If the unity could not be brought about by an ascent, then it must be attempted by a descent."⁹³

The transformation in question is therefore twofold: That of the omnipotent God becoming the lowly servant and the learner being reborn through his encounter with God. This process is understood in terms of authenticity, of the person in question manifesting his true being. God does not become something that he is not in the Incarnation. Rather, he reveals what he has always been: The servant, the one who forgives and suffers with his people. Christ, the *Logos*, the perfect appearance of God's being, is the "true form" of the divine.⁹⁴ This is why it is essential for Christ to undergo the despair of Gethsemane as well as the suffering of the Cross, in order for him to reveal his true personhood.

Climacus writes:

⁹² Ibid., 31.

⁹³ Ibid., 31.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 32.

The form of a servant was not something put on. Therefore the god must suffer all things, endure all things, be tried in all things, hunger in the desert, thirst in his agonies, be forsaken in death, absolutely the equal of the lowliest of human beings—look, behold the man! The suffering of death is not his suffering, but his whole life is a story of suffering, and it is love that suffers, love that gives all and is itself destitute.⁹⁵

Climacus' demarcation between religiousness "A" and "B" is especially revealing in light of Kierkegaard's critique of both Lutheran and Roman Catholic theology. As I discussed in chapter 2, Haufniensis sees fundamental problems with the Lutheran notion of salvation as representing Christ's "cloaking" the absolute sinfulness of the believer being covered by Christ's sanctity. There remains a similar chasm between the believer and God, on Luther's account, as there does between Socrates and the divine—and the people of Israel and their God—as described by Climacus in his writings on religiousness "A." And even though scholastic theology points towards a fundamental transformation of the human *nous* in the beatific vision, it also fails to account for the kind of absolute unity-as-equality that Climacus is pointing towards in the *Fragments*.

There are, on the other hand, two particularly interesting cornerstones of Eastern Orthodox theology that correspond remarkably well with Kierkegaard's (and specifically Climacus') views on union, equality, and love. The first is the Eastern Orthodox teaching on the Transfiguration, which markedly differs from the theological understanding of the event found in both Protestant and Catholic Christianity. The second is the connection between transfiguration and *theosis*, the notion that Christ's ability to equally manifest lowliness and divinity mirrors this essential quality in human nature as a whole. This particular strain of theology has a long and noted history in Eastern Christian writings.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

Symeon Lash, writing on *theosis* in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology*,

notes:

Deification is for Orthodoxy the goal of every Christian. [...] It is possible for man to become like God, to become deified, to become god by grace. [...] The language of II Peter is taken up by St. Irenaeus in his famous phrase, ‘if the Word has been made man, it is so that men may be made gods’ (*Adv. Haer* V, Pref.), and becomes the standard in Greek theology. In the fourth century St. Athanasius repeats Irenaeus almost word for word, and in the fifth century St. Cyril of Alexandria says that we shall become sons ‘by participation’ (Greek *methexis*). Deification is the central idea in the spirituality of St. Maximus the Confessor [...] and St. Symeon the New Theologian.⁹⁶

I have already made several connections between Kierkegaard’s philosophy and the Eastern Orthodox notion of deification. I would now like to reexamine this issue in light of the Eastern Orthodox teaching on the Transfiguration of Christ, especially as it relates to Climacus’ writings on union and love. To begin with, it is important to note several important differences between how the Transfiguration, as described in the synoptic gospels,⁹⁷ has been understood in Eastern and Western Christian thought. In the gospel accounts, Jesus is said to have ascended a mountain⁹⁸ along with his disciples Peter, James, and John, and to have suddenly become “transfigured” before them, his face and body radiant with light. The Old Testament prophets Elijah and Moses appeared to them and spoke with Christ, and his disciples fell on their faces, bowing before him, blinded by his radiance.

⁹⁶ Symeon Lash, “Deification,” *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Alan Richardson and John S. Bowden (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 147-48.

⁹⁷ Matthew 17:1-9, Mark 9:2-8, and Luke 9:28-36. The event is also referred to in 2 Peter 1:16-18.

⁹⁸ In Christian tradition, both East and West, the mountain is often identified as Mt. Tabor, though the location is never specified in scripture.

All of the major Christian traditions view this event as being theologically significant, though the way it is interpreted differs according to the metaphysical biases of the traditions. In the Latin West, the event has been understood, primarily due to the influence of Augustine and Aquinas, to be an example of God using a created effect (a miracle) to represent his presence. In the Orthodox East, on the other hand, the transfiguration takes place not just in Christ but also in the disciples, whose intellect (*nous*) and senses are, at least momentarily, cleansed through divine grace so that they can perceive who Christ has been *all along*. In this tradition, most famously articulated and defended by Gregory Palamas, the divine light that the disciples perceive is not a created effect but rather God himself appearing in a true theophany, i.e., a manifestation of the uncreated energies of God.⁹⁹

Though it carries us slightly afield, it is important to consider some of the theological background for these divergent interpretations of the Transfiguration account, since it has bearing on the different ways Kierkegaard (and especially Climacus) can be understood, depending on which Christian tradition one is coming from.

According to Bogdan Bucur, the early Christian tradition (Syriac, Greek, and Latin), predating the influence of Augustine, had a “tradition of interpreting the theophanies as ‘Christophanies.’”¹⁰⁰ This meant that the Son himself, the second person of the Trinity, was manifesting himself (and prefiguring his ultimate incarnation) in all of the revelations to the prophets described in the Old Testament. The pre-Augustinian

⁹⁹ The most comprehensive study of this theological divergence is Édouard Divry’s *La Transfiguration selon l’Orient et l’Occident: Grégoire Palamas - Thomas d’Aquin vers un dénouement œcuménique* (Paris: Croire et Savoir, 2009). It should be noted that Divry suggests that these two interpretations might be reconciled by using the concept of a “hypostatic property.”

¹⁰⁰ Bogdan Bucur, “Theophanies and Vision of God in Augustine’s *De Trinitate*, 67-93.

tradition, therefore, saw a direct continuity between the revelations of the Old Testament and the miracles and grace exhibited by Jesus Christ in the New Testament, both of them being manifestations of the eternal *Logos*. Augustine's disagreement with this earlier interpretation arose, as did much of his revolutionary theology, out of his engagement with heresy, in this case his debate with the Modalists and Homoians.¹⁰¹ The Homoians used the theophanies as proof that the Son was subordinate to the Father, since the Son manifested himself in and through theophanies while the Father did not.¹⁰² As Bucur notes: "The Homoian interpretation of theophanies relied on the following causal chain: in the theophanies, the Son is visible *ergo* mutable *ergo* not divine."¹⁰³ The Eastern Church attacked this argument via the essence/energies distinction, noting that the divine *Logos* manifests itself in and through the divine energies while the nature, shared by the three persons of the Trinity, remains hidden. Augustine, on the other hand, chose to attack the problem by "severing the ontological link, so that the *species* [the visible manifestation] is no longer 'owned' by the subject of the *natura* (i.e. God)."¹⁰⁴ Augustine's point is that God uses created matter "in order to signify his presence, and to reveal himself in them... but without appearing in that substance itself by which he is."¹⁰⁵

The Transfiguration, then, the apotheosis of the Christological theophanies, is viewed in the East as the revelation *par excellence* of the uncreated energies (which are

¹⁰¹ The former denied the hypostatic reality of the persons, seeing them rather as "modes" of the divine. The latter viewed the Son as being subordinate to the Father.

¹⁰² See Bucur, p. 74. Also Michel René Barnes, "Exegesis and Polemic in Augustine's *De Trinitate* I," *AugStud* 30 (1999): 43-60.

¹⁰³ Bucur, 75.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹⁰⁵ It is, of course, essential in the context of Western Christian metaphysics that God not reveal Himself "in that substance itself by which he is" since this substance is only accessible via the beatific vision, qua Augustine and Aquinas. See *De Trinitate* 3.4.10.

God Himself) while in the Latin west, qua Augustine, it is considered a created effect by which God tries to communicate something about himself.

Martin Luther, in his sermon on the twelfth Sunday after Trinity, focuses on the difference between the revelation of God to Moses on Mount Sinai and Christ's Transfiguration on Tabor. Luther views the Transfiguration event primarily in terms of the difference it reveals between the "terror" of the Old Testament Law and the "comfort and joy" of Christ's salvation. To try to live according to the law ultimately sends the human person careening down into the abyss of despair, according to Luther, while believing that Christ is God and can save the person offers immediate comfort and joy.¹⁰⁶ The purpose of the Transfiguration, and indeed, of all Christ's miracles, according to Luther, is to allow people to have faith in Christ as God, which is sufficient for salvation. This is very much in keeping with the Augustinian view on the theophanies as a method of communication between God and human beings.

Climacus, on the other hand, sees Christ's revelation as the suffering servant, which he considers to be the revelation of Christ's true *being* (not as essence but as lived reality), as an occasion for personal transformation due to it essentially being an "offense."¹⁰⁷ It is the nature of the paradox as offense that opens up a new and shocking way for the human being to think about himself. The offense *is*, therefore, the moment. Christ's revelation of himself to his followers, and this would presumably include the

¹⁰⁶ The Law produces "naught but terror and death," represented by Moses having to shield his face as he encounters God, as opposed to the grace of Christ that produces "comfort and joy," represented by the shining light of Tabor. Kierkegaard makes note of this comparison in his journals, though he offers little commentary on it, except to say that the disciples found Christ's light to be "greatly beneficial."

See JP 3, 2533 / X⁴ A 12. The version that Kierkegaard quotes of Luther's sermons is *En Christelig Postille, sammendragen af Dr. Morten Luthers Kirke- og Huuspostiller*, trans. Jørgen Thisted (Copenhagen: den Wahlske Boghandling, 1828), 420ff.

¹⁰⁷ On God's "essential" mode of communication as the "suffering servant," see *Fragments*, 31-32. On the paradox as "offense," see *Fragments*, 49-54.

Transfiguration on Tabor, is primarily understood by Climacus as opening up the possibility of personal transformation. This is keeping with the pre-Augustinian view of theophany, as well as with the later Eastern Orthodox tradition.¹⁰⁸ As Bucur notes:

Augustine's theology of theophanies not only moves away from the Christological content of theophanies, but also marks a break with the transformative character of theophanies. Traditionally, the theophanies at the Lord's Baptism in the Jordan or at the Transfiguration at Mount Tabor were considered a revelation of Christ's *own* glory to the apostles, which transfigured them. For Augustine, instead, 'what appeared in events such as the theophany atop Mt. Tabor was created matter being used as an instrument of communication by the Trinity.' And while 'an encounter with such an instrument... was an occasion for faith in God,' it could not, obviously have any transformative power.¹⁰⁹

From the perspective of both Luther and Augustine, focused as they are on the efficacy of divine grace in salvation over and beyond any sort of personal transformation, the importance of the theophanies is the extent to which they can assist the believer/learner to achieve faith in the existence of God as savior.¹¹⁰ Climacus, on the other hand, sees little to no value in faith as it relates to whether or not God exists.¹¹¹ We

¹⁰⁸ It is important to note that the feast of the Transfiguration in the Eastern Orthodox tradition always points towards the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. The kontakion for the feast explicitly points to this connection: "On the mount you were transfigured, and your disciples, as much as they could bear, beheld you glory, O Christ God; so that when they should see you crucified, they would know your passion to be willing and would preach to the world that you, in truth, are the effulgence of the Father" (*Prayer Book – 4th Edition* (Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Monastery, 2003)).

¹⁰⁹ Bucur, 80-81. The quotations within the above quote from Bucur are from Barnes, "Visible Christ," 346.

¹¹⁰ For a more detailed discussion of Augustinian and Lutheran soteriology see chapter 2. It is worth noting that Augustine did, on occasion, mention the *transformative* power of grace (for which, interestingly enough, he used the term "deification"). See *Sermon 192; Enarrations on the Psalms* 49, 146. McGuckin, "Deification," *Westminster Handbook of Patristic Theology*, 98.

¹¹¹ *Fragments*, 41. See especially the note on Spinoza and the ontological argument. The issue at stake for Luther, following his reading of Augustine, is whether or not one believes that Jesus Christ is savior. If one has faith, then one is saved. Christ's role as savior for Climacus is much more difficult and complex. Due to the fact that Climacus, like all of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms, understands the self in terms of a process of becoming, salvation can never be reduced to belief. Salvation for Climacus is a long and difficult process, one that is manifest throughout the entirety of one's life and that is primarily understood in terms of personal transformation.

cannot help but grapple with the *concept* of God, and perhaps we can even convince ourselves absolutely that God exists simply by grappling with that concept (e.g., via an ontological argument of some sort). But this would simply be avoiding the problem of the self—of despair, anxiety, and sin—altogether, since we would be turning God into a philosophical problem to be solved, viewing him solely in terms of ideal being, i.e., as an essence. As Climacus points out, this “completely circumvents the difficulty, for the difficulty is to grasp the factual being and to bring God’s ideality into factual being.”¹¹² The whole point of the incarnation for Climacus, as well as of every single theophany and miracle, is its potential for transformation and healing, and this can only occur in and through the offense at the absolute paradox when we are confronted with “Christ’s *own* divine glory,” made manifest in a human being that suffers and dies.¹¹³

Viewing the Climacian writings from an Eastern Orthodox perspective highlights important divergences between Climacus and the Lutheran tradition that he is critiquing in conjunction with his attack on Hegelianism. The notion of being saved through faith alone, for Kierkegaard and especially Climacus, simply seems much too easy, at least if it is presented in terms of an immediate rebirth. Christianity is a *process*, according to Kierkegaard and all of his pseudonymous cohorts. Over and over again we see Kierkegaard put emphasis on dynamic, existential language of movement and

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Climacus’ (and Kierkegaard’s) tendency to talk of the Incarnation, the absolute paradox, without any reference to Christ’s crucifixion, resurrection, and the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, marks an important difference between his philosophy and the Eastern Orthodox tradition. In Eastern Orthodoxy—due to its immense emphasis on the liturgical feasts—the events of Christ’s life and their existential, metaphysical, and spiritual import, are always understood in terms of a *trajectory*. The Incarnation points to Christ’s baptism, which points to the Transfiguration, which points to the crucifixion, which points to Christ’s resurrection at Pascha, which points to the ascension, which points to the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

See Catherine Aslanoff, ed., *The Incarnate God: The feasts of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary*, trans. Paul Meyendorff (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995).

development as opposed to any static conceptions such as “essence” or even “salvation.” Kierkegaard’s soteriology is always focused on an inward, existential transformation.

This brings me to the second point of Eastern theology that resonates in Climacus’ writings, namely that of deification. The beginning of the offense (the moment), for Climacus, is when we as human beings become aware of our absolute difference from the eternal, i.e., becoming aware of our sinfulness: “Just to come to know that the god is the different, man needs the god and then comes to know that the god is absolutely different from him.”¹¹⁴ This is the essential difference between the Socratic model and the Christian (religiousness “A” and “B”). In the Socratic model, the god is simply an occasion for bringing the learner to realize what he had known all along. The learner contains the condition for truth within himself and the god jolts the learner into remembering this.¹¹⁵ Socrates then takes up this service for the god and similarly seeks to jolt the citizens of Athens from their dogmatic slumber. This model is, in effect, the central facet of a great deal of spiritual and psychotherapeutic teaching. Whether we are

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 46; see also 49-51. Note that Climacus is here moving towards religiousness “B” in pointing to the infinite qualitative difference between the human person and God. I have capitalized “God” in my discussion of religiousness “B”—in order to differentiate from “the god” of Socrates—but have not changed the capitalization in the Hong translation.

¹¹⁵ In the *Fragments* Climacus refers to Socrates’ “love” for the divine (24) in and through which Socrates was able to take up the mantle of “teacher.” Climacus makes a direct reference to *Symposium* 215 d-e and 216-18. Later (31) Climacus makes reference to the “ascent” of Diotima’s ladder (*Symposium* 209 e-211 b) in relation to Socrates’ status as “teacher.” Climacus’ point at 31-32 is that Socrates, bringing forth the truth that is inherent within himself via *anamnesis*, does not offer a “birth” in the same manner as the truth of Christianity. The “moment” of Socratic discourse is always “swallowed up” in recollection. But in order to overcome despair, the human person must make a “leap” away from what was previously known into a completely new existential reality.

Even though Climacus does not make explicit reference to the dialogue, Socrates’ journey in the *Apology* is also working in the background of Climacus’ discussion. Socrates’ journey is always centered on self-discovery, of finding truths inherent within the self. Even the *katharsis* described in the *Phaedo* (64d-65a) is an attempt to unveil what the soul has been all along. Christianity (religiousness “B”), on the other hand, represents the realization that there is no truth within that can save us. The realization that we are untruth, that we are in sin, is a realization of supreme helplessness. The absolute paradox, Christ’s Incarnation, is the only proper response to this situation, since it allows God to enter into human existence not as sovereign lord (as in the parable of the King and the maiden in *Fragments*) but as our equal.

talking about Socrates, Zen Buddhism, or Sigmund Freud, there is a common thread that connects them all, namely the belief that human beings have the capacity within themselves to transform from one condition (ignorance, pain, neuroticism) to another (wisdom, happiness, health). The Christian model, on the other hand, presents the God Himself *as the teacher*, and the God's appearance in the moment *as the teaching*. The absolute paradox reveals to us that even though we are made in the image of God, we are nonetheless infinitely different from God, that the poles of existence have been torn asunder through sin, but that Christ has somehow managed to bridge this gap in his person and now seeks to enable us to do the same. While the Socratic learner grows deeper and deeper in wisdom and introspection, the Christian learner is shocked to realize that his understanding will *never* fathom the absolute paradox. The learner can never understand the paradox but he can, according to Climacus, come to an understanding *with* the paradox:

[This] occurs when the understanding and the paradox happily encounter each other in the moment, when the understanding steps aside and the paradox gives itself, and the third something, the something in which this occurs (for it does not occur through the understanding, which has discharged, or through the paradox, which gives itself - consequently *in* something), is that happy passion to which we shall now give a name... We shall call it *faith*.¹¹⁶

On the one hand, then, we have the model of the Socratic learner who, through the instigation of the god, finds the condition of truth within himself and ascends towards the divine. On the other we have the *kenosis* of faith where the Christian learner must empty himself of all pretensions of understanding and mastery and come to rely on the power of

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 59.

the paradox. It is only in and through the absolute paradox of Christ that a human being can begin to overcome despair, according to Climacus, and this cannot occur unless the understanding is “crucified.”¹¹⁷ As I will argue, Climacus sees the first model as undermining the full authenticity of the person while the second is ultimately empowering.

In Climacus’ discussion of the King and the maiden, the King is only able to make the girl “forget” herself. He can make his own glory shine upon her, blotting her out, and in this way unite the two of them. But this is not the King’s (the teacher’s/God’s) desire. He seeks not his own glorification but that of the maiden (learner/disciple). The union he seeks is one of equality, of partnership, but he can only do this by being what he is (the King) and what he is not (her equal) at the same time. This is the paradox that Christ ultimately manifests.¹¹⁸

On the Christian model, then, the self-emptying of the learner is ultimately revealed to be empowering, because in forsaking one’s ego one is able to open oneself up to accepting the absolute paradox of God becoming human, becoming one of us, and thereby allowing us to stand face to face with the God.¹¹⁹ Climacus over and over again in the *Postscript* points to how important it is that we correctly contextualize this event. In “crucifying” the understanding we achieve a “higher” understanding. But we have to be very careful not to view this “higher” understanding in terms of some kind of genius or brilliance:

¹¹⁷ *CUP*, discussion starting on 564.

¹¹⁸ *Fragments*, 29-30.

¹¹⁹ This is another place in the Climacian writings where the notion of synergy between human free-will and grace seems to ground the discussion. Climacus and Kierkegaard always emphasize the role of grace in this process but nonetheless always point out the absolute necessity of the human person *accepting* the realization that is afforded us via grace, namely that we are sinful (sick) and that we need help from God in order to heal our condition.

The same thing happens with faith's crucifixion of the understanding as with many ethical qualifications. A person renounces vanity—but he wants to be admired because he does it... Because an individual in faith relinquishes the understanding and believes against the understanding, he should not for that reason think poorly of the understanding or suddenly ascribe falsely to himself a splendid distinction within the total range of the understanding; a higher understanding is still, of course, also an understanding.¹²⁰

Here, again, is an important distinction between the Socratic path and the Christian (between religiousness “A” and “B”). Plato's divided line, especially with its demarcation between *dianoia* and *nous*,¹²¹ suggests a noetic apprehension of spiritual truths that transcends *dianoia* altogether.¹²² Even though there is a mystical dimension to Climacus' view that the crucified understanding is resurrected in a “higher” form of understanding, the difference is that on the Christian model, this understanding must always be grounded in humility as self-emptying. This is because the higher understanding is ultimately a kind of “acquaintance knowledge” (*Bekendelse*) having to do with our ability to *love a person* rather than an ability to grasp any kind of universal truth or reality.¹²³

¹²⁰ *CUP*, 564-65. This is one of the more striking quotes that show decidedly that Climacus is *not* an irrationalist or anti-rationalist in any way, shape, or form. Given the fact that the Climacian writings represent a cornerstone of Kierkegaard's epistemology, I would venture to say that the same can be said of the Kierkegaardian corpus as a whole. For a more in-depth discussion of this topic, see chapter 3.

¹²¹ The former representing abstract rationality and discursive reasoning (contemplation of “mathematics,” i.e. formulas, equations, proofs - in short: scientific thinking) and the latter representing a direct, intuitive apprehension of the highest spiritual realities. See discussion in chapter 3, esp. 11ff.

¹²² This, of course, depends highly on one's reading of the divided line. It is at least clear that *dianoia* is an essential “step” towards reaching *noesis*, as is shown in Socrates' insistence that the Philosopher Kings must study mathematics before they are able to enter into the mysteries of dialectic. See 537c-d and 522c-531d for the discussion of the importance of mathematics and 537d-540a and 531e-535a for a discussion of dialectic. All of this, as it turns out, is training for the political arts, given the fact that the philosopher must return to the Cave and put his education for use for the good of the people (see also 539e-540a).

¹²³ *CUP*, 565-66. It should be noted that Climacus' views on Socrates himself are always presented in a kind of dialectical mode and often suggest that he sees Socrates as traversing the line between religiousness “A” and “B.” On 566 Socrates is presented as someone who always returns to “ignorance,” as always emptying himself again and again in order to achieve a deeper knowledge of the god. This being

It is particularly illuminating to consider this personal emphasis of Climacus' epistemology in light of the Eastern Orthodox teaching on deification, which also emphasizes the highest kind of knowledge in terms of a *personal* union. In *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, a pivotal theological work in 20th century Russian Orthodoxy, Pavel Florensky writes: "Knowing is a real *going* of the knower *out* of himself, or (what is the same thing) a real *going* of what is known *into* the knower, a real unification of the knower and what is known. That is the fundamental and characteristic proposition of Russian and, in general, of all Eastern philosophy."¹²⁴ Florensky sees this event taking place only in and through faith which, much like Climacus, he characterizes as an event where dianoetic reasoning is transcended in a moment of communion: "Knowing is not the capturing of a dead object by a predatory subject of knowledge, but a living moral communion of persons, each serving for each as both object and subject. Strictly speaking, only a person is known and only by a person."¹²⁵

Kierkegaard's epistemology and philosophy of personhood are intrinsically intertwined, much as they are in Eastern Orthodoxy. For both Kierkegaard (and especially Climacus) and the Eastern Orthodox theological tradition, communion represents the highest form of knowledge, but it also represents the essential nature of authentic personhood. Throughout Kierkegaard's writings he uses the term "build up" (*opbygge*) to signify the development of the person towards authenticity. In *Works of*

said, it is obvious that Socrates was unable to come face to face with the God in the same way that a Christian can, since the *Logos* had yet to be incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ. Climacus' discussion of Socrates in relation to the two modes of religiousness nonetheless raises interesting questions about the possibility of Kierkegaard holding to a Universalist view of salvation.

¹²⁴ Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and the Ground of the Truth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 55.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 55-56.

Love we see that love represents not only the highest form of knowledge, for Kierkegaard (as discussed in chapter 3) but also the essence of upbuilding towards authenticity:

Building up is exclusively characteristic of love... This quality of *building up* has the essential characteristic of giving itself up in everything, of being one with all - just like love. Thus one sees that love with its characteristic quality does not set itself apart or pride itself on independence or self-sufficiency in relationship to one another but completely gives of itself. The characteristic is just this that it exclusively has the attribute of complete self-giving.¹²⁶

In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the process of deification is largely understood in similar terms, i.e., with regards to a person's ability to open him- or herself up to communion and love. This is, indeed, the basis of the Eastern Christian conception of heaven and hell, viewed as they primarily are in terms of the existential reality of the human person and the extent to which we are able to love one another. Kallistos Ware writes: "Love cannot exist in isolation but presupposes the other. Self-love is the negation of love... Self-love is hell; for, carried to its ultimate conclusion, self-love signifies the end of all joy and all meaning. Hell is not other people; hell is myself, cut off from others in self-centeredness."¹²⁷ In Dostoyevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* the Elder Zosima says: "I ask myself: 'What is hell?' And I answer thus: 'The suffering of being no longer able to love.'"¹²⁸

Deification, *theosis*, being made like God, is then the process of an increase in love and communion, the ability to enter ever deeper into the circle of love that is the life of the Trinity. This is made possible through Christ's Incarnation, crucifixion, and

¹²⁶ WOL, 202.

¹²⁷ Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 28.

¹²⁸ Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 322.

resurrection. Love is the ultimate expression of freedom and freedom represents our ability to live in a manner that is not reducible to the determinate, biological necessity of our nature.¹²⁹ This tension also lies at the heart of Kierkegaard's anthropology, as I have noted time and time again, the dynamic relation between the poles of existence as detailed by Anti-Climacus in *The Sickness Unto Death*. To live as spirit,¹³⁰ to be an authentic person, is to overcome the negative effect the poles have upon each other and to enter into a new state of being through their synthesis. This can only be done via the absolute paradox, where these poles of existence (eternal/historical, divine/human, free/determined) become fully and absolutely manifest in the person of Christ.¹³¹ Kierkegaard's existential emphasis echoes the Eastern approach to Christ's Incarnation, centered as it is on his *hypostatic* manifestation of divine and human realities. As Zizioulas points out: "In the West, as is apparent in the *Tome* of Pope Leo I, the starting-point of Christology is found in the concept of the 'natures' or 'substances,' whereas in the Greek Fathers, for example in Cyril of Alexandria, the starting-point of Christology is the hypostasis, the person."¹³² This emphasis on the hypostasis is essential if we are to make sense of the way in which the human person can enter into the absolute freedom that is communion and love, especially when we take into account the detrimental aspects of sin: "If, in order to avoid the consequences of the tragic aspect of man... the person as

¹²⁹ This does not mean that the facticity (to use Heidegger's term) of our biological makeup is ever "overcome." Freedom, in this context, means to be able to express ourselves fully and authentically as embodied beings. None of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms, least of all Climacus, ever advocate for any kind of angelism or Gnostic dualism.

¹³⁰ *SUD*, 13, where Anti-Climacus begins to use "spirit" and "self" interchangeably. Again, this is not indicative of dualism but rather that the authentic self is inherently "spiritual," i.e., attuned to the eternal *telos* of the human person. Manifesting this *telos* nonetheless takes place in the here and now, in the body.

¹³¹ See especially the discussion in *CUP*, 208-10 regarding the necessity of the "eternal truth" coming into existence as a historical reality.

¹³² Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 55.

absolute ontological freedom needs a hypostatic constitution without ontological necessity, his hypostasis must inevitably be rooted, or constituted, in an ontological reality which does not suffer from createdness.”¹³³ Echoing Kierkegaard almost exactly, Zizioulas writes: “The perfect man is consequently only he who is authentically a person, that is, he who subsists, who possesses a ‘mode of existence’ which is constituted as being, *in precisely the manner in which God also subsists as being.*”¹³⁴

Deification, then, is to exist authentically as God exists, as completely free and open to the other. The “sickness” described by Anti-Climacus, despair and sin, is the exact opposite of communion, namely an “inclosing reserve” where the human being becomes increasingly closed off from himself, other people, and God. This is because in existing in immediacy, the person is stuck in a continual cycle of self-obsession, guilt, and shame.¹³⁵ The aesthetic mode of existing attempts to overcome the despair of immanence by embracing it fully and consciously (the philistine does so unconsciously), though this can only keep the immediate, superficial effects of despair at bay for a short

¹³³ Ibid., 54.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 55. Italics in original. It should be noted that Zizioulas, much as Kierkegaard, is pointing towards Christ with his reference to “the perfect man.” Nobody else is able to fully and absolutely achieve the life of God in immanence except for Christ. This being said, Zizioulas and Kierkegaard both seem to think that the purpose of the Christian life is to live as closely as possible to the ideal represented by Christ.

¹³⁵ For Climacus’ most comprehensive discussion of the category of “immanence,” see *CUP*, 572ff. Immanence is the “here,” both the everyday reality that we live and breathe in but also what is accessible to us through the methods of modern science. Immanence is always juxtaposed with the eternal, the “hereafter,” the transcendent elements of reality that lie outside our reach. The various stages on life’s way are attempts to “interpret” reality in such a way that the “here and hereafter” can be harmonized. All of these fail, leading to the absolute “break” between the two in religiousness “B” where the two are no longer synthesized but rather kept absolutely separate, even as the eternal *enters into* immanence.

It is important to note the difference between immanence and immediacy. Immanence is an essential element of human existence (or a “pole” of existence). There is no way for human beings not to exist in the here and now. We are always immersed in the everyday, no matter how religious or “spiritual” we may be. Immediacy, on the other hand, is a category associated primarily with the aesthetic. It is an attempt to deal with immanence by completely embracing it. Immediacy is refusing to consider the eternal, what is over and beyond immanence, even though this is ultimately impossible, given that the eternal is just as an essential facet of human existence as immanence. Immediacy is therefore a willful ignorance, though it can take on surprisingly sophisticated forms, as is evident in the aesthetic descriptions of *Either/or*.

period of time.¹³⁶ The ethical person begins to feel the tension of immanence but attempts to overcome it through “self-assertion,” by putting himself in opposition to the negative aspects of immanence. Even though this manner of living may lead to a great deal of good, it may ultimately end up recreating the negative conditions of immanence it sought to fight against because it has no higher ground to stand from, no ability to break from the effects of despair.¹³⁷ Religiousness “A” creates a condition where a person can exist in opposition to immanence and to the evils of the age, though it does not allow one to break free of these completely.¹³⁸ Religiousness “B,” the “paradox-religious,” offers a break with immanence. It is not an attempt to somehow bring immanence and the eternal into communication (as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle sought, i.e., as represented by religiousness “A”) but rather that eternity enters into immanence, making it possible for people to live their day to day lives in light of the eternal and absolute because one’s eternal happiness is now based on a historical event.¹³⁹

The “birth” that occurs in the moment is both a “break,”¹⁴⁰ i.e. a discreet event, and also the beginning of a process. Both Climacus and Johannes de Silentio emphasize

¹³⁶ The use of drugs, alcohol, sex, and entertainment as a reprieve from the mundanely of the everyday is a good example of this. All of these work rather splendidly to begin with, but they ultimately end up making the everyday even more painful than it was before if they are allowed to dominate our lives. No matter how bohemian one may attempt to be, there is still the ugly matter of getting through a Wednesday afternoon when there is nothing on TV and the Jim Beam has run out.

¹³⁷ An example of this would be a political activist who fights against social injustice or the rebel who attacks a corrupt government. But if this person were to succeed he or she runs the risk of bringing about similarly corrupt circumstances in a new guise. The communist revolutions in Russia and Cuba are a good example of this. Just and righteous as they may have been, the people who were the victors of those revolutions ultimately became guilty of horrendous atrocities. Kierkegaard’s point is that any attempt to create utopia on earth, to overcome despair in immanence, is bound to fail.

¹³⁸ Socrates railing against the evils of the Athenians, though still so deeply connected to the laws and traditions of Athens that he would rather die there than leave to save his life.

¹³⁹ The preceding paragraph is an attempt on my part to explain the passage in *CUP*, 572-73 in light of the analysis in this chapter. Again I hasten to remind the reader that the “break” between immanence and the eternal in religiousness “B” does not mean that immanence is done away with. It is only in religiousness “B” that immanence can be comfortably experienced, hence the description of the Knight of Faith by Johannes de Silentio in *Fear and Trembling*, esp. 38.

¹⁴⁰ Or “leap,” a sudden movement from one way of being to another. See *CUP*, 576.

that faith in the absolute paradox (the absurd) must be made manifest in our lives over and over again through the existential movements of faith and resignation. De Silentio emphasizes the difference between resignation and faith (which corresponds a great deal with the difference between religiousness “A” and “B”) by pointing out that in resignation we leave the temporal behind in our ascent towards spiritual truths while in faith we “grasp the whole of temporality on the strength of the absurd.”¹⁴¹ This is only possible because the absurd is a description of a temporal event, namely the incarnation, the eternal *Logos* entering into time and assuming flesh. Kierkegaard himself, as well as the pseudonymous authors, describe this as the prerequisite of true authenticity, true individuality, which paradoxically only becomes fully manifest in a newfound ability to love people in a deeper, more profound way than has heretofore been possible. Silentio writes: “Faith’s knight knows... that it is glorious to belong to the universal.”¹⁴² In the story of Abraham and Isaac, Isaac represents the universal, the community, other people, which Abraham can only fully love as a true, authentic individual if he is able to let go of (resign) Isaac. The idea is that if we love people in a purely worldly manner, according to the precepts of the ethical sphere, then we will never be able to love them as *persons* but only as manifestations of the universal. This is echoed in Dostoyevsky’s tragic character Ivan Karamazov who rails against God’s injustice against “people” and “children” but who finds himself unable to love the person (the neighbor) in front of him. Ivan represents the righteous indignation of the political reformer and the social activist, which Dostoyevsky sees as noble inclinations indeed, but which are doomed to result in nothing but anger and self-righteousness if they are not connected to a more profound, personal

¹⁴¹ *F&T*, 77.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 103.

love. Similarly, the character of the Grand Inquisitor in the book is willing to go to any lengths to “help” people to have bread and comfort, but at the cost of their freedom and their personhood, both of which threaten the utopia that the Inquisitor seeks to create.¹⁴³

In Eastern Orthodox anthropology, deification is understood in terms of an authentic communion, of the human person who lives in the fullness of communion. Olivier Clement in his *Spiritual Anthropology* writes: “Between the first and second comings of the Lord, between the God-man and the God-universe, between the fallen and transfigured states of being, stands the Church, as a boundary and a crossing-place.”¹⁴⁴ The Church, effectively, constitutes the manifestation of “the moment” on earth, the way in which the Incarnation is continually made manifest in and through the sacraments.¹⁴⁵ This moment signifies the self-emptying of the person, the death of the ego, and the opening up of human life to the fullness of communion. Clement continues:

The Body of Christ is not only unity but interchange, by which the ‘movement of love’ of the Trinity is conveyed to humankind. This movement in which each effaces himself in order to give, is the transition

¹⁴³ *Brothers Karamazov*, 236-64. Huxley's *Brave New World* is an equally profound meditation on this issue.

¹⁴⁴ Olivier Clement, *On Human Being: A Spiritual Anthropology* (New York, London, and Manila: New City Press, 2000), 115.

¹⁴⁵ Kierkegaard, of course, wrote preciously little on the sacraments. His most sustained dialogue on the issue is found in “The Discourse at the Communion on Fridays,” (*CD*, 247-300). In the journals he connects an unhealthy, obsessive attitude about the Eucharist to objective thinking (*JP* 5, 5047 / XI¹ A 556). See Plekon, “Kierkegaard and the Eucharist,” *Studia Liturgica* 22 (1992): 214-36; Jack Mulder Jr., “The Catholic Moment? Apostolic Authority in Kierkegaard and the Catholic Tradition,” in *Kierkegaard and the Catholic Tradition: Conflict and Dialogue* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), 98-125.

Many of Kierkegaard's criticisms are aimed at the institutional nature of the churches and his sacramental reticence reflects this. That being said, the theological drive of the Climacian writings is centered on the eternal being made temporal, i.e., the manifestation of holiness and grace in our immediate, lived experience. This focus is, in and of itself, profoundly sacramental, even though Kierkegaard may have been hesitant to use such terminology, given the critical nature of his project. I am certainly not suggesting that Kierkegaard would have viewed the Orthodox Church, or any church for that matter, as the primary manifestation for how individuals enter into the moment and face the absolute paradox. Rather, I am trying to view his writings from the perspective of Orthodox Christianity, and find that he is in much more agreement with sacramental traditions such as Catholicism and Orthodoxy than what is often presented in the scholarship.

from individual to person, a growing to maturity certainly, but only achieved by means of a succession of deaths-and-resurrections, in the course of which we are stripped down and recreated. We become unique, escape the repetitive character of sin, only in proportion to our achieving unity. In coming to completion, the personality is shaped by its various tendencies of inclusiveness and discrimination, self-giving and letting be, and by the effects of love [...]. No longer do we jealously guard our share of humanity, our own joys, our separateness. We give so that we may bring to life. Giving our life, we receive all lives into ourselves.¹⁴⁶

This communal nature of salvation is one of the more distinctive elements of Eastern Christian thought. Individual salvation, in the context of Eastern Orthodox anthropology, is an oxymoron. As Georges Florovsky notes: “Christianity means a ‘common life,’ a life in common. Christians have to regard themselves as ‘brethren’ (in fact this was one of their first names), as members of one corporation, closely linked together. And therefore charity had to be the first mark and the first proof as well as the token of this fellowship.”¹⁴⁷ This does not mean that deification means the shattering of the unique, personal self, or that we become engulfed in some sort of Platonic universal. Rather, it signifies the manifestation of authentic, unique personhood. Florovsky goes on to note that the community in question is not a “society” or a collective which threatens the status of the person as a single individual. Rather, the community in question is a manifestation of communion, of love: “Christians are united not only among themselves, but first of all they *are one—in Christ*, and only this communion *with Christ* makes the communion of men first possible—*in Him*.”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Clement, 50.

¹⁴⁷ See Georges Florovsky, *Bible, Church, Tradition: An Eastern Orthodox View* (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Company, 1972), 59; Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, especially 145-49.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

This emphasis on communion also forms a central aspect of Kierkegaard's philosophy. In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard writes: "As Christianity's glad proclamation is contained in the doctrine about man's kinship with God, so its task is man's likeness to God. But God is love; therefore we can resemble God only in loving, just as, according to the apostle's words, we can only 'be God's co-workers in love.'¹⁴⁹

Kierkegaard's distinction between the "public" (*Offentligheden*) and "community" (*Menighed*) is important to consider in this regard.¹⁵⁰ In the journals, Kierkegaard writes:

"In the 'public' and the like the single individual is nothing; there is no individual; the numerical is the constituting form [...]. In community the single individual [*den Enkelte*] is; the single individual is dialectically decisive as the presupposition for forming community and in community the single individual is qualitatively something essential and can at any moment become higher than 'community,' specifically as soon as 'the others' fall away from the idea. The cohesiveness of community comes from each one's being a single individual, and then the idea; the connectedness of a public or rather its disconnectedness consists of the numerical character of everything. Every single individual in community guarantees the community; the public is a chimera. In community the single individual is a microcosm who qualitatively reproduces the cosmos; here, in a good sense, it holds true that *unum noris, omnes*. In a public there is no single individual and the whole is nothing; here it is impossible to say *unum noris, omnes*, for here there is no *one*. 'Community' is certainly more than a sum, but yet it is truly a sum of ones; the public is nonsense—a sum of negative ones, of ones who are not ones, who become ones through the sum instead of the sum becoming a sum of the ones.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ *WOL*, 74.

¹⁵⁰ *Menighed* is the word that is primarily used for religious communities in Danish. It can mean "congregation," though "fellowship" is a much better translation. Kierkegaard sometimes uses the word to mean "community," but only in the context of the Christian life, and usually in juxtaposition to the inauthentic reality of "the public."

¹⁵¹ *JP* 3, 2952 / X² A 390.

Kierkegaard's repeated emphasis on the individual over and against the public does obviously not mean that he does not appreciate the essentially communal and communitarian nature of the Christian life. On the contrary, in *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard calls our need for communion "essential" and says that "the most important thing" is "to understand oneself in one's longing for community."¹⁵² In fact, Kierkegaard states that in order for Christ to have been fully human, he would have needed to experience this need for love and companionship.¹⁵³ Kierkegaard also states that community must function as a "middle term" between the individual and God.¹⁵⁴ Finally, de Silentio's analysis of Abraham's teleological suspension of the ethical shows that it is only by passing *through* the ethical that we can begin to enter into a religious manner of living, a movement that is analyzed by Climacus in the *Postscript*.

The important distinction between "the public" and "community" in Kierkegaard's works has not always been recognized in the literature, resulting in the charge of individualism against Kierkegaard.¹⁵⁵ In the next section I will further examine Kierkegaard's emphasis on the communal aspects of the Christian life and look at possible social and political dimensions of such a view as understood in relation to Eastern Orthodox social thought.

¹⁵² *WOL*, 153.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹⁵⁴ *JP* 2, 1377 / IX A 315.

¹⁵⁵ For a representative view, see Roger S. Gottlieb, "Kierkegaard's Ethical Individualism," *The Monist* 62, no. 3 (1979): 351-67.

4.3 - Social and Political Dimensions in Kierkegaard and Eastern Orthodoxy

In examining the social dimensions of Kierkegaard's philosophy and of the Eastern Orthodox tradition, we must first consider how their vision of spiritual communion differs from the more secular (and certainly more prevalent) models of globalization and intercultural tolerance.¹⁵⁶ Second, it is worth considering to what extent such a vision of persons in communion includes considerations of political and systemic realities.¹⁵⁷ If Eastern Christians are serious about viewing salvation in terms of a deification that is largely understood in terms of our ability to relate to our neighbors within the community, does this not by necessity mean that the political dimension of the human person needs to be transfigured and sanctified? Similarly, given Kierkegaard's view that an authentic relationship to the community is an essential element in our relationship to God—as outlined in *Works of Love* and *Fear and Trembling*—a proper understanding of the structure of said community seems essential, especially given Kierkegaard's differentiation between the inauthentic reality of “the public” and the authentic reality of true community.

¹⁵⁶ In Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox theology, spiritual communion includes the communion of saints. Kierkegaard, of course, never discusses communion or community in the context of saints or martyrs.

¹⁵⁷ The words “politics” and “political” are to be construed in the most general Aristotelian sense, i.e., as *politikos*; having to do with the things that concern the citizens of the state. I am basing much of the following discussion on the principle that human beings are political animals, that our well-being and flourishing necessarily includes considerations of governance and distribution of resources. The central claim of this section is that Kierkegaard, and important influences in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, have a great deal to say about the political dimension of human life.

The thorny issue of the relationship between Christianity in general and the political sphere falls outside the boundaries of this current discussion. For a recent overview, see C.C. Pecknold, *Christianity and Politics: A Brief Guide to the History* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010).

Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos, in his work *Facing the World*, offers a critical view of the difference between the secular vision of a “global community” and the spiritual principle of persons in communion:

The current trend toward unification does not spring ‘from within,’ from spiritual maturity and a loving desire to learn about other people; on the contrary, it has been imposed ‘from without,’ by purely material factors, as a form of behavior. People who are brought together through this kind of unification remain strangers or are only united because of their common economic or political interests.¹⁵⁸

We are brought back to the spiritual crisis of Ivan Karamazov when considering the secular model. It is easy to love “people,” or to care for “the poor.” But when we are faced with flesh and blood human beings who demand our attention and care, the neighbor right in front of us, our prejudices, desires, and ignorance often outweigh our political and societal ambitions. The ideals of openness, inclusivity, and equality that marked so much of post-war Western Europe have in recent decades increasingly given way to far-right nationalism, Islamophobia, xenophobia, and pure racism as people are confronted with the difficult realities of having to confront the other. Anastasios suggests that without some kind of personal, spiritual transformation, political ideals will have little efficacy in the face of such challenges: “Taking Christian principles as our starting point, it is our belief that the real problem is how we can advance from being merely a community to becoming a communion of love—or, to use the Greek word, a *koinonia*, a

¹⁵⁸ Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos, “Toward a Global Community,” in *Facing the World: Orthodox Christian Essays on Global Concerns* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 21. The recent breakdown of the Eurozone and the possibility of Greece’s exit from the European Union at the time of writing are interesting manifestations of Yannoulatos’ point.

‘communion, society, communication, interconnection’ of love—with our fellow human beings, with the entire universe, and with the Supreme Reality.”¹⁵⁹

Basing personhood on the communion of the persons of the Trinity obviously has significant implications for how the Eastern Orthodox tradition views the political dimension of the human being. Similarly, if the fall is viewed in terms of personal and interpersonal fragmentation, and salvation is considered in largely therapeutic terms,¹⁶⁰ spiritual considerations will be inherently social and political.

A word on the distinction between the categories of “social” and “political:” For both Kierkegaard and the Eastern Orthodox tradition (in both teaching and praxis) political (structural/systematic/political) realities arise out of social (interpersonal) considerations, i.e., the fact that the human self is structured in an inherently social and communal manner. The Eastern Church, especially during the Byzantine era, played a pivotal role throughout the Orthodox world in addressing many of the fundamental societal and political ills of the time. Even though theology that was explicitly focused on the political and systemic dimensions of human existence remained scarce the Church often involved itself in political issues, especially when they related to the welfare of the most disenfranchised portions of society. In the following section I will examine various ways in which the Byzantine heritage has informed social and political dimensions of Eastern Orthodox theology.

In relation to Kierkegaard, my hope is to at least point out the political and structural *implications* of his works. Most of Kierkegaard’s direct references to political issues are relegated to his journal entries and he certainly never attempted to deal with such issues

¹⁵⁹ “Toward a Global Community,” 21.

¹⁶⁰ See chapter 2.

in a longer work. There are, nonetheless, issues raised throughout the Kierkegaardian corpus that can only be described as being political in nature, i.e., as having a direct relation to how societies develop policies and institutional responses to such issues as poverty, education, and even immigration. Even though it falls outside the scope of my project here to address these issues in any substantive way, I at least hope to point towards a way to read Kierkegaard as a philosopher whose writings include a highly important political dimension.¹⁶¹ It is in light of this consideration that I offer a comparative view of Kierkegaard's philosophy in light of Eastern Christian views on these issues.

As I have already noted, the Eastern Orthodox views on the social dimension of the human person are always: a) centered on the notion of *koinonia*, communion and interconnectedness, and b) incarnational in nature. Anastasios writes:

[The Incarnation is] an event that is both the basic focal point for unity in the universe and the crucial factor in restoring the divine *koinonia* of love. This event, put succinctly, was when 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth' (Jn: 1:14). The incarnation of the Word of God is the critical impetus that was needed to move us toward a *koinonia* of every human person with all other human beings and with the entire natural world.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ The view that Kierkegaard was an apolitical writer who championed individualism in one form or another was a prevalent view of Kierkegaard in the early literature. Interest in the social and political dimensions of Kierkegaard's works have grown increasingly in the past two decades. The most important contributions to the growing consensus that Kierkegaard has a great deal to say about politics and community include: Barry Stocker, *Kierkegaard on Politics* (London: Palgrave Pivot, 2013); Armen Avanesian and Sophie Vennerscheid, ed., *Kierkegaard and Political Theory: Religion, Aesthetics, Politics and the Intervention of the Single Individual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Jon Stewart, ed., *Kierkegaard's Influence on the Social Sciences* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011); George Pattison and Steven Shakespeare, ed., *Kierkegaard: The Self in Society* (London: Macmillan Press, 1998); George Connell and C. Stephen Evans, ed., *Foundations of Kierkegaard's Vision of Community: Religion, Ethics, and Politics in Kierkegaard* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press International, 1992).

My main purpose here is to provide a connection between Kierkegaard's spiritual anthropology and his more explicitly social and political writings. I will argue that a comparative analysis between the interplay of the individual and social dimensions of Eastern Orthodox soteriology and Kierkegaard's philosophy is an excellent way to draw out these aspects of Kierkegaard's writings.

¹⁶² "Toward a Global community," 26-27.

This understanding of salvation and deification in terms of the communal has its roots in patristic thought. Three figures loom especially large with regards to this emphasis on societal change: Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and John Chrysostom.¹⁶³ These three pivotal figures in Eastern Christian religious thought all emphasized the correspondence between inward, personal transfiguration and the deification of the social sphere. Anastasios notes that these three teachers constantly preached “human equality, referring to *homotimia* (that all people are of ‘equal value’) and to *isotimia* (that all people are entitled to ‘equal privileges’). They find the basis for this equality in the very essence of humanity’s nature, and any departure from this equality is understood unconditionally as injustice.”¹⁶⁴

An especially important element of their preaching was the belief that issues of inequality and injustice need to be addressed on a societal and even political/systematic level. Charity and compassion are not reducible to individual acts of piety, nor is poverty reducible to any sort of individual failure. John D. Jones notes this emphasis in the homilies of Chrysostom:

A compassionate response to assisting those who are poor is in principle critically sensitive to attitudes and policies that seek to blame the poor entirely for their poverty. One need only read St. John Chrysostom’s many homilies dealing with poverty to see how often he caustically rejects claims by parishioners that the poor did not deserve assistance since they were to blame for their condition.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Basil 330?-379, Gregory 329-390, Chrysostom 354-407.

¹⁶⁴ “The Dynamic of Universal and Continuous Change,” 157. See Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, 20 (PG 32:161; *New Advent*, accessed 9/10/2015, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3203.htm>); Gregory Nazianzen, *Ethical Verses*, 34.59-60 (PG 37:950); John Chrysostom, *On Lazarus*, 2.6 (PG 48:992; *On Wealth and Poverty*, trans. Catherine P. Roth (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), 39-57).

¹⁶⁵ John D. Jones, “The Church as Neighbor: Corporately and Compassionately Engaged,” *In Communion* (Winter, 2013): 22.

The three hierarchs viewed the model for Christian life not only in the lives of individual saints but in light of specific communities, namely the monasteries. Basil the Great, in his *Rules for Ascetic life*, writes: “I call that manner of communal life perfect in which private property does not exist, contradictory opinions have been eliminated, all turmoil, rivalry, and discord have been set well out of the way, and everything is shared in common.”¹⁶⁶ Such communities represent the communal nature of deification, of transformation that consists in growing in likeness to God’s Trinitarian life, which is perfect communion.¹⁶⁷ This is an inward change that manifests itself in each person’s unique personhood but which is not relegated to individual acts of piety or mercy, which are often based on capricious emotional responses: “Humanity has been called upon to proceed toward radical transformation and change. This is not merely external or superficial change, but a change in the nature of our very existence, one that can transform all of creation. It is a change that takes place with a profound awareness of the unity in the cosmos. It is a change whose end lies in deification.”¹⁶⁸

Kierkegaard’s *Works of Love* provide a similar focus on personal uniqueness that is expressed in universal love. A central theme of the work is the distinction between

¹⁶⁶ Basil the Great, *Rules for Ascetic Life*, 18.1, (PG 21:1381C). See Yannoulatos, “The Dynamic of Universal and Continuous Change,” 161.

¹⁶⁷ There are three critiques that come to mind with regards to Basil’s use of the monastery as an ideal for communal life: First, similar to using Christ as a model for individual deification, the monastery may represent an unattainable ideal in relation to the possible deification of the community. Second, there is an element here of Glaucon’s critique of Socrates’ “City of Pigs” in the *Republic*, namely that the life of the monastery is not only unattainable in the context of the *polis* but also unattractive for those who are not drawn to that kind of life (given that life outside of a monastic setting represents a different manifestation of how people strive to realize the eternal *telos*). Third, Basil’s idealized view of the monastery is, obviously, pretty far from the truth. Monasteries are, at least in my experience, pretty far from being filled with nothing but harmony, self-emptying, and love. They are, like any other community, replete with all the usual drama, neuroses, and wonderful nonsense that accompany the human condition.

¹⁶⁸ “The Dynamic of Universal and Continuous Change,” 177.

“erotic” love (*Elskov*) and Christian love (*Kærlighed*), roughly corresponding to the Greek concepts of *eros* and *agape*.¹⁶⁹ Much of this distinction rests on how to correctly love oneself and how that love can be transferred onto other people. As Kierkegaard notes, *Kærlighed* “does not seek to teach a man not to love himself but in fact rather seeks to teach him proper self-love.”¹⁷⁰ Similarly, the point is not to do away with erotic love, i.e., the preferential love between friends, spouses, or family, but rather to transfigure that love in and through the experience of the universal love of *Kærlighed*.

At the beginning of the work, Kierkegaard shows that *Kærlighed* revolves around *becoming* a neighbor¹⁷¹ to all, which in turn primarily revolves around loving oneself in the correct manner. This, Kierkegaard believes, is the primary element of the commandment to “love thy neighbor as yourself:” “To love oneself in the right way and to love one’s neighbour correspond perfectly to one another; fundamentally they are one and the same thing. When the law’s *as yourself* has wrested from you the self-love which Christianity sadly enough must presuppose to be in every man, then and then only have you learned how to love yourself.”¹⁷² This, in turn, means that to acquire true “neighbor-love” centers on *becoming* a neighbor: “The one to whom I owe a duty is my neighbor (*Næsten*), and once I have completed my duty I reveal that I am the neighbor.”¹⁷³

¹⁶⁹ For an overview of Kierkegaard’s discussion of this distinction see the introduction to the HarperPerennial edition of *Works of Love* by George S. Pattison (vii-xvii) and D. Anthony Storm’s commentary on the work at <http://sorenkierkegaard.org/works-of-love.html>.

¹⁷⁰ *WOL*, 35.

¹⁷¹ It is important to note that Kierkegaard often uses the Danish word *Næsten* in *Works of Love* instead of the more common *Nabo*, even though he often utilizes the latter word in other works to refer to the “neighbor,” in a scriptural sense. *Nabo* literally means “near-dweller,” usually referring to someone who lives close by. *Næsten* means “brother” or “fellow(-man).” *Næsten* has the connotation of universal kinship and is the word used by Kierkegaard for the Greek *plésion* (the word Christ uses for the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:29-37).

¹⁷² *WOL*, 39.

¹⁷³ *WOL*, (SKS 9, 30). Translation mine.

As George Pattison has pointed out, *Works of Love*, is the book people most often point to in order to defend Kierkegaard against the accusation that his philosophy is inherently individualistic.¹⁷⁴ That being said, this view is far from representing a consensus, as many still read Kierkegaard as always heralding the individual at the cost of the communal in order to overcome the dangers of the Hegelian universal.¹⁷⁵ There is undoubtedly a tension that runs throughout the work between the individual person's passion towards a relationship with God and the person's care for the world. This tension, in fact, runs throughout all of Kierkegaard's works. But the main thrust of *Works of Love* is to offer an alternative to the secular mode of Being-with-others, to use the Heideggerian phrase, which allows us to relate to one another as true equals. This "divine" equality is an important issue for Kierkegaard because it offers a way to overcome the oppressive pseudo-equality of secular levelling. As Pattison points out:

It is only through such an absolute and inward 'levelling' that we realize the radical nature of the demand to see each and every one of our fellow human beings as a 'neighbour' in the Christian sense... Kierkegaard regards the modern preoccupation with levelling in the external sense (the removal of external distinctions by political and economic strategies) as fundamentally denying this underlying common humanity. Such attempts at social engineering are trapped in way of thinking that see the external differences as having a decisive significance for human life.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ See George Pattison, *Kierkegaard and the Crisis of Faith*, 109.

¹⁷⁵ See, Malantschuk, 322-26 for a rather individualistic reading of *Works of Love*. Martin Buber's sensitive and nuanced criticism of Kierkegaard's focus on the individual's relationship to God to the exclusion of the individual's concern for the world can be found in *Between Man and Man*, 71-89. For a critical discussion of Levinas' famous critique of Kierkegaard on this front, see Jeffrey Dudiak, "Religion with an Impure Heart?: Kierkegaard and Levinas on God and Other Others," in *The Hermeneutics of Charity*, ed. James K.A. Smith & Henry Isaac Venema (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 185-96. On the theological front, Niebuhr in *Christ and Culture* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Incorporated, 1956), 243ff and Bonhoeffer in *Ethics*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 197-98 see Kierkegaard's philosophy as being largely relegated to individualism.

¹⁷⁶ *Kierkegaard and the Crisis of Faith*, 110. It should be noted that one can find plenty of references in Christian ethics, both East and West, to grounding our ethical thinking in considerations of *physis*. The difference between the Christian and secular approaches to appealing to universal considerations (and this is what I take Kierkegaard to be highlighting) is that the "divine equality" of human persons in Christian thought does not undermine human personhood (including the value and worth of the individual) but rather

The social aspects of Kierkegaard's philosophy echo the primary concerns laid out in the aforementioned writings of Bishop Anastasios. Kierkegaard was an astoundingly prophetic writer, one who could read the writing on the wall with regards some of the major social and spiritual trends of the coming twentieth century. Among these was his skepticism regarding a purely secular basis for national and international communities. Though Kierkegaard was in many ways a progressive thinker (of which I will have more to say in just a moment), he nonetheless firmly believed that there had to be a spiritual basis for community and interpersonal relations.

Even with the socio-political undercurrent in Kierkegaard's writings there is nonetheless a highly understandable tendency in the scholarship to focus on the tension between the individual and the community in his writings. The inwardness of the duty to love can easily be seen as existing in opposition to socio-political realities and strategies. This tension is inherent in Anti-Climacus' existential analysis of the poles of existence in *The Sickness Unto Death*. What is individual and unique in us (freedom, spirit, the eternal) always manifests itself in tension with our lived reality as an instantiation of a universal (as a finite, mortal, member of a species that has a deterministic nature). This tension between the particular and the universal, the individual and the essence/nature, was a much-discussed topic in patristic thought.¹⁷⁷

supports it. Many "secular" attempts to develop a purely universal approach to ethical thinking seem to offer such an abstract account of personhood that the value of the individual becomes seriously undermined. Utilitarianism and deontology are the most famous examples of this tendency. The alternative offered by Kierkegaard (and, as I am arguing, by the Eastern Orthodox tradition) has interesting points of contact with later critiques of post-modern ethics and feminist ethics of care.

¹⁷⁷ John Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, ed. Paul McPartlan (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 56, n. 129; Basil, *Ep.* 236.6 (PG 32, 884A); 38, 1;5 (PG 32, 325f); Amphilochius, *Frg.* 15 (PG 39, 112C-D); Maximus, *Ep.* 15 (PG 91, 545A); John Dam., *C. Jacob.* 52 (PG 94, I461). See also Daniel Buxhoeveden, and Gayle Woloschak, ed., *Science and the Eastern Orthodox Church* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate,

The conflict between the particular and the universal manifests itself in various ways, of course, but a primary instance of this tension is the struggle of the individual to manifest his or her uniqueness in some kind of harmony with the well-being of the community. This is, of course, a central issue at stake in de Silentio's *Fear and Trembling* where the individual is unable to find ultimate value in his experience as a part of the *Sittlichkeit*.

In Eastern Orthodox thought, the *ecclesia* is seen as a primary way in which human beings navigate the tension between the particular and the universal. It is in the context of the divine liturgy that the human being finds harmony between her *hypostasis* and *ousia* insofar as we open ourselves up to a form of communion that respects and validates our unique individuality while at the same time manifesting a profound form of solidarity and interconnectedness. This interconnectedness manifests itself both in the relationships and communion of members of the community (the Church) as well as in the relationship between the faithful and God. The Eastern Orthodox liturgy is always a communal event. There are no private masses in the Eastern Orthodox Church as the liturgy must always be celebrated by a priest and at least one other person, to signify the communal nature of the event.¹⁷⁸

Even though Kierkegaard never made the kind of explicit connections between liturgy and communion that one finds in Eastern Orthodox theology he nonetheless also saw the Christian experience as offering a profound alternative to secular attempts, via economic and political systems, to harmonize the relationship of the individual and the

2011), esp. 137ff for a discussion of Maximos' the Confessor and his views on the relationship between grace and natural laws.

¹⁷⁸ See Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1975).

community.¹⁷⁹ It is with an eye to this proposed harmony of the one and the many that I will now look at ways in which the Eastern Orthodox Church and Kierkegaard have addressed these issues.

It should first of all be noted that a great deal of Eastern Christian views on the political dimension of human beings was developed during the Byzantine Empire, a time when the sacred and the secular were most deeply intertwined in the history of the Orthodox faith. According to Demetrios Constantelos in his study of social justice in the Byzantine world, there was “no development of systematic ethics as we understand the concept today.”¹⁸⁰ There were two reasons for this lack of systematization: First of all, the distinction between the individual and the social dimensions of the human being were not nearly as entrenched as they had become in Kierkegaard’s time (and certainly not in comparison to the modern tension between these spheres). The Byzantine conception of the human person was inherently social, much like the anthropology presented in Greek antiquity by Plato and Aristotle. Second, philanthropy was not considered a distinct virtue in the Christian life, something that one did in addition to other activities. Rather, philanthropy was seen as an “all-encompassing attribute.” The Christian life *is* philanthropy, or so the Byzantine’s believed.¹⁸¹ The God of the New Testament, the God of the Incarnation who appeared among us to heal and save us, was seen as being essentially *philanthropos*, the lover of mankind. The Church was seen as an extension of this salvific activity, not the manifestation of judgment or legalism but rather a “hospital

¹⁷⁹ In chapter five, which serves as an epilogue to this project, I will explore Kierkegaard’s views on liturgy and communal worship.

¹⁸⁰ Constantelos, *Poverty, Society and Philanthropy in the Late Medieval Greek World* (Rochester, NY: Aristide D. Caratzas, Publisher, 1992), 39.

¹⁸¹ See Constantelos, 39-52. On the relationship between *philanthropia* and *agape*, see Constantelos, “Origins of Christian Orthodox Diakonia: Christian Orthodox Philanthropy in Church History,” website of International Orthodox Christian Charities, accessed 7/23/2015, <http://www.iocc.org/>.

for the healing of sick souls.”¹⁸² The ecclesia was seen as a whole, as *one*, the cure against the fragmentation that was the inevitable result of the Fall. As Constantelos notes, there was no “drastic separation between the earthly Ecclesia and the supernatural community, because both constitute the whole of God’s creation and there is no division between the sacred and the profane.”¹⁸³

Yet this is not to suggest that the Byzantine Empire somehow manifested a perfect harmony and union between secular authorities and the life of the Church. The Church often took on a critical role in its relation to secular authorities and believed one of its main functions to be the protection of the poor and disenfranchised.¹⁸⁴ The patriarchs of the late medieval Greek world saw the emperor as “the representative of God on earth, not for private gain but for the benefit of God’s people.”¹⁸⁵ This did not make the ecclesiastical hierarchy subservient to the emperor or fully supportive of his political actions. On the contrary, the role of the emperor as God’s representative was seen as an ideal that often stood in tension to the lived reality of bureaucracy and aristocracy, both of which the Church hierarchy vehemently critiqued when they failed to live up to the ideal of *God-as-philanthropos*, especially when the empire failed to respond to the needs of its poorest and most disenfranchised citizens.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸² Constantelos, 40.

¹⁸³ Constantelos, 49.

¹⁸⁴ It should be noted that one of the most striking differences between the pre- and post-Protestant eras in European history is the social attitude towards the poor. As Max Weber outlined in his *The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism*, it is only with Protestantism that poverty become as vehemently vilified as it is today, associated as it is with moral failing, a concept that was completely alien to both Greek and Latin Christianity in the late medieval world.

As Constantelos notes regarding the Byzantine empire (70): “most people attached no shame to the fact of poverty.”

¹⁸⁵ Constantelos, 72.

¹⁸⁶ Constantelos, 73.

This is not to say that the Church, especially in its inevitable role as an earthly institution, always lived up to its own ideals. The church hierarchy undoubtedly validated and reified the secular hierarchy of the time and the clergy of the Byzantine era often received criticism for their extravagant lifestyle. The writings of John Chrysostom provided an ascetical critique of these issues and aimed to both instigate reform within the Church and inspire social awareness among the faithful.¹⁸⁷ John McGuckin has noted that the Orthodox churches throughout the Byzantine era were in a constant struggle with both secular authorities and themselves in their formulation of a healthy relationship between the *ecclesia* and the political hierarchy.¹⁸⁸ The relationship between the Church and the ruling authorities was primarily marked by the extent to which the political class followed the moral tenets of the Christian faith.¹⁸⁹

Kierkegaard's political writings are similarly marked throughout by his critique of Christendom and what he sees as the unnatural marriage between the sacred and the secular via the Danish Lutheran Evangelical Church and its status as a national, governmental institution. But unlike those who see Kierkegaard as thereby advocating for a pietistic, individualistic Christianity,¹⁹⁰ there is much to suggest that his aim was much more in keeping with the ideals represented by the Byzantine model where the unique individuality of the person coheres with the social and political spheres. Elísio Pérez-Álvarez, in his study of the economic and political implications of Kierkegaard's philosophy, writes:

¹⁸⁷ See Chrysostomus Baur, *John Chrysostom and his Time*, trans. Sr. M. Gonzaga (Westminster: Newman Press, 1959), and John D. Jones, "John Chrysostom and the Problem of Wealth," *In Communion* (May 9, 2009), accessed 8/1/2015, <https://incommunion.org/2007/05/09/st-john-chrysostom-and-the-problem-of-wealth/>.

¹⁸⁸ McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church*, 380-396.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 382.

¹⁹⁰ See 257, n. 175.

Kierkegaard was not pursuing a kind of rejection of mundane policy. On the contrary, he was struggling for the preservation of the Christian message as a critical instrument within society. Instead of escaping from the world, he was denouncing the manipulation of religious speech. According to Kierkegaard, what lies beyond the doctrine of the church are the Hegelian philosophy and its ideology that privileges the status quo of the aristocracy.¹⁹¹

Works of Love, *Two Ages*, and *Training in Christianity* present Kierkegaard's attempt at distinguishing clearly between Christendom, a Christianity that supports and accommodates an unjust (economic and political) status quo, and the true Christianity whose political function was deeply Socratic in nature, i.e., to be a vexing gadfly, stinging the culture and thereby waking it up to its societal failures.¹⁹²

Pérez-Álvarez notes how the writings of Kierkegaard's later years were deeply influenced by the economic changes occurring in Denmark, especially following the agrarian reforms enacted by prince Frederick VI in the 1840's.¹⁹³ The rise of a new, bourgeois middle class also created the conditions for a disenfranchised, oppressed lower class of peasants ("cottagers") who suffered greatly in the economic reforms of the era. Kierkegaard was deeply affected by their plight and these economic policies provided a great deal of inspiration for his critiques of Danish society.¹⁹⁴ As Pérez-Álvarez notes,

¹⁹¹ Elisio Pérez-Álvarez, *A Vexing Gadfly: The Late Kierkegaard on Economic Matters* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009), 37.

¹⁹² This is not to say that Christianity's political function was reducible to just this facet though it seems that Kierkegaard believed it to be the primary political dimension of Christian life. Kierkegaard, for example, talks about his Christian philosophy in relation to education (*JP* 1, 782 / II A 4; *JP* 1, 788 / X¹ A 647) but never suggests that Christianity could provide a systematic alternative to the one already in place. Christianity's primary purpose is to transform individual persons who live in communion with one another. It thereby should (though it often fails to) affect every aspect of human existence, including education, economics, and politics.

¹⁹³ Pérez-Álvarez, 38.

¹⁹⁴ Pérez-Álvarez, 38-40 and Kirmmse, *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark* (Bloomington, IN: The Indiana Series in the Philosophy of religion, Indiana University Press, 1990), 12-20.

this is an important factor to take into account when considering the socio-political elements of Kierkegaard's philosophy, especially in works such as *Works of Love*:

Some scholars assert that Kierkegaard loved his neighbors not because they were lovable in themselves or because of a special intrinsic characteristic, but due to God's transcendent commandment: 'thou shalt love thy neighbor.' But it is easy to miss Kierkegaard's point in *Works of Love*: in loving the neighbor one is rejecting the bourgeois ideology and seeking the Kingdom of God and its justice.¹⁹⁵

Kierkegaard's attacks were equally aimed at secular authorities as well as the institutionalized church; not surprisingly given the nature of a national church functioning largely as a government bureaucracy. Michael Plekon notes that Kierkegaard's aim was to return to the spirit of "original," orthodox Christianity, much as Luther had wished to do.¹⁹⁶ But Kierkegaard's critique was not an attempt to salvage Lutheranism but rather to offer a radically new way of viewing Christian life, one focused on personal transformation and action rather than institutional allegiance: "Like Bonhoeffer much later, he found fault with an exaggerated emphasis on faith and grace in the Lutheran tradition to the detriment of the imitation of Christ, of Christian *praxis*."¹⁹⁷

In his rejection of the Lutheran church, Kierkegaard attacked the primary theological voices of his time and place but also the very notion of the church as the "corporate body" of Christ and the traditions and rituals it claimed to manifest.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ Pérez-Álvarez, 39.

¹⁹⁶ Plekon, "Protest and Affirmation: The Late Kierkegaard on Christ, the Church, and Society," *Quarterly Review*, (1982): 50. Plekon notes that "[Kierkegaard's] published works and journals confirm that he constantly returned to traditional sources such as the church fathers, Luther, and other theologians" (50). As I discussed in chapter 1, Kierkegaard certainly drew a great deal of inspiration from patristic sources but his access to original texts was often limited and in some cases his research was limited to interpretations of the original texts found in the textbooks of the Danish Lutheran seminary.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

Kierkegaard's critique of Lutheranism echoed Martin Luther's critique of Roman Catholicism in many important ways.¹⁹⁹

There is some question as to the extent to which these critiques were aimed at the very concept of *ecclesia* per se. Again, there is undoubtedly an emphasis on the individual's relationship to God in Kierkegaard, especially since he saw the corruption of the Danish Lutheran church as representing yet another manifestation of the Hegelian universal that threatened individual well-being. But this does not mean that Kierkegaard saw no value in the church as a community.

Works of Love is an example of Kierkegaard's attempt to formulate a notion of a *community* that is bound by something deeper and more profound than the Hegelian *Sittlichkeit*. It is a work that is not offered as an alternative social ethos to that propounded by secular humanism or the prophets of Christendom but rather a radical view of Christianity as an *ecclesia* in the most basic sense of the word, those that are "called forth" to engage in a specific kind of activity. In *Works of Love*, this activity is the full expression of *Kærlighed*, the manifestation of self-emptying and selfless loving that allows human beings to be free, authentic *persons*.²⁰⁰ This is never more apparent than in the fascinating section of *Works of Love* entitled "The Work of Love in Remembering One Dead." Here Kierkegaard speaks of love for the dead as being the most faithful and freest love available to us: "In order properly to test whether love is entirely free, one eliminates everything which in some way could constrain a person to an act of love. But

¹⁹⁹ For more on these parallels, see chapter 2.

²⁰⁰ In the Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions, this activity is primarily manifest in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Kierkegaard is, of course, famously reticent to speak of sacramental matters, though there are fascinating implications between his notion of "the moment" and the Eucharistic realism inherent in Roman Catholic and Orthodox theology. For a consideration of the Eucharistic implications of "the moment," see Marcus Pound, "The Assumption of Desire: Kierkegaard, Lacan, and the Trauma of the Eucharist," *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 9, no. 1 (2008): 67-78.

precisely this is absent in the relationship with one who is dead. If love nevertheless remains, this is the freest love.”²⁰¹

One way of reading this baffling passage would be to reduce Kierkegaard’s *Kærlighed* to pure deontology. Indeed, Kierkegaard throughout *Works of Love* calls free, Christian love a pure duty. But there is much to suggest that we are here far removed from any kind of categorical imperative. Throughout the work, Kierkegaard emphasizes that the duty in question does not arise out of any sort of rational or social ethos but rather out of a profound solidarity, one where psychological idiosyncrasies or national bonds are transcended and we reach a universality based not on any sort levelling or abstraction but rather on the mutually shared love of unique persons.²⁰² In this light, death and the experience of dying encapsulate central elements of Kierkegaard’s view of the human person as being in communion. Death is always entirely our own, as Heidegger would later note, a hallmark of inescapable authenticity.²⁰³ Yet it is also *the* universal experience, the common ground, the settling of dust to dust. As Hugh Pyper notes: “Death is profoundly solitary. We can only die our own death, and in its grip we pass beyond the claims and possibilities of the human. [...] Yet death is also profoundly social. [...] Such solidarity as we have is in the common life of the grave.”²⁰⁴ The Christian, furthermore, is conscious of a different kind of death, the sickness unto death,

²⁰¹ *WOL*, 322.

²⁰² This is an important point to consider, one that sometimes gets glossed over in discussions of Kierkegaard’s focus on the individual, namely that his philosophy is equally a critique against faceless commonality as well as against the post-Enlightenment view of the individual. Kierkegaard’s anthropology of the person does not focus on rational, autonomous agents with specific rights and duties but rather on human beings who exist in interdependence, though their relationships with themselves and other people are often shattered by the reality of despair.

²⁰³ *Being & Time*, H. 250-254.

²⁰⁴ Hugh Pyper, “Cities of the Dead,” in *The Joy of Kierkegaard: Essays on Kierkegaard as a Biblical Reader* (Sheffield & Oakfield: Equinox, 2011), 74-75.

the fullness of the reality of sin and despair: “The sickness unto death is to be perpetually dying and yet not able to die.”²⁰⁵ Piper notes: “As despair, so Kierkegaard claims, is universal, so all of us must be dwellers in cities of the perpetually dying.”²⁰⁶

Yet the Christian also understands death in a profoundly hopeful sense, both the physical death of the body as well as the spiritual decay of the soul. Salvation is understood here as a community of love where all distinctions are erased, even between the living and the dead, a community of spiritual equality and communion. Love for the dead, therefore, is love for the living: “Love for the physically dead teaches us how to love those who are spiritually dead. It also teaches us a signal lesson in the love of the self. If salvation depends on dying to the self, the love of the self must be love of the dead. Only if we are able to love ourselves as dead can we claim a Christian self-love.”²⁰⁷

Kierkegaard’s vision for a church, then, is completely catholic, i.e., universal. This universality cannot be institutionalized but must be realized in the mystical union of unique persons who love one another. As Hilarion Alfayev writes about the Orthodox view on the *ecclesia*:

The church is one, for it is constituted in the image of the Holy Trinity and reveals the mystery of unity in essence, while being differentiated in hypostases. [...] The unity of the human race once destroyed by people is now restored in the Church, where neither national nor linguistic distinctions are made. Rather, each person is granted a ‘new tongue’: the language of faith and prayer, of unity of mind and love.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ *SUD*, 6.

²⁰⁶ Piper, 74.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.

²⁰⁸ Alfeyev, 100 and 102.

Kierkegaard viewed this vision of true equality as being profoundly political and the failure of the institutionalized church to manifest it as an example of the pure hypocrisy of Christendom. In his journals Kierkegaard wrote that “It is very moving to preach on Sundays about Christ’s associating with sinners and tax-collectors—but on Mondays it is a crime to speak with an ordinary man, with a servant girl.”²⁰⁹

Kierkegaard’s vision of the Church, the *ecclesia*, the universal love of believers, stood in stark contrast to the failures of the institutionalized church to live up to this vision:

The definition of “Church” found in the Augsburg Confession, that it is the communion of saints where the word is rightly taught and the sacraments rightly administered, this quite correctly (that is, not correctly) grasped only the two points about doctrine and sacraments and has overlooked the first, the communion of saints (in which there is the qualification in the direction of the existential). Thus the Church is made into a communion of indifferent existences (or where the existential is a matter of indifference)—but the ‘doctrine’ is correct and the sacraments are rightly administered. This is really paganism.²¹⁰

Kierkegaard was obviously highly critical of the concept of an institutional church. His criticism can be applied equally to all denominations of Christianity. Indeed, many of Kierkegaard’s criticisms of the church as an institutionalized, hierarchical authority can be applied to the Orthodox church of both past and present. Kierkegaard saw himself as a corrective to the corrupting influences of Christendom that undoubtedly appear in every religious setting, i.e., superficiality, hypocrisy, and spiritual values being replaced by secular comfortability. But this does not mean that Kierkegaard advocated for an individualistic religiosity. His view of the Christian faith is highly communal. As

²⁰⁹ *JP* 1, 1011 / VIII 1 A 314.

²¹⁰ *JP* 1, 600 / X⁴ A 246. In his commentary on this passage, Pérez-Álvarez writes that Kierkegaard’s point is that “contrary to the early church, we converted the Eucharist into the real body of Christ and the Church into the mystical body” (93).

an Orthodox Christian reading Kierkegaard, I cannot but be struck with how closely his vision of the *ecclesia* aligns with the vision of patristic Christianity, with the idea of the Church as a critical counterpoint to secular complacency and as offering a form of communion that is much deeper and more profound than what is offered through national, political, or social communities, which are always exclusivist in nature.

There is an especially striking connection between Kierkegaard's emphasis on Christian *praxis*, on action that is inherently social in nature, and between the later Byzantine view of *philanthropia* as being the primary hallmark of the Christian life. Even though these elements have not always been fully realized by the Orthodox churches, such a theological emphasis casts Kierkegaard's philosophy in an interesting light. Pérez-Álvarez writes:

What counts for Kierkegaard is 'the correspondence or no-correspondence of my life or thine' with the teaching of the church, and not the calculation of scholarly correspondence between the different dogmatic declarations. What come first are the transformed lives that reconcile weekends with weekdays. Within this train of ideas, Kierkegaard articulates his concept of idolatry, which has to be addressed at the level of practice more than at the theoretical level.²¹¹

Similarly, the Orthodox church always viewed its relation to secular authorities primarily in terms of how well they managed to live up to the *praxis* of the gospel, rather than the extent to which these authorities proclaimed allegiance to any particular doctrine.²¹² A primary consideration for the church was whether the secular authorities

²¹¹ Pérez-Álvarez, 153.

²¹² McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church*, 382: "As far as the church was concerned it never lost its commitment to the principle that the emperor ruled under the eye of God; and only as an icon, or type, of Christ's loving dominion of his world. If the emperor departed from the 'Charter' of Christ (the Gospel and the church canons) his rule was never sanctioned by the church leaders, and both he and those clergy who were his sycophants, invariably came to grief."

respected the dignity and freedom of human persons in their rules and systems of government. McGuckin, in his analysis of the relationship between the Byzantine church and the political authority of the time, writes:

The Creation ordinances of God show how much he has elevated human will and enhanced human freedom. The conciliar and canonical principles of church government show how much the church has always sought to protect the legitimate liberty of the Christians. Christianity is not an enemy of human freedom. Although there have been many instances in the past where ecclesiastical authorities have seemed to be in league with the most repressive and reactionary forces in society, the church has never lacked monastic and simpler leaders (those still in touch with the cry of the poor) who have pointed out the freedoms the Gospel has enshrined for all men and women.²¹³

Kierkegaard's critique of both the present age as well as his attacks on Christendom are similarly informed by the fundamental Christian teaching of the human person's inherent value, dignity, and freedom. Kierkegaard saw the rise of capitalist and materialist philosophies and values in his time as a direct attack on Christian principles. He bemoaned the increasing competitiveness and acquisitiveness of society as a hallmark of both bourgeois values and Christendom, i.e., the failure of the Church to offer an alternative teaching to these developments and even its direct and indirect support for materialistic values.²¹⁴ Kierkegaard saw many of the developments in the modern world—the rise of capitalism and consumerism, obsession with technology and entertainment, the focus on comfort and pleasure—as seriously threatening human dignity and freedom. Worst of all, Kierkegaard thought, was that these values were

²¹³ McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church*, 383.

²¹⁴ Pérez-Álvarez, 55-67. For Kierkegaard's views on business and competitiveness, see esp. *JP* 1, 233 / VIII 1 A 368; *JP* 6, 6188 / IX A 134; *JP* 1, 235 / IX A 387; and *JP* 2, 1787 / X³ A 347 n.d., 1850. For the relationship between bourgeois values and the gospel preached in the Danish Lutheran church, see *JP* 3, 2767 / VII 1 A 77.

increasingly being associated with Christianity. In *Judge for Yourself!* Kierkegaard writes: “We have made the finite and the infinite, the eternal and the temporal, the highest and the lowest, blend in such a way that it is impossible to say which is which, or the situation is an impenetrable ambiguity.”²¹⁵

The prosperity gospel preached in Kierkegaard’s time was an especially egregious example of this.²¹⁶ Kierkegaard always viewed true Christianity as a form of dying to oneself in order to help others, of voluntarily accepting suffering and pain in order to live in imitation of Christ. As such, true Christianity is diametrically opposed to a gospel of comfort, wealth, and luxury,²¹⁷ even though the church repeatedly failed to live up to this ideal. Pérez-Álvarez writes that one of Kierkegaard’s primary objectives in his attack upon Christendom was: “To make Christianity possible again by means of rejecting the reduction of the gospel to pecuniary interests and, above all, by repudiating the practice of absolutizing money in the name of the interest of Christianity.”²¹⁸

4.4 - Conclusion

One advantage of reading Kierkegaard in light of the Eastern Orthodox tradition is that it allows for an extremely holistic reading of the Kierkegaardian corpus. Throughout the years, scholars have fought to put Kierkegaard into one camp or another and in doing so have downplayed certain aspects of his writings while highlighting others. Reading Kierkegaard in light of the East allows us to bring together elements of

²¹⁵ *JFY*, 123.

²¹⁶ *JFY*, 123-130.

²¹⁷ “The greater the advantages the more difficult it is to become a Christian.” *JP* 1, 991 / X³ A 714. See also *FSE*, 201: “To suffer for the doctrine, to *will* to suffer for it—not accidentally to happen to suffer for it—well, that kind of Christianity has become obsolete.”

²¹⁸ Pérez-Álvarez, 146; *JP* 3, 2773 / XI² A 363.

his thought and writing that heretofore have often seemed diametrically opposed, or have at least stood in considerable tension to one another. Primary among these is the relationship of the individual to the community. Kierkegaard's focus on the individual and inwardness has caused many commentators to downplay the essentially communal and social aspect of his writings, especially with regards to his views on personhood. The Eastern Orthodox tradition, with its focus on the harmonization of the communal and the individual, highlights how Kierkegaard managed to dialectically engage the opposite poles of community and individuality in subtler ways than he has often been given credit for. Kierkegaard's primary aim was always to save Christianity from itself, to nudge his readers into thinking of how incredibly revolutionary the gospel message truly is. To do this he engaged in a rhetoric that is at times astoundingly revolutionary and radical. The political and economic dimensions of Kierkegaard's works were informed by his philosophy of personhood, which echoes many of the central characteristics of patristic and Eastern Orthodox anthropology. First and foremost among these was Kierkegaard's view of human personhood as being essentially relational and his view that human dignity and freedom can only be fully expressed via the Christian commandment of neighborly love.

Even though an examination of Kierkegaard in light of the Eastern Orthodox Church cannot lay claim to revealing the "real" Kierkegaard—an objective which must always be bound to fail, give the indirect method of communication that lies at the heart of Kierkegaard's philosophy—it nonetheless reveals many fascinating elements of Kierkegaard's authorship that may otherwise go unexamined. Just as with comparative approaches to Kierkegaard from the Roman Catholic or even Zen Buddhist traditions, the

Eastern Orthodox tradition offers a new point of entry into Kierkegaard's philosophy. An examination of Kierkegaard's soteriology in light of the Eastern Orthodox tradition draws out the extent to which he attempted—and perhaps managed—to break away from the traditional Augustinian account of original sin that became prevalent in Western Christianity. Kierkegaard's epistemology, when viewed in light of the East, reveals fascinating layers of apophaticism and an emphasis on relational knowledge. It also brings out important elements of Kierkegaard's notion of passion (*Lidenskab*) when examined in light of the notion of *apatheia* that played a pivotal role in the formation of Eastern Christian spirituality. Finally, Kierkegaard's emphasis on love and communion reveals interesting parallels with the Eastern Orthodox emphasis on the communal nature of salvation and the relational nature of human personhood.

Chapter 5 – Epilogue: Concluding Unscientific Remarks on the Ecclesiastical Event

As I have repeatedly noted, points of contact between Kierkegaard and Eastern Orthodoxy stem not from Kierkegaard’s explicit attempt to craft an “Eastern” philosophy but rather from his attempt to connect to certain root principles in Christian thought and worship, many of which date back to the patristic era, which forms the core of Eastern Orthodox theology. My point here has not been to argue that Kierkegaard is some kind of pseudo-Orthodox but rather that viewing him from an Eastern Orthodox viewpoint highlights important aspects of his philosophy that may not be immediately apparent from either a Protestant or Roman Catholic perspective.

But a comparative analysis of Kierkegaard and Eastern Orthodox philosophy and theology cannot be considered complete unless we look at what is perhaps the most essential element of Eastern Orthodox spirituality, namely the central role of liturgical worship. The brief, concluding remarks that follow are an attempt to look at Kierkegaard’s complex views on liturgy, sacraments, and collective worship in comparison to Eastern Orthodox liturgical theology. My aim here, as in all the preceding chapters, is to shed a new light on Kierkegaard’s writings on this particular subject, one that has not received a great deal of attention in the literature.¹

This chapter is not an attempt to offer an in-depth analysis of Kierkegaard’s views on collective worship or on Eastern Orthodox liturgics. It is, rather, an attempt to point

¹ Recent work by Carl S. Hughes on this subject has moved the discussion forward a great deal. Hughes’ work is greatly influenced by Henning Fenger who attempted to connect Kierkegaard’s writings on aesthetics and religion in innovative ways. See Carl S. Hughes, *Kierkegaard and the Staging of Desire: Rhetoric and Performance in a Theology of Eros* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014); Henning Fenger, *Kierkegaard, the Myths and their Origins: Studies in Kierkegaardian Papers and Letters*, trans. G.C. Schoolfield (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

the way forward towards a further comparative analysis between Kierkegaard and the Eastern Orthodox Church. It therefore serves as an epilogue of sorts to the preceding analysis and suggests some ways in which the project can be further developed.

I will begin with a brief overview of Kierkegaard's views on the role of collective worship in the spiritual life, including a look at his views on the sacraments. I will then examine Eastern Orthodox liturgical theology and examine the central role that the liturgy and the sacraments (most importantly, of course, the Eucharist) play in Eastern Orthodox spirituality. I will then conclude with a comparative overview of Kierkegaard and the Eastern Orthodox Church on these matters, as well as providing a few closing statements on the project as a whole.

5.1 – Sacraments and Worship in Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard, especially towards the end of his life, had a great deal of criticism for public worship. But these criticisms were almost always bound up with his (increasingly vehement) attacks on the Danish Lutheran Church. In his later writings Kierkegaard calls it a “great guilt to participate in public worship as it is at present.”² Kierkegaard sees Christ as directly admonishing the kind of “Sunday worship” that has been developed in contemporary Lutheranism: “The worship service you want to hold is hypocrisy and equal to blood-guilt. What the pastor, along with his family, is living on is that you are a hypocrite, or on making you into a hypocrite and keeping you a hypocrite.”³ In his work *The Moment*, Kierkegaard suggests that a state church, where the pastor is paid to deliver sermons *about* Christianity rather than revealing the Christian life

² “*The Moment*” and *Late Writings*, 131.

³ *Ibid.*, 135

in and through his or her inward appropriation of the gospel, is bound to be an exercise in hypocrisy.⁴ “True worship,” Kierkegaard says, “quite simply consists in doing God’s will.”⁵ But the function of the church in its current manifestation (i.e., the 19th century Evangelical Lutheran Church of the State of Denmark) did not provide an opportunity to do God’s will but rather the opportunity to conform oneself completely to societal standards. Kierkegaard is especially scathing in his remarks on how the church has turned participation in the sacraments into bourgeois institutions. This applies especially to baptism, confirmation, and weddings, i.e., those occasions where the Christian life is turned into a “festivity” and a “joke,” a public spectacle celebrating conformity and “pleasant family festivities.”⁶

Yet Kierkegaard often spoke with great reverence of the sacraments when he discussed them outside of the context of institutionalized religion. Kierkegaard viewed the Eucharist as the “original true center in the church.”⁷ He viewed his decision to

⁴ Ibid., 226.

⁵ Ibid, 245.

⁶ Ibid., 243ff. I can imagine that American readers may think that Kierkegaard is being hyperbolic, but anyone who has grown up in any of the Scandinavian countries knows *exactly* what he is talking about. When I was confirmed in the Icelandic Evangelical Lutheran Church (also a state church) it was taken for granted that one was participating in the ceremony primarily to reap the benefits of the family festivities afterwards, with their necessarily accompanying gifts and pastries. Children were (and many still are) pressured by their family and society to be confirmed but anyone who took the religious elements of the proceedings seriously was considered to be more than a little strange. After all, actually believing in God might give the smørrebrød following the ceremony a rather bitter taste. And nobody wants that.

⁷ JP 5, 5089 / I A 60 May 28, 1835. This section of the journals contains one of the very few instances where Kierkegaard mentions contemporary Eastern Orthodoxy, in this case the Greek Orthodox Church. Kierkegaard is commenting on a debate between H.N. Clausen and N.F.S. Grundtvig on whether the bible is sufficient in and of itself as a basis for Protestantism or if tradition plays an essential role in the life of the church. Kierkegaard agrees with Clausen that any literal interpretation of *sola scriptura* is unsustainable, primarily due to the fact that human interpretation of scripture is inevitably varied and complex, even if we grant that scripture itself is divinely inspired. On top of this, Kierkegaard notes, is the fact that most Protestants use one translation or another of scripture, which are often highly ambiguous and problematic. Kierkegaard’s point is that if one were to take *sola scriptura* seriously one should only read scripture in the original Greek, as the Greek Church does. He notes that the Greek Orthodox Church “differs in its creed from the others.” This had caused Grundtvig to declare the Greek Church a “withered branch” but Kierkegaard points out that this would only be true if we “concede a miracle with respect to translation,” which Kierkegaard dismisses by saying that nothing warrants such a position. Interestingly enough,

receive communion again with a great deal of fear and trembling and struggled with notions of whether one could ever be considered “worthy” of receiving the sacrament.⁸ It is only in relation to the sacraments that Kierkegaard ever speaks positively of an “objective” element in Christianity:

We ordinary human beings do not have a direct or spontaneous God-relationship; therefore are not able to express the unconditional, and we always need grace beforehand, because even the most sincere beginning is always imperfect compared to the demand of the ideal—consequently it is like a new sin.

Thus grace in the first place.

But then once more the need for the objective is felt still more deeply. And this is offered in the sacraments, in the word, yet not magically.⁹

Kierkegaard saw the possibility of the objective elements in Christianity, including the sacraments, as being used to diminish inwardness, especially in relation to imitation (*Efterølgelsen*).¹⁰ Kierkegaard, especially towards the end of his life, thought that the sacraments were increasingly being used as an excuse for people to feel comfortable and happy in “the cheapest way possible.”¹¹ Kierkegaard’s criticism of the sacraments is most often in connection with the failure of Christendom to take the *commitment* of sacramental life seriously: “Christendom’s Christianity takes Christianity only as a gift.

Kierkegaard seems to be suggesting that if Protestants were true to their word in wanting to base their faith on the fundamentals of scripture then the creed that they profess should be like the one professed in the Greek Orthodox Church. Even though Kierkegaard does not explicitly refer to the debate, he is undoubtedly referring to the addition of the *filioque* in the Latin creed.

⁸ *JP* 2, 1494 / *X*⁵ A 103.

⁹ *JP* 2, 1493 / *X*⁵ A 101.

¹⁰ *JP* 2, 1905 / *X*⁴ A 366. Kierkegaard in the journals often refers to external elements in Christian worship as “objective” elements. Though somewhat different from his epistemological use of the word, it nonetheless bears obvious relations to the notion of “objective” knowledge, as discussed in chapter 3.

¹¹ *JP* 4, 5047 / *XI*¹ A 556.

That is why it is so busy with the sacraments (superstitiously) and pretends ignorance of any commitment in relation to the sacraments. This defrauds God.”¹²

Yet Kierkegaard also saw the sacraments, when viewed authentically, as essential to the Christian life. In the journals, Kierkegaard quotes Pascal who writes of the paradox of hiddenness and revelation in Christianity, of how God makes himself “more knowable” by becoming “invisible.” The deepest hiddenness, the deepest mystery of God is “in the sacrament.” Kierkegaard sees this as representing the dialectic of Climacus in the *Postscript*: “A revelation, the fact that it is a revelation, is recognized by its opposite, that it is a mystery. God reveals himself—this is known by his hiding himself. Thus there is nothing of the direct.”¹³ The Eucharist, therefore, represents the ultimate manifestation of the paradox.¹⁴

Interestingly enough, Kierkegaard sees the church, the living body of Christ, as being the element that safeguards the sacraments from becoming pure objectivity, i.e., empty ritual. Yet Christendom has destroyed the notion of the church as communion (*Samfund*), as the manifestation of Christ’s love on earth.¹⁵

It is this lack of the *Existentielle* that lies at the root of Kierkegaard’s critique of both collective worship and sacramental life. It is not the mass (or liturgy) itself that is the problem, but rather the disposition of the worshipper towards these things. The categories of “subjective” and “objective” knowing¹⁶ are not meant to categorize particular things but rather certain kinds of epistemological and spiritual orientations. We

¹² *JP* 3, 2919 / XI² A 387.

¹³ *JP* 3, 3110 / X³ A 626.

¹⁴ It is worth mentioning that the sacraments in Eastern Orthodoxy are officially known as “the holy mysteries.” The Orthodox Church does not have the kind of systematic analysis of sacramental theology as one might find in Roman Catholicism, e.g. in the doctrine of transubstantiation.

¹⁵ *JP* 1, 600 / X⁴ A 246.

¹⁶ See chapter 3, 151-61.

can view the liturgy and the sacraments in a purely objective manner, seeing them in terms of “right” or “wrong” belief or ritual, or we can approach them with the passionate inwardness that is necessary for our appropriation of the truth and healing that they may potentially offer.

Throughout this work I have pointed out how Kierkegaard’s philosophy—whether viewed in terms of sin and salvation, epistemology, or personhood—is always driven by two primary considerations: The need for self-emptying (*kenosis*) as a path towards authenticity and healing and the need to overcome the spiritual and existential isolation that has become the default state of the psyche of modern man. Kierkegaard’s writings on liturgy and sacramental life echo these primary considerations.

Vigilius Haufniensis in *The Concept of Irony* associates “the demonic,” the breakdown of the self and the falling into despair, with isolation and individualism: “The demonic is unfreedom that wants to close itself off... The demonic is *inclosing reserve [det Indesluttede] and the unfreely disclosed.*”¹⁷ The demonic, for Haufniensis, represents the inability of the human person to live up to her freedom, to manifest and appropriate it, as well as the breakdown of communion, the central facet of human personhood.

Commenting on this passage, John Panteleimon Manoussakis writes:

In contradistinction to the ecstatic movement of the *prosopon*, the demonic remains withdrawn in this lonely prison made up by the fragments of a mirror that reflect back the selfsame images of itself. Condemned to this monotonous existence, we should not be surprised by Kierkegaard’s apt observation that monologue and soliloquy are the modes of demonic expression and that the discontinuity of the sudden—always the same, without memory or expectation—becomes the form of its manifestation. A last but telling point: the demonic does not “partake of communion” (*communicere*), which means that it does not communicate,

¹⁷ COA, 123.

but also (and it is Kierkegaard himself who invites us to think of this sense) that it does not receive communion.¹⁸

The significance of the sacraments, according to Kierkegaard, is that they bridge the chasm that opens up between the human person and God (and, thereby, the chasm that opens up between human beings). The Eucharist, for Kierkegaard, is another manifestation of the paradox of Christ's incarnation, a way for the believer, who is always far from God (due to sin), to draw near to Christ's love, to stand face-to-face with the Word. In the journals, commenting on the gospel passage on the tax collector and the Pharisee,¹⁹ Kierkegaard writes:

The tax collector stood far off by himself and did not even dare lift up his eye, but said: God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

You, however, are now closer—you are now about to go up to the Communion table, even though you are still far off. But in a sense the Communion table is the place where one is closest to God.

(*In margin*): In the inwardness of the consciousness of his sin (and this inwardness determines the distance) the Christian stands still further away—and yet at the foot of the altar he is the closest to God that it is possible to be. This being far off and near, whereas the Pharisee in his presumptuous forwardness was near—and far off.²⁰

The Eucharist manifests the moment (*Øjeblik*) where we can relate to ourselves in light of eternity. The moment is always connected to the dialectic of hiddenness and unveiling.²¹ Haufniensis writes that “a blink is a designation of time, but mark well, of time in the fateful conflict when it is touched by eternity. What we call the moment, Plato calls *tó exaiphnes* [*the sudden*]. Whatever its etymological explanation, it is related to the

¹⁸ John Panteleimon Manoussakis, *God After Metaphysics: A Theological Aesthetic* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), 26.

¹⁹ Luke 18:9-14.

²⁰ *JP* 4, 3933 / *X*¹ A 428.

²¹ Heidegger's analysis of *aletheia* is undoubtedly indebted to Kierkegaard's writings on the moment.

category of the invisible.”²² Luther, in his first German translation of the Bible, chose the German word *Augenblick* to translate St. Paul’s phrase “in the twinkling of an eye,” a reference to the way the eschaton cannot be understood in terms of chronological time.²³ Kierkegaard’s connection between the *Øjeblik* of the eschaton and the Platonic notion of *exaiphnes*, and his belief that the sacrament of the Eucharist somehow manifests the difference between the two, is an important part of Kierkegaard’s views on liturgy and worship.

Manoussakis notes that the philosophical notion of the Moment is connected to two distinct conceptions of time:

Time does not exhaust temporality. The Greeks knew of two different phenomena of temporality that have come down to us as *chronos* and *Kairos*. *Chronos* is time seen either as sequence or duration—invariably constituting a chronology: every minute passing by is accumulated in those layers of dead time that compile the chronicle of our lives. *Chronos* represents what Heidegger calls ‘the vulgar understanding of time’ or ‘inauthentic present.’ [...] If chronological time is seen in a horizontal way, that is, as sequence and duration, *Kairos* could be represented as vertical and dis-continuous. If *chronos* is measured in seconds, minutes, hours, and years, *Kairos* cannot be measured at all, since it occurs only in the Moment. What is called here ‘the Moment’—that is, as we will see, the *Augenblick* or the *exaiphnes*—is characterized by this dis-continuity through which, according to Heidegger, the world is dis-closed and Dasein is faced with his or her de-cision.²⁴

It is in the *kairon* that human transformation takes place, according to Kierkegaard.

Haufniensis writes that in Plato’s notion of the *exaiphnes* “the moment becomes the category of transition, for Plato shows in the same way that the moment is related to the

²² *COA*, 87-88.

²³ The reference is from 1. Cor. 15:52. See Manoussakis, 65.

²⁴ Manoussakis, 59.

transition of the one to the many, of the many to the one, of likeness to unlikeness, etc.”²⁵

In his journals Kierkegaard speaks of the Eucharist in light of this transformation, where Christ’s love becomes manifest to the human person and “covers the multitude of sins.”²⁶

Kierkegaard, writing on Christ’s appearance to the apostles in Luke 24:31, writes:

The very fact that he became invisible to me is the sign that I recognize him; he is indeed the object of faith, a sign of contradiction, consequently in a certain sense must become invisible when I recognize him. He is the prototype, *must therefore become invisible so that the imitator can be like him.*

At the Communion table he is invisibly present, and yet in verse 30 it truly says that it was when he blessed the bread and broke it, and gave it to them that they recognized him.²⁷

Carl S. Hughes has noted that Kierkegaard’s views on transformation, especially as outlined in his Eucharistic discourses, are easily tied in with his aesthetic appraisal of the liturgy. Writing on Kierkegaard’s Eucharistic discourse on the woman caught in sin, Hughes notes that Kierkegaard connects the story of the woman’s transformation to the services he attended at Vor Frue Kirke in Copenhagen:

Kierkegaard locates his Eucharistic Discourses amid this aesthetic and ritual setting in order to further the process of transformation that he sees in the story of the Sinful Woman and in the practice of the Eucharist itself. At the altar, an outcast woman becomes a welcome guest, and Christians take her place at Christ’s feet. A minister says the words ‘This is my body’ and offers bread and wine as Christ’s body and blood.²⁸

Kierkegaard, though always critical of the passionlessness and apathy of Christendom, which he sometimes connected to sacramental and collective worship,

²⁵ COA, 84.

²⁶ JP 4, 3963 / X² A 50.

²⁷ JP 6, 6495 / X² A 40. Emphasis mine.

²⁸ Hughes, 131.

nonetheless saw the Eucharist (and, indeed, all of the sacraments), as well as liturgical practices, as playing a central role in the existential appropriation of the paradox, i.e., the spiritual life of each and every Christian. Hughes has noted that Kierkegaard, in his emphasis on personal transformation and development in his Eucharistic discourses, offers an alternative vision of salvation than the standard Protestant account of atonement, whereby Christ's sacrifice is not seen as a one-time, metaphysical act but rather a relational reality that each and every individual person can enter into through the rituals of sacrament and liturgy.²⁹ As Hughes notes, this is due to Kierkegaard's view that Christ's salvation is understood in term of the *kairon*, the Moment when past, present, and future all collapse in upon themselves and eternity enters into time. Noting Kierkegaard's language in relation to humankind's salvation through Christ, Hughes writes: "Kierkegaard's use of this language is different from that traditional dogmatics because his motivating concern is not to theorize Christological substitution as a one-time event that affects God, but to promote it as an ongoing process that can transform human beings today."³⁰

5.2 The Ecclesiastical Event and the Healing of Time in the Eastern Orthodox liturgy

The liturgy, according to Eastern Orthodox theology, is a manifestation of the *kairos*. In his study of time in the context of Orthodox theology, Brandon Gallaher writes:

Christ heals our time (*chronos*), and indeed, the time of the invisible creation (*aeon*), by making it His time of opportunity for our salvation in Him (*kairos*). Time, as Christ's time, becomes a means to our perfection

²⁹ Ibid., 150-53.

³⁰ Ibid., 153.

in Him rather than the ultimate expression of our rejection of God's grace. Through Him, in His Body the Church, we come to partake in the mode of being of the invisible creation, creaturely eternity; but this eternity or time of the invisible creation becomes wedded with our sensible time, remade for an embodied being like man, through participating in the everlasting life of God. Time is, therefore, remade and renewed in the Church as the Kingdom of God, and we have a foretaste of this renewal in the liturgy.³¹

Gallaher notes that, according to Orthodox theology, our experience of time (*chronos*) has been corrupted due to the fall. We experience time as meaningless repetition, the ticking of the clock inching us ever closer to oblivion. "We experience fallen time as constant change or ceaseless movement in a cycle of death that can be seen cyclically in the seasons, which move in a circle like a snake swallowing its tail. Winter follows Autumn and Spring follows Winter just as death follows old age and old age is not the end, for out of our death comes the birth of our descendants. Thus all of time is perpetual repetition of death."³²

It is this corruption of *chronos* into meaningless repetition that sends the aesthete into such panic and despair regarding marriage, commitment, and life in general, according to Kierkegaard.³³ Repetition manifests the meaninglessness of life, the ultimate in despair, and one must thereby avoid it at all costs by constantly rotating one's crops, constantly moving on to new adventures and experiences. Yet, as the dialectic of *Either/or* points out, this is an impossible proposition, since the meaninglessness of repetition is only heightened by trying to escape from it. Each new drug and every new

³¹ Brandon F. Gallaher, "Chalice of Eternity: An Orthodox Theology of Time," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2013): 15.

³² *Ibid.*, 17-18.

³³ See esp. "Rotation of the Crops," *Either/or*, 285-300. The *Spidsborger* is in an even worse state than the aesthete with regards to repetition since he enters into it without even realizing the frightening effects of repetition. The aesthete is at least acutely aware of how painful commitment can be and thereby shuns it. It is only in the ethical stage that repetition becomes transformed, a process that can only be fully realized in the religious sphere.

sexual conquest simply becomes a reminder of the inescapable fact that we are all going to die and that there is no escaping the existential realities of anxiety and despair. Judge Vilhelm offers the first glimpse of how repetition might be transfigured through an existential leap whereby our commitments become a way to achieve authenticity and true inwardness. Constantin Constantius continues this discussion by associating repetition with the moment:

Recollection's love, an author [A in *Either/or*] has said, is the only happy love. He is perfectly right in that, of course, provided one recollects that initially it makes a person unhappy. Repetition's love is in truth the only happy love. Like recollection's love, it does not have the restlessness of hope, the uneasy adventurousness of discovery, but neither does it have the sadness of recollection—it has the blissful security of the moment.³⁴

Kierkegaard's writings on repetition and the moment offer an alternative approach to *anamnesis* from the standard Platonic account. Instead of viewing *anamnesis* in terms of overcoming the temporal (*chronos*/the body/earthly existence) through eternity (the realm of the forms) one begins to see it in terms of eternity entering into time, of *kairos* transforming *chronos*. Past, present, and future all collapse in upon themselves in repetition. The moment points backwards in recollection yet also looks towards a future horizon of possibilities. As John Manoussakis points out, this is also the paradigm that lies at the center of Christian eschatology: "Whereas Judaism and Islam have *one* eschatological center, fixed in the future (messianism), Christian eschatology unfolds as this tension between *two* eschatological nodal points: between the *already* of the

³⁴ *Repetition*, 185.

Incarnation and the *not yet* of the Parousia. This tension finds expression the formula of the Fourth Gospel: ‘the hour is coming and is now here’ (John 4:23, 5:25).”³⁵

This connection between eschatology and repetition is a central facet of the Eastern Orthodox liturgy.

At the very beginning of the liturgy, then, the kingdom is proclaimed as a reality and not as an expectation. It is this bold experience of the kingdom that enables the celebrant to say during the *anaphora*, that is, the consecration prayer: ‘Remembering thus this salvific command and everything that was done for us, namely, the cross, the tomb, the resurrection after the third day, the ascension to heavens, the sitting at the right hand of the Father, the second and glorious coming.’ Here logic is violated and history is left behind. How could it be that we remember the ‘second and glorious coming’?

To remember the future, to have already experienced what is still to come, this is something that goes against our protological categories of thinking. The Eucharist is thus more of a *prolepsis* than *anamnesis*, since the events that we recall lie, from the historical perspective, in the future—a future made present in the Eucharist and by the Eucharist.

Kierkegaard’s notion of repetition was directly aimed against Hegel’s view of synthesis and progress, of leaving the past behind (destroying it) as we move on to a new category of thought and being.³⁶ Repetition, on the other hand, encapsulates both past and future in the present. Gallaher notes a similar view of temporality in the structure of the Eastern Orthodox liturgy:

In Christ, as the Lord of Time, is realized the ingathering of all moments in one moment of what we might call an ‘eternal temporality’ [...] that is, the co-inherence or co-presence of each part of time to each other in the present happens in Jesus Christ. Christ is Himself the Lord of *Chronos* or time proper because He is the *Kyrios Kairou*, Lord of the appointed time of our salvation. In Him, our broken mode of temporality, *chronos*, is renewed and sanctified. [...] When He returns to us in His Body and Blood in the liturgy, which is both our ascent to God and his descent to us,

³⁵ Manoussakis, 61.

³⁶ It should be noted that this is Kierkegaard’s reading of Hegel.

we see that our new mode of time, eternal temporality, is something radically new to creation, sensible and spiritual at once, as it has partaken of the very mode of God Himself as everlasting Trinity.³⁷

This notion of Christ as the Lord of Time, as the union of the *kairos* and *chronos*, was developed by Maximus the Confessor (who himself was greatly influenced by Gregory of Nyssa). In *Ad Thalassium* 60 Maximus writes:

Because of Christ—or rather, the whole mystery of Christ—all the ages of time and the beings within those ages have received their beginning and end in Christ. For the union between a limit of the ages and limitlessness, between measure and immeasurability, between finitude and infinity, between Creator and creation, between rest and motion, was conceived before the ages. This union has been manifested in Christ at the end of time, and in itself brings God’s foreknowledge to fulfillment.³⁸

Christ, the eternal God, unites himself with the temporal and human. The liturgy, especially in the celebration of the Eucharist, manifests this union by creating the ritual and sacramental space (*topos*) whereby the believer can enter into the reality of this paradox and appropriate it in an existential manner.

5.3 – Concluding remarks

Though Kierkegaard was highly critical of the state of collective worship and of sacramental participation in the Lutheran church of his time, he nonetheless viewed ritual and sacraments as core elements of Christian spirituality. The essential hiddenness of God becomes his essential un-veiling in

³⁷ Gallaher, 23-24.

³⁸ *Ad Thalassium* 60, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ*, 125. On Maximus’ indebtedness to Nyssa, see Paul M. Blowers, “Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Concept of ‘Perpetual Progress,’” *Vigilae Christianae* 46, no. 2 (1992): 151-171.

the Eucharist. Repetition, the continual progression of the human person towards deeper commitment and authenticity, manifests the union of *chronos* and *kairos*, the “blink of an eye” where eternity enters into time and the human being, as the synthesis of the poles of existence, is able to orient herself towards her eternal *telos*. As I have argued, many of these elements form core components of Eastern Orthodox liturgics. The liturgy represents the passageway into a new way of being and a new way of experiencing time where the determinism of fallen *chronos* is overcome and life takes on its inherent beauty and meaning in the *kairos* of the resurrection.

Throughout this work I have strived to show that Kierkegaard offers a striking alternative to many fundamental doctrines in the Western Christian tradition, perhaps especially in relation to how we view human salvation. Kierkegaard always strives to avoid legalistic and juridical language, choosing instead to view sin and salvation in terms of existential development. This development is always understood relationally, primarily as the relation between God and man but always also in terms of how human beings relate to one another. Kierkegaard was, first and foremost, the poet and philosopher of love. Even though his writings delve deep into the abyss of human despair, fear, and trembling, his brilliance lies in illuminating the rays of light that break through the darkness, the hope of resurrection and healing in and through the brokenness of the human condition.

Western Christians have, for the past century and a half, gained immeasurable insight and spiritual solace (as well as challenge) from

Kierkegaard's writings. Roman Catholics and Protestants alike have wrestled with his works and thoughts and benefitted enormously from this encounter. The Eastern Orthodox engagement with Kierkegaard has been extremely limited up to this point, but it is my sincere belief that both scholars of Kierkegaard as well as Eastern Orthodox Christians can gain immense insight into the Christian life by engaging in dialogue with each other.

As a final note, I would like to say that the most surprising thing about this project was the way that Kierkegaard managed to highlight for me the most beautiful aspects of my own tradition. Like all practitioners of a religious tradition, I have moments of extreme doubt and despair where only the most superficial and fundamentalistic aspects of that tradition come to the fore. Orthodoxy, much like Protestantism and Roman Catholicism (and, indeed, all religions), is easily corrupted in its practice, devolving as it can into religiosity and obsession with objective elements of ritual and belief. Yet all of these traditions contain treasures of beauty and truth that have echoed through the ages to us since the time Christ walked the earth with his disciples. I owe Kierkegaard a great deal of thanks for allowing me to rediscover these treasures and for challenging me, and all of us, to consider what it means to live a life of authenticity and selfless love.

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