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The Existential Compromise in the History of the Philosophy of Death

Adam Buben

University of South Florida, reubenbuben@yahoo.com

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The Existential Compromise in the History of the Philosophy of Death

by

Adam J. Buben

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Philosophy
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Charles Guignon, Ph.D.
Roger Ariew, Ph.D.
Andrew Burgess, Ph.D.
Thomas Williams, Ph.D.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation in loving recollection to Hank, Kay, Lloyd, Pete, and Wendell.

I would also like to mention the rest of my family—largely composed on all sides of professional educators—whose emphasis on education has influenced me greatly.

Although my parents (all four of them) may have been perplexed at times by my extended philosophical pursuits (and, in my mother's case, disappointed that I gave up on paleontology), they have always been supportive of my adventures. I must also make a special point of thanking my grandmothers, Inez and Emily, whose undeserved generosity and support have contributed greatly to my achievements.

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Abstract

I begin by offering an account of two key strains in the history of philosophical dealings with death. Both strains initially seek to diminish fear of death by appealing to the idea that death is simply the separation of the soul from the body. According to the Platonic strain, death should not be feared since the soul will have a prolonged existence free from the bodily prison after death. With several dramatic modifications, this is the strain that is taken up by much of the mainstream Christian tradition. According to the Epicurean strain, death should not be feared since the tiny particles that make up the soul leave the body and are dispersed at the moment of death, leaving behind no subject to experience any evil that might be associated with death. Although informed by millennia of further scientific discovery, this is the strain picked up on by contemporary atheistic, technologically advanced mankind.

My primary goal is to demonstrate that philosophy has an often-overlooked alternative to viewing death in terms of this ancient dichotomy. This is the alternative championed by Søren Kierkegaard and Martin Heidegger. Although both thinkers arise from the Christian tradition, they clearly react to Epicurean insights about death in their work, thereby prescribing a peculiar way of living with death that the Christian tradition seems to have forgotten about.

Despite the association of Kierkegaard and Heidegger, there is a fundamental difference between them on the subject of death. In *Being and Time* Heidegger seems to

rely on the phenomenology of death that Kierkegaard provides in texts such as “At a Graveside.” It is interesting to notice, however, that this discourse, especially when seen in the light of Kierkegaard’s more obviously religious works, might only be compelling to the aspiring Christian. If so, then perhaps there is a tension in both Heidegger’s “methodologically atheistic” appropriation of Kierkegaard’s ideas about death, and Heidegger’s attempt to make these ideas compelling to the aspiring human. My secondary goal is to determine whether Heidegger takes the “existential philosophy of death” too far when he incorporates it into his early ontological project.

Preface

In order to circumvent certain specific concerns that might distract from my general account of death in the history of philosophy, I find it necessary to begin with a brief statement of my methodology. While aspects of this methodology will be reiterated throughout the dissertation, there are two issues in particular that should probably be laid out in explicit detail up front. The first is the selection of the thinkers and texts that will find a prominent place in my account. There is of course no shortage of thinkers in the history of philosophy who find it worthwhile to discuss the topic of death, and it would surely be impossible to say something about each of them in this dissertation. It might not even be an easy matter to identify each of them if the proverbial net was cast widely enough. I have therefore been forced to employ a series of criteria in order to help narrow my scope.

In many cases, the selection requires little deliberation. Plato, for example, is (1) an important figure in the mainstream canon of western philosophy, (2) well known for his views on death, (3) the author of key works on this topic that are extant and widely read, and (4) hugely influential on the death-views of those who come after him. In other cases that might not be so clear-cut, it is probably worth making an exception to these basic criteria. The *New Testament* writings, for example, might meet the latter three criteria, but one could argue that they are hardly philosophical in nature. Side-stepping this thorny issue, it is clear that these religious writings cannot be excluded from the story

because they are such an important part of the background views on death of some of my central thinkers, not the least of which are Kierkegaard and Heidegger (my primary subjects). On the other hand, it might be necessary to rule out certain authors or texts whose views, one could argue, meet the aforementioned criteria, but are adequately expressed by other thinkers I deem more important for the sake of my narrative. Consider the views on death of numerous Christian or early modern thinkers that are similar enough to those of figures who play more central roles in the development of Kierkegaard's or Heidegger's ideas; such thinkers can be left out for the sake of maintaining a project of manageable size.

The second issue of methodology deals with my conceptual organization of treatments of death in the history of philosophy. The two key strains, and the existential compromise between them, that I describe are largely based on positions with respect to the following: (a) post-mortem continuation of particular subjective experience, (b) the importance of death in daily life, and (c) the fear of death. For the most part, the thinkers who accept (a), accept (b) as well; and thinkers who reject (a), reject (b) as well. The former group I call "the Platonic strain" and the latter, "the Epicurean," and they both seem to reject (c) in one way or another or at least argue as to why it might not be necessary. These correlations are far from fixed, however, and I do not mean to suggest that there are no exceptions; but after a thorough encounter with the philosophy of death landscape, my general dichotomous understanding seems to be the rule. This observation finds further confirmation in the fact that some of the exceptional cases—for example, certain contemporary analytic thinkers who reject (a) and (b), but accept (c)—are clearly working within one of the two main frameworks, even as they diverge from it somewhat.

While there simply is not enough space to consider thoroughly some of the more rare and peculiar cases (e.g. Leibniz seems to accept (a) while rejecting (b) and (c)), my project is mostly concerned with the sort of exception to the rule represented by Kierkegaard and Heidegger. These two “existential” thinkers reject or at least bracket (a) for the sake of argument, and accept (b) and even (c) in some sense.

Although I will argue on behalf of my perspective, I would never presume to suggest that my answers are the only viable ones when it comes to questions about who matters in the history of philosophy’s dealings with death, how this history ought to be characterized, or which side of this history each thinker in it belongs to. In very complicated cases, such as that of the Stoics, it may be far from settled, for instance, which strain best represents their views on death. Faced with a certain amount of ambiguity, I find it helpful to quote another preface that I am particularly fond of:

my method in this book is to trace the historical development ... given that this is intended to be a relatively short book, the story must be rather coarse and schematic, making bald assertions about historical outlooks with no appreciation of the complexities of the historical record. I hope that the story is roughly on target even if it is not always accurate in its details.¹

Just to be clear, neither I, nor the author of this passage, are interested in making false claims. I also understand that I am writing a dissertation and not a book that (while perhaps scholarly to some degree) is largely intended for a broader audience. I realize that a dissertation brings with it a high level of scholarly responsibility, and I want to meet this responsibility. Having said all of this, my historical account must of necessity be somewhat schematic and rely on generalities and connections that are certainly open to question. I will attempt to acknowledge when my account is not exactly beyond

¹ Charles Guignon, *On Being Authentic* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. xiii.

reproach, but my goal is to provide good reason for buying into my general claims. In the end, I think I provide an intriguing way of organizing philosophical views on death, even if not everyone will agree as to all of the specifics.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Death is one of those few topics that attract the attention of just about every significant thinker in the history of philosophy. This attention has resulted in diverse and complex views on death and what comes after. For example, while some argue in favor of metempsychosis, others claim that death is the utter annihilation of an individual. In conjunction with these larger metaphysical issues, the philosophy of death has also come to deal with various related practical, ethical, and linguistic problems associated with death, dying, and the dead. In recent years, numerous attempts have been made to identify and catalog the responses to all of these problems. But while I find these attempts interesting, they are almost always incomplete, or at least too superficial on certain issues, which might just be unavoidable given the vast array of material that has accumulated up to the present.² Thus, even though I will touch on several notable attitudes toward death, I will not try to provide such a comprehensive account. My goal here is to take the diversity found in these sorts of catalogs, boil it down to what I believe are two key strains in the history of philosophical dealings with death, the Platonic and the Epicurean, and then draw attention to a more recent and often neglected alternative.

² A few examples of these attempts at something like comprehensive accounts of the philosophy of death are: Vincent Barry, *Philosophical Thinking about Death and Dying* (Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2007); Jacques Choron, *Death and Western Thought* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963); Geoffrey Scarre, *Death* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007). While the others are quite helpful, I cannot recommend Barry's book. Not only does it attempt to do far too much in too few pages, but it is also woefully inaccurate in its description of Heidegger on death.

Historically speaking, both of these strains originally seek to diminish the fear of death by appealing to the idea that death is simply the separation of the soul from the body. According to the Platonic strain, as first elaborated in Plato's *Phaedo*, death should not be feared since the soul will have a prolonged existence free from the bodily prison after death. With several dramatic modifications under the influence of early figures in both strains, this is the option that is taken up by much of the mainstream Christian tradition. Although it is difficult to pin this tradition down given its various manifestations and sects, it will be necessary to describe the fairly consistent significance of death at a few key junctures during the long period of time when the history of Western philosophy was inextricably intertwined with that of Christianity.

According to the Epicurean strain, as first developed in Epicurus' "Letter to Menoeceus," death should not be feared since the tiny particles that make up the soul evacuate the body and are dispersed at the moment of death, leaving behind no subject to experience any evil that might be associated with death. Although informed by millennia of further scientific discovery that has cast doubt on the existence of souls, this is the strain picked up on by an atheistic, technologically advanced mankind. It is thus also the strain that is of most interest to philosophy once it begins to reassert its independence from Christianity during the period from the moderns to contemporary Anglo-American philosophers.³ Perhaps the essential difference between these two strains is that while the

³ One such philosopher, Jeffrie G. Murphy, seems to agree with my general dichotomy, albeit without the association of Plato and Christianity, when he states "such an idea [that fearing death is irrational] is found in the Stoics and the Epicureans among others and is, in many respects, interestingly different from the way of thinking about death that Christianity introduced into our civilization" ("Rationality and the Fear of Death," in *The Metaphysics of Death*, edited by John M. Fischer (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 44).

one seeks to deal with the fear of death by transforming it into something new, e.g. hope for the future; the other seeks to eliminate this fear plain and simple.

After providing an account of the Platonic and Epicurean strains in the philosophy of death, it will be possible to describe the often-overlooked alternative to viewing death in terms of this ancient dichotomy. This is the alternative championed by the likes of Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), the supposed father of existentialism, and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), whose work on death tends to overshadow Kierkegaard's despite the undeniable influence exerted on him by the nineteenth century Dane. Although both of these thinkers arise from the Christian tradition,⁴ I intend to show how they react to Epicurean insights about death in their work, thereby prescribing a peculiar way of living with death that is in some sense a compromise between the Platonic and the Epicurean strains. In describing this way of living with death, I will be able to offer criticisms of both the position of the Christian tradition and that of the increasingly atheistic philosophy of modernity, including contemporary analytic approaches to death.

In the course of dealing with Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and their peculiar appropriation of the philosophy of death, several other issues, which have received either too little or at least unsatisfactory attention in the surrounding literature, will have to be addressed. For example, within the realm of Kierkegaard studies there has been little

⁴ Kierkegaard was for most of his life a practicing Lutheran, who considered retiring to the life of a country pastor. See for example, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers* (JP), vols. 1-7, translated and edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1967-78), v. 5, p. 310/SKS 18, p. 278; v. 6, p. 124/SKS 21, p. 289 (it has become the standard practice in Kierkegaard studies to include reference to the new Danish fourth edition of Kierkegaard's complete works in addition to the English edition reference: *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, vols. 1-28, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn et al. (Copenhagen: Gads, 1997-present)). Heidegger spent his early education in training for the Catholic priesthood. For excellent discussion of Heidegger's religious background and theological interests, see John D. Caputo, "Heidegger and Theology" in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, 2nd ed., edited by Charles B. Guignon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 326-44; and Benjamin D. Crowe, *Heidegger's Religious Origins*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006).

attempt to synthesize Kierkegaard's discussion of the "earnest thought of death" in a relatively early discourse with his ever-present notions of dying to immediacy, dying to the world, and dying to the self. Even in the case of Julia Watkin's work, which certainly suggests some connection between Kierkegaard's many discussions of death, there is no clear attempt at the specific sort of thoroughgoing integration that I am after. In the case of Heidegger, his famous chapter on death in *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*) remains one of the most obscure and frustrating aspects of his thought, despite a great deal of ink spilt trying to grasp its meaning. I believe that a major reason for the difficulty in understanding this chapter is that Heidegger is not always perfectly clear about whose thought he is borrowing from. Thus, I intend to bring clarity to some of the most opaque passages with a thorough reading of the chapter through Kierkegaardian (and perhaps briefly some other) lenses. Although there is some discussion of Heidegger's dependence on Kierkegaardian ideas about death in the work of Hubert Dreyfus, Charles Guignon, Michael Theunissen, and John van Buren, there is surely more to be done, especially when there is such a paucity of literature that ties both Kierkegaard's thinking about death and his dying to the world together when considering his impact on Heidegger.

Despite my interest in associating Kierkegaard and Heidegger by portraying them both as engaged in a project that one might call the "existential philosophy of death,"⁵ I intend to push my investigation one step further in order to demonstrate a fundamental difference between these two on the subject of death. In the relevant chapter of *Being and Time* Heidegger seems to rely specifically on the phenomenology of death that

⁵ I do not mean to use the term "existential" in Heidegger's more technical understanding of this term, as he seems to believe that this usage might exclude the work of Kierkegaard. I simply mean to suggest that these two thinkers allow death to penetrate and interact with one's existence in a way that the Platonic and Epicurean strains do not.

Kierkegaard provides in writings such as “At a Graveside” (*Ved en Grav*).⁶ What is interesting to notice, however, is that these writings, especially when taken in conjunction with some of Kierkegaard’s more explicitly religious works (e.g. *Works of Love* and *For Self-Examination*), might only be completely compelling to the aspiring Christian. If this is so, then one might start to wonder if there is a tension in either Heidegger’s “methodologically” atheistic appropriation of Kierkegaard’s ideas about death, or Heidegger’s attempt to make these ideas compelling to the aspiring human. In the course of describing this possible tension, it is my ultimate goal to determine whether Heidegger takes the existential philosophy of death too far when he attempts to incorporate it into his early ontological project. To this end, it will be helpful to include a brief glimpse into the legacy of the existential philosophy of death.

⁶ Michael Theunissen, “The Upbuilding in the Thought of Death: Traditional Elements, Innovative Ideas, and Unexhausted Possibilities in Kierkegaard’s ‘At a Graveside,’” translated by George Pattison, in *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vols. 9 and 10, edited by Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2006), pp. 327-9.

Chapter 2: Bilateral Development of the Philosophy of Death

Despite the fact that written accounts of death in both Western and Eastern philosophical traditions surely predate Plato (c. 428-348 BCE),⁷ it is in his *Apology* that one can find the West's first (extant) philosophical, detailed, and explicit disjunction between the basic post-mortem possibilities. Either one "lives" on in some sense, or one ceases to exist in any way. It is in this text depicting the trial and defense of Socrates (c. 470-399 BCE) that Plato's famous character⁸ explains to the assembled Athenians why he is not afraid to die. First of all, such fear would be inconsistent with Socratic "wisdom," which basically asserts that one ought not to act as though one knows what one does not know. Since no one knows whether or not death is a good thing or a bad thing, there is hardly knowledge enough to determine whether or not one ought to fear death. Socrates states, "For no one knows whether death may not be the greatest good that can happen to man. But men fear it as if they knew quite well that it was the greatest of evils. And what is this but that shameful ignorance of thinking that we know what we do not know?"⁹ Even

⁷ For some helpful descriptions of how death was treated by philosophers prior to Plato, see Choron, pp. 31-41; and Scott Kramer and Kuang-Ming Wu, *Thinking Through Death*, vol. 1 (Malabar, FL: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1988), pp. 5-8, 53-60. Several of these early philosophical views on death will be addressed briefly in connection with more recent ideas in this chapter.

⁸ All references to Socrates will refer to the character in Plato's works unless specifically stated otherwise. I will try not to assume, since I have little reason to do so, that the historical Socrates is accurately represented in Plato's dialogues. For support in these ideas, see Harold Tarrant, "Where Plato Speaks" in *Who Speaks for Plato?: Studies in Platonic Anonymity*, edited by Gerald A. Press (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), pp. 67-80; and Joanne Waugh, "Socrates and the Character of Platonic Dialogue" in *Who Speaks for Plato?: Studies in Platonic Anonymity*, edited by Gerald A. Press (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), pp. 39-52.

⁹ Plato, *Apology*, in *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito*, translated by F. J. Church (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1955), 29b.

though Socrates claims not to know what happens in death, this is not his final word in the dialogue on the appropriateness of fearing death.

Without knowing the actual nature of death, by the end of the dialogue Socrates is perfectly willing to speculate on what death could possibly mean for the existing individual. He narrows these possibilities down to two very general post-mortem situations, both good, he thinks, as he states, “either the dead man wholly ceases to be and loses all consciousness or, as we are told, it is a change and a migration of the soul to another place” (40c). The former situation he compares to a pleasant dreamless sleep, and the latter situation he depicts as a prolonged, but very life-like situation in which he will have access to the deceased heroes of old (41a). Either way, given the perceived pleasantness of both situations, Socrates sees no reason to fear death if his account is accurate. Of course, one might point out the many problems with this account, such as the possibility that a prolonged existence might be utterly different (especially if one gives up metaphysical beliefs that make room for souls) than he expects, and maybe even quite unpleasant. If one momentarily ignores these sorts of details, however, and simply considers the distinction Socrates draws in itself, one will notice that he is at least right in that these two possible outcomes of death seem to be exhaustive. After all, what other possible outcomes could there be besides non-existence and continued existence?

Ultimately, it seems that Plato sets aside the possibility of non-existence in order to consider the other alternative in detail. It is of course very difficult to pin down Plato’s own final views on this matter, but given the regularity with which the notion of the continued existence of the soul comes up in Plato’s dialogues it seems at least fair to attribute to him a great interest in this particular alternative. On the other hand, it is

Epicurus (341-270 BCE) who, within decades of Plato's death, becomes the champion of the opposite notion of death as the end of (subjective) existence. In an effort to provide a thorough account of the historical development of the philosophy of death, this chapter will include two major parts: one detailing the Platonic strain, and another, which details the Epicurean strain. In the course of describing the history of these two strains, it will of course be necessary to discuss briefly how various significant thinkers in the history of philosophy seem to have appropriated these alternatives along the way.

The Platonic Strain: Death in and after the *Phaedo*

Plato. After “unsuccessfully” defending himself¹⁰ against the charges brought against him, Plato's Socrates elaborates on the notion of death as a transition into another form of existence in the *Phaedo*. Although Socrates continues to discuss the possibility of death as the way to non-existence in this re-telling of the final prison dialogue, he seems far less open to it than he is in the *Apology*.¹¹ Leaning towards the idea of continued existence, the *Phaedo* is largely focused around the famous claim that “the one aim of those who practice philosophy in the proper manner is to practice for dying and death” (64a). This claim is as perplexing to the participants in the conversation as it might be to

¹⁰ Given the tone with which Socrates addresses the assembly in the *Apology*, it seems fair to say that Socrates has no intention of trying to get himself off the hook. In this sense, Socrates' defense is arguably a tremendous success.

¹¹ The *Phaedo* is actually Plato's writing about the character Phaedo's recounting of Socrates' final words and deeds. It is surely peculiar that Plato decided to complicate this dialogue with an extra layer of hearsay, but what makes this dialogue even more perplexing is the fact that both those characters present in the prison and those present during Phaedo's re-telling are Pythagoreans. Given the Pythagorean belief in the transmigration of souls, it might be that *Phaedo*-Socrates' departure from the non-committal attitude of *Apology*-Socrates on the issue of death has something to do with the participants in the different conversations (Plato, *Phaedo*, in *Five Dialogues*, 2nd ed., translated by G. M. A. Grube and edited by John M. Cooper (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002), pp. 93-4).

modern readers. After all, what could it mean to connect philosophy and death so intimately?

This connection, it turns out, is deeply rooted in what has come to be known as “Platonic metaphysics.” According to this metaphysics, as described in the *Phaedo*, a human is made up of both body and soul, and prior to birth (after death too, as Socrates shall argue) the soul exists apart from the body in a pure state, bordering on the divine, in which it has access to a more perfect knowledge of reality than is possible while embodied in the world. Thus, if Socrates can establish that the soul will return to such a state after death, when it is again separated from the body, then it will be reasonable to view death as great gain, rather than as great loss (which is the common sentiment Socrates rebuts in the *Apology*).¹² In a departure, then, from his non-committal attitude in the *Apology* and in opposition to future Epicurean doctrines, Socrates offers several arguments in the *Phaedo* in support of a specific sort of post-mortem existence of the soul. Although none of these arguments seem particularly compelling (and Socrates himself may come to no firm conclusion),¹³ what is important to notice is the desirability of release from the body for the sake of knowledge (64c-70d).

This desirability not only explains why philosophers, as lovers of knowledge or wisdom, should “fear death least of all men” (67e), but it also explains the troubling notion of philosophy as practice for death. Socrates points out that it is their very love of wisdom that causes philosophers to cultivate the qualities of the soul at the expense of the

¹² Nonetheless, suicide is not a viable way to attain post-mortem goods more quickly according to the *Phaedo*, since Socrates argues that as possessions of the gods, humans have no right to destroy themselves unless they do so with the permission of their owners (61e-62d).

¹³ One aspect of his argumentation that I find interesting is the binary opposition of life to death (71c-72a). Clearly life must come from a lack of life, but he calls this lack death. Why not call it non-existence, or in this case, “non-life existence?” Given Socrates’ discussion, it seems somewhat more accurate to define death as that perhaps unidentifiable moment of transition between living and another period of non-existence or non-life existence.

worldly interests of their bodies. But it is a similar sort of casting off of bodily interests in exchange for a higher existence of more perfect knowledge that takes place when one's life ends. There is a sense then, albeit a limited and impermanent one, in which the practice of philosophy attempts to separate the soul from the body and imitate the Socratic experience of being dead. For this reason, Socrates claims that philosophy is a sort of dying and "true philosophers are nearly dead" (64b). To characterize the Platonic strain of the philosophy of death thus far: the highest form of life approximates, as closely as possible, being dead, which is really a prolonged and perfected form of existence.

Early Christian Appropriation. A few hundred years after the establishment of the numerous schools of philosophy in Greece, the Apostle Paul undertook several journeys in the first century CE around the Greco-Roman world of the Mediterranean in order to preach the message of Jesus Christ. Although he founded churches in several cities of significance to the history of philosophy, including one in relatively close proximity to Athens (at Corinth), the *New Testament* reports that his encounters with philosophers were occasionally somewhat hostile.¹⁴ Nonetheless, it would seem that the lessons of Greek thought (which might include, perhaps somewhat indirectly, Platonic lessons) were not lost on the well-educated Paul.¹⁵ On the specific issue of death, Paul seems to have

¹⁴ In fact, the book of *Acts* details Paul's time in Athens, where he was not able to found a church, and suggests that his less than stellar results in Plato's hometown are due in part to disagreements with "a group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers" (*Concordia Self-Study Bible*, edited by Robert G. Hoerber (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), *Acts* 17:18).

¹⁵ For some examples of Paul's knowledge of Greek thought, see *Acts* 17:28, *1 Corinthians* 15:33, and *Titus* 1:12. In passages like these Paul is actually attempting to use the words of Greek poets to help get his Christian message across. Perhaps he also found it easier to explain Christian doctrines about death given the already established related ideas of Platonic philosophers. One possible example, which is admittedly very speculative, is that Christ's martyrdom might strike a certain chord with those familiar with the story of Socrates.

found a great ally (probably unknowingly) in the philosophy of Plato.¹⁶ Just as Socrates finds a way of approximating death in philosophy, Paul sees faith in Christ as producing a living death in the believer. The dying of the pre-Christian self and the subsequent rebirth as a follower of Christ, which this death makes possible, is a recurring theme throughout his *New Testament* letters. But one need not rely entirely on Paul in order to get the impression that Christianity and life as we ordinarily know it are not destined for peaceful coexistence. According to the gospels, Jesus himself often warns his disciples that a life of worldly concerns is not conducive to the proper care of the soul (e.g. *Matthew* 16:24-6; *Luke* 14:26). Because a worldly life is inhospitable to a Christian soul, Paul points out that such a life must end before Christianity can take root (e.g. *2 Corinthians* 4:10-2, 5:14-9; *Galatians* 2:20). But how exactly is one to understand death as the precondition for Christian life? Fortunately for the aspiring Christian, Christ's own life provides a model for finding life in death.

Just as Christ is said to have died on the cross to overcome the sin of the world, but later rose from the dead, one who would be a follower of Christ must also die to the sin of the world in order to live free from its tyranny (*1 Peter* 2:24). There are two senses in which this analogy might hold true for the Christian. First, there is a sense in which one must physically die in order to be reborn in a heavenly afterlife, free from the sinful world. Second, there is a sense in which one must figuratively die to the sinful desires and preoccupations that come from being in the world, in order to become ready for

¹⁶ I certainly do not mean to leave out the obvious "*Old Testament*," or Hebrew, foundations of Paul's teachings, particularly as they shape his views on death. For a brief, but helpful, description of the views of the *Tanakh* on death, see Choron, pp. 81-3. For an excellent discussion of the Christian merging of Hebrew and Greek thought on the issue of death see Simon D. Podmore, "'To die and yet not die': Kierkegaard's Theophany of Death," in *Kierkegaard and Death*, edited by Patrick Stokes and Adam Buben (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, forthcoming 2011).

Christ-like living. *Romans* 6:6-8 states, “for we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with ... if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.” While this passage might support both senses, each of which is quite similar to particular issues presented in the *Phaedo* (setting aside obvious differences concerning the nature of the afterlife), it is the latter, figurative sense of dying to the world that will play an important role in Kierkegaard and Heidegger’s existential refutation of the Epicurean position. But these two are not among the first to develop the figurative sense of Christian dying to the world, nor do they derive their respective understandings of this dying completely from the *Bible*. In order to see how dying to the world passes down to them, it will be necessary to trace a line through a few of the high points of Christian thought after Paul.

From Neo-Platonism to Medieval Christianity. Even though it is easy enough to point out striking similarities between *New Testament* writings and those of Plato, there is less need for speculation when it comes to connecting Platonism with the Christian teachings of Augustine (354-430).¹⁷ In his *Confessions*, Augustine details the circumstances of his conversion to Christianity, including the influence of Neo-Platonism on his thought during the period leading up to this conversion.¹⁸ Like the original Platonists, this more recent incarnation holds that the philosopher is to be prepared and long for a time when the more perfect soul will be unleashed from its corrupt bodily and worldly shackles.

¹⁷ On the issue of the relationship between Platonism (specifically “Middle Platonism”) and Christianity after the *New Testament*, second and third century thinkers such as Justin Martyr, Clement (and Origen) of Alexandria, and Tertullian are key precursors to Augustine. In setting the stage for Kierkegaard’s use of Socrates, Karen L. Carr provides a helpful historical orientation concerning the varying proximity of Platonism (and rationalism more generally) relative to Christianity (“After Paganism: Kierkegaard, Socrates and the Christian Tradition,” in *Kierkegaard After MacIntyre*, edited by John J. Davenport and Anthony Rudd (Peru, IL: Open Court Publishing Co., 2001), esp. pp. 177-8).

¹⁸ Augustine, *The Confessions*, edited and translated by Philip Burton (New York: Everyman’s Library, 2001), pp. 146-57. He also includes a highly influential chapter on the nature of time.

Plotinus (205-270), perhaps the greatest of the Neo-Platonists in the century prior to Augustine, recounts the ancient virtues of the philosopher and states, “Courage is but being fearless of the death which is but the parting of the Soul from the body, an event which no one can dread whose delight is to be his unmingled self. And Magnanimity is but disregard for the lure of things here.”¹⁹ Echoing both this very Platonic sentiment of disenchantment with the bodily world and Jesus’ own words in *Luke* 14, Augustine tells his interlocutor, in *On Free Choice of the Will*, that as Christians, “we must wholeheartedly desire and love [Godly] things and place no value on what is earthly and human.”²⁰ Pushing this eschewal of all things worldly even farther, Augustine’s most significant appropriation of Platonic thought as it relates to Christian dying to the world can be found in his doctrine concerning original sin.

Plotinus speaks in great detail of the situation of a soul, which is naturally pure and good, once it becomes “sunk in manifold death” as the result of a “fall” into the life of worldly lusts and material pleasures. Given its corrupt and tainted, or as Plotinus puts it, “ugly,” state, a soul in this condition is no longer capable of understanding the beautiful reality of things (pp. 60-1). It is only by turning away, in a movement reminiscent of Plato’s famous image of the cave, from such a degraded life of corporeal passion towards a more divine existence in the realm of the intellect, that such a soul can be purified and return to its prior perfect state (pp. 62-4). This Neo-Platonic account of the fall and rise of the soul runs parallel in several significant ways to Augustine’s understanding of original sin. Due to the fall from the natural state of perfection in the

¹⁹ Plotinus, *The Enneads*, fourth edition, translated by Stephen MacKenna, revised by B. S. Page (London: Faber and Faber, 1956), p. 61.

²⁰ Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, translated by Thomas Williams (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 1993), p. 33.

Genesis story, the descendants of Adam, i.e. all of humankind, are doomed to take on a new nature and live the life of the sinful, lustful flesh. Rather than experiencing everlasting goodness and wisdom, humans must face ignorance, hardship, and death—both physical and spiritual (Augustine, *On Free Choice* pp. 106-8).²¹ Fortunately, just as Plotinus identifies a way out of such a corrupted state, Augustine also claims that redemption comes by way of giving up, or paradoxically dying to, the spiritually dead way of life to which humans have become accustomed. But is Augustine’s understanding of this shedding of worldliness exactly what Plotinus has in mind?

Augustine is surely on board with the Neo-Platonic concerns about material pleasure and corporeal passions, and he is also in agreement about turning towards something higher and divine in order to avoid such worldly snares. But it is at the point in Augustine’s account where he discusses what is involved in this turning that one can find the major Christian innovation in the Platonic strain of the philosophy of death. While Plotinus believes that the road to redemption is an intellectual one taken by particular souls, Augustine claims that the human capacity for such a self-motivated intellectual transformation has been irreparably damaged by the fall—humans are “born in the blindness of ignorance” (*On Free Choice*, p. 107).²² In other words, there can be no

²¹ In his *City of God Against the Pagans*, Augustine has a great deal to say both about death as a harm in general, and about death as punishment. Despite some agreement with Platonic doctrines, on the issue of death as a punishment he actually argues against Plato that death is indeed a punishment arising from original sin, a concept foreign to Platonism. He even speaks in greater detail about the two different senses of death, one of the soul (separation of the soul from God) and one of the body (separation of the soul from the body). See Augustine, *City of God Against the Pagans*, edited and translated by R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 541-50, 557-9.

²² Augustine also argues against the Platonists, in another interesting innovation of Christianity, that a resurrection and redemption of the body is possible (*City of God*, pp. 559-63). Of course, I do not mean to suggest that Augustine is the originator of this key Christian doctrine (see John Anthony McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology* (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), pp. 292-5). While this is surely a crucial difference between Christians and Platonists, the details of its development need not be described here. For my purposes, it is enough to recognize that Christians and

pulling oneself up by one's own bootstraps when one's legs are shattered.²³ Given this desperate situation, Christianity in general, and Augustine specifically, must posit another capacity if redemption is to be possible. They believe that God "showed them the path of faith in the blindness of forgetfulness" (*On Free Choice*, p. 110). For the Christian, reason, or intellect, is just one more aspect of the corrupt, blinded, human condition that one must in some sense die to in order to regain the perfect human nature that God originally created. Paul himself actually points out that, to the so-called "reasonable" world of corrupt humanity, Christianity can only appear offensive or foolish, and so, a new way of seeing is necessary (*1 Corinthians* 1:23). Humbling oneself, admitting the insufficiency of one's intellectual capacities, and faithfully appealing to God's grace for help, are the only recourses for finding life in death (*City of God*, pp. 541-6, 550-4).²⁴

The period of Christian thought after Augustine, the medieval period, is a long and complicated one that I cannot begin to do justice to here, given that my ultimate goals must soon take me quite a bit farther abroad historically.²⁵ Nonetheless, it will be

Platonists alike (as opposed to thinkers in the Epicurean strain) argue for some form or another of post-mortem continuation of particular subjective experience.

²³ For a very clear and concise description of this sort of position, see Carr, pp. 184-5.

²⁴ To summarize, the paradoxical situation is this: humans have left a situation of life without death and entered into one in which they must live with the constant reality of death. In order to overcome this present situation, a human must give up, or "die to," this dead way of life. In other words, a Christian must die to death. In some sense a Christian must pass from a corrupt state of living death (biologically alive for now and actively engaged in human affairs, but spiritually decaying) to a purified state of living death (biologically alive for now, spiritually thriving, but detached from ordinary human life).

²⁵ One prominent movement from this period, that was particularly popular during the Early Middle Ages (but whose popularity seems to have waned somewhat during the later Middle Ages with the rise of mendicant orders), is monasticism. This movement seems worth mentioning briefly given that it is basically a mechanism intended to facilitate dying to worldliness. Despite its apparently powerful expression of this sort of dying, many of the Christian thinkers that I am about to discuss reject it. Besides the fact that these thinkers can find no biblical precedent for precisely this sort of behavior, they seem to agree that, regardless of its intentions, monasticism does not really lead to proper dying to the world. Luther, for instance, points out that the monastery is a relatively tranquil place that shuts out worldly suffering so that one might indulge in the more pleasant aspects of being alive (*The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, volumes 1-7, translated by Eugene Klug, Erwin Koehlinger, James Lanning, Everette Meier, Dorothy Schoknecht, and Allen Schuldheiss (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Co., 2000), pp. 5:234-5).

worthwhile to highlight one aspect of the scholastic trend of the later medieval period. This trend is perhaps best characterized by the writings of natural theologians like Anselm (1033-1109) and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). The latter's work—probably scholasticism's most paradigmatic example—integrates Greek thought in the form of the newly “rediscovered” texts of Aristotle during the Crusades, and seems to carve out a more substantial place for reason, or human capabilities in general, than Augustine would have condoned.²⁶ Besides the famous scholastic arguments for God's existence, based on pure reason in the case of Anselm's ontological argument and reason aided by experience of the world in other cases, Aquinas actually goes so far as to distinguish, explicitly, between separate domains for reason and faith within Christian doctrine. Although Aquinas does speak of the primacy of faith in some sense for the sake of being a Christian, he claims that faith is only necessary for appropriating certain articles of church doctrine (e.g. the trinity), while reason is sufficient for grasping other articles, such as the existence of God.²⁷ Given this compartmentalizing of reason, I do not mean to suggest that Aquinas, or scholasticism in general, breaks entirely with the more anti-rational aspects of Christian dying to the world²⁸ that Augustine emphasizes. The scholastic position does, however, offer a convenient adversary to those who would restore these traditional aspects to their place of prominence in such dying.

²⁶ In discussing the claims of Clement and Justin Martyr, Carr points out that the scholastics are by no means the first thinkers in Christian history to hold views that differ from the Augustinian position in this way (Carr, p. 176-9). Unlike the case of these early Christian thinkers, however, scholastic ideas about the proper use of reason come to dominate church doctrine in a way that seems to overshadow Augustinian Christianity for some time.

²⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, volume 1, translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benzinger Brothers Inc., 1947), p. 12.

²⁸ For more of Karen Carr's excellent discussion of this topic, see “The Offense of Reason and the Passion of Faith: Kierkegaard and Anti-Rationalism,” in *Faith and Philosophy* 13, no. 2 (April 1996), pp. 236-51.

An Augustinian Reformation. There are at least two thinkers worth discussing from the first post-medieval centuries who stand out as champions of the Augustinian tradition against the widespread scholasticism of the day. These thinkers believe that the church, with its excessive Aristotelianism, had forgotten some of the basic lessons of Pauline dying to the world, as well as those of Augustine's turn away from the more rationalistic aspects of Platonism. The first of these traditionalists is none other than the famous reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546), himself a monk of the Augustinian order.²⁹ Reacting as much to the rationalism of prominent church doctrine-crafters like Aquinas with his famous proclamation that reason is a whore,³⁰ as to the "lazy" Christianity then practiced in what is now Germany (exemplified by the church's custom of selling indulgences),³¹ Luther sees the value in a return to the *New Testament* focus on death, particularly the death of Jesus.

The issue of Luther's views on death is a complicated one given the gradual yet extreme changes in his views in general throughout his lifetime. For the sake of relating his more thoroughly "Lutheran" thought to the work of Kierkegaard, it is probably best to

²⁹ The so-called "Lutheran reformation" is in many ways not a reformation, but a "pre-formation," or a return to Christianity as it had previously been.

³⁰ "But the devil's bride, reason, the lovely whore comes in and wants to be wise, and what she says, she thinks, is the Holy Spirit. Who can be of any help then? Neither jurist, physician, nor king, nor emperor; for she is the foremost whore the devil has" (*Vernunft ... ist die höchste Hur, die der Teufel hat*) (Martin Luther, "The Last Sermon in Wittenberg" (1546), in *Luther's Works*, vol. 51, edited and translated by John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), p. 374). In making this specific claim, Luther actually seems to have in mind "fanatical antisacramentalist[s];" and in less fiery moments he suggests that reason is not to be thrown out entirely, but tempered by faith (pp. 378-9). Thus, I only mean to claim that Luther is critical of the stand-alone use of reason seen in particular examples from the work of thinkers like Anselm and Aquinas, not that he is necessarily some kind of radical irrationalist. (Cf. also the following claims: "he who wishes to philosophize by using Aristotle without danger to his soul must first become thoroughly foolish in Christ... no person philosophizes well unless he is a fool, that is, a Christian" (Martin Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation" (1518), in *Luther's Works*, vol. 31, edited and translated by Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), p. 41). Luther does not rule philosophy, or Aristotle, out altogether, but recommends a certain Christian caution).

³¹ See Martin Luther, "Disputation Against Scholastic Theology" (1517) and "Ninety-five Theses" (1517), in *Luther's Works*, vol. 31, edited and translated by Harold J. Grimm and C. M. Jacobs (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), pp. 5-33.

focus on those works that come after what is traditionally taken to be the beginning of the “Lutheran reformation” in 1517. Mirroring to some extent my prior discussion of dying to the world in the *New Testament*, it will also be helpful to distinguish between two types of Luther’s writings on death: those that have to do with individuals passing away and those that have to do with facing death, literally and figuratively, for Christ.

Although there is surely too much material to cover here, particularly on the latter type of discussion, I have selected a few short texts to focus on, which should allow for an adequate characterization of Luther’s views as they relate to Kierkegaard’s.³²

The first of these documents is a relatively early text (1519) and is entitled “A Sermon on Preparing to Die.” Written just two years after his publication of the so-called “Ninety-five Theses,” which changed the course of Western history, this short text includes twenty articles of practical advice and spiritual comfort. Although the writing of this document was originally requested by a particular individual struggling with the thought of death, within a few years it was widely published and read.³³ Despite its popularity, it should be noted that there are particular aspects of this sermon that Luther would later reject. For example, he repeatedly appeals to the value of particular sacraments such as “extreme unction” (part of the last rites), which he, and millions of Lutherans after him, will eventually jettison due to a lack of Biblical precedent (Luther v.

³² Concerning Heidegger’s connections to Luther on death, it should also be pointed out that Luther takes up this topic briefly in various places including his “Heidelberg Disputation” (v. 31, p. 69) and his *Lectures on Genesis*, which Heidegger seems to think highly of. Luther’s most helpful discussion of death in these lectures comes in his commentary on *Genesis* 3:15 (Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis Chapters 1-5* (1535-1536), in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 1, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and translated by George V. Schick (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), pp. 196-7). However, it is best to proceed with caution when dealing with these lectures given Pelikan’s introductory account of their being tampered with by their editors (pp. ix-xii).

³³ Martin Luther, “A Sermon on Preparing to Die,” in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 42, edited by Martin O. Dietrich and translated by Martin H. Bertram (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), pp. 97-8.

42, pp. 100, 108).³⁴ It is not clear, however, that the presence of these particular remnants of his Catholicism pose any problems for his overall account of the proper way for a Christian to approach death.

At the beginning of his sermon Luther, treating death as the human condition (v. 42, p. 99), states, “we should familiarize ourselves with death during our lifetime, inviting death into our presence when it is still at a distance and not on the move” (p. 101). In fact, he includes death, along with sin and hell, as issues that must be kept in mind constantly in life, but which must remain unthought as life nears its conclusion (p. 102). As the sermon progresses, however, it becomes clear that what Luther is advocating is no mere meditation on human finitude, personal or otherwise. Rather, he advocates focusing on Christ’s death to the exclusion of the consideration of any other perspective on death. He states, “you must not view or ponder death as such, not in yourself or in your nature ... you must concern yourself solely with the death of Christ ... if you look at death in any other way, it will kill you with great anxiety and anguish” (p. 104). Just as Christ is said to have substituted his death for that of mankind, Luther substitutes a detailed consideration of Christ’s death for a consideration of one’s own death or the death of humans in general. His purpose in making this substitution is clearly to offer comfort to the dying, and mitigate the anxiety that one feels when thinking about death. Among numerous claims he makes to this effect, he ponders, “what more should God do to persuade you to accept death willingly and not to dread but to overcome it? In Christ he offers you the image of life, of grace, and of salvation so that you may not be horrified

³⁴ In fact, it was only a few months later in 1519 when Luther openly rejected most “nonscriptural sacraments,” and even in this sermon on death one can see him leaning in this direction (v. 42, p. 100).

Luther will also eventually reject several aspects of the priesthood, and praying to Mary and the saints. In this sermon, however, he still has positive things to say about both priests and this sort of prayer (pp. 110, 113-4).

by the images of sin, death, and hell” (p. 114). Luther’s overall message seems to be that one should really not spend one’s time thinking about his or her mortality, but rather about one’s eternal life in Christ.

But there is another aspect of focusing on the death of Christ and the eternal life this death brings with it that Luther’s early sermon does not really address. This aspect concerns the suffering, persecution, and martyrdom that come along with the imitation of Christ. In texts like “A Letter of Consolation to All Who Suffer Persecution” (1522), which is a letter to a sympathetic nobleman, and the outlined sermon later entitled, “That a Christian Should Bear His Cross with Patience” (1530), Luther picks up on these issues with constant scriptural reference.³⁵ While one might find comfort in the face of death by thinking about a heavenly eternal life, it seems that a life in Christ is likely to be less than comfortable in the temporal world (v. 43, p. 183). In fact, Luther seems to believe that the sign of true Christianity is the very presence of persecution and suffering. He states, “wherever Christ is, Judas, Pilate, Herod, Caiaphas, and Annas will inevitably be also, so also his cross. If not, he is not the true Christ” (v. 43, p. 63).³⁶ In other words, one will only know if one is doing it right, when one is betrayed, arrested, mocked, tortured, condemned, or even killed. Applying these criteria to his own situation, in which even martyrdom seems to be a real possibility, Luther begins almost to revel in death as he states:

they threaten us with death. If they were as smart as they are stupid, they would threaten us with life. It is a shame and disgrace to try to threaten

³⁵ Martin Luther, “A Letter of Consolation to All who Suffer Persecution,” and “That a Christian Should Bear His Cross with Patience,” in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 43, edited by Gustav K. Wieneke and translated by Martin H. Bertram and Dorris A. Flesner, respectively (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), pp. 59-60, 181-2.

³⁶ For similar statements of suffering as evidence of true Christianity, and Biblical support for such statements, see also v. 43, pp. 184-5.

and terrify Christ and his Christians with death for, after all, they are lords and victors over death. It is just like trying to frighten a man by bridling and saddling his horse and bidding him to ride on it (p. 63).

For Luther then, it seems as though Christians (like all good Platonists) are really at home in death. It is as though they are already in some sense dead and yet in some sense incapable of dying.

Like Luther a century before (and Kierkegaard two centuries later), the Jansenist-leaning Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)³⁷ takes issue with a religious status quo that seems to have forgotten Augustine's lessons about the importance and worldly repercussions of a faithful relationship with God. Given the Augustinianism of both Jansenists and Lutherans, it is certainly not surprising that the sixteenth and seventeenth century Jansenist movement was condemned by the Jesuits, the great propagators of scholastic doctrines at this time, for the former's apparent protestant sympathies. And Pascal's views connecting death and reason place him squarely in the middle of this conflict with the Jesuits. In the skeptical context of thinkers like Michel de Montaigne, Pierre Charron, and René Descartes,³⁸ Pascal comes to wonder about the legitimacy and limits of reason

³⁷ Certain aspects of the Christian side of my discussion of the Platonic strain have been developed in conjunction with my "Christian Hate: Death, Dying, and Reason in Pascal and Kierkegaard," in *Kierkegaard and Death*, edited by Patrick Stokes and Adam Buben (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, forthcoming 2011). Most notably, the brief description of Pascal in the present chapter, and his comparison with Kierkegaard in the next, are based on the more thorough account in "Christian Hate."

³⁸ For an excellent account of the difference between Pascal and his sixteenth and seventeenth century precursors/contemporaries concerning skepticism, see José Raimundo Maia Neto, *The Christianization of Pyrrhonism: Scepticism and Faith in Blaise Pascal, Søren Kierkegaard, and Lev Shestov* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1992). Interestingly, just as the scholastics were moved to extreme rationalism by the rediscovery of ancient Greek texts—those of Aristotle—these thinkers were moved to doubt the capabilities of rationality by the rediscovery of (or at least renewed interest in) ancient Greek texts—those of skeptics such as Sextus Empiricus.

The relationship between Pascal and these other figures on the topic of death and dying is also an interesting one. Despite his reaffirmation of the Platonic notion that philosophy is practice for death (*The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, translated by Donald Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958), pp. 56-68), Montaigne will be of most interest during the consideration of the Epicurean strain of death. But compare Pascal's ideas about death and the insufficiency of human reason with the claims of Montaigne's houseguest, Charron (Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), pp. 56-9), who states, "that well to prepare our souls for

in the service of Christian belief. Specifically, he feels that the Jesuit use of reason to “combine God and the world”³⁹ leads to a situation in which the true nature of Christianity is lost. It is at least partially with these issues in mind that Pascal’s *Pensées* turns to the thought of death in order to focus attention clearly on the state of humanity in the world and the essence of Christianity.

For Pascal, physical death is significant as the deadline by which an individual must make a decision concerning belief in the immortality of the soul, or else risk certain consequences. In a slightly updated version of Socrates’ disjunction in the *Apology*, he states: “eternity exists, and death, which must begin it and which threatens them every hour, must in a short time inevitably put them under the horrible necessity of being annihilated or unhappy eternally” (*Pensées*, p. 221). Given the obvious importance of making what Pascal would see as the “right” decision about the eternal (p. 217), there are a few things about the deadline that ought to be kept in mind. The first of these can be seen in the passage quoted above—death can come at any moment without warning. Another issue to consider about death, in conjunction with the first, is that it is certain. Regarding life in the world, Pascal claims, “it is certain we will not exist in it for long and uncertain if we will exist in it for one hour” (p. 51). A further key point is that death is something that an individual faces alone (p. 50). Hence, an individual must not think that anyone else can help them once the deadline has been reached. While Pascal, who is perhaps less interested in comforting the dying than Luther, has other things to say about

God and the receiving of his holy spirit, we must empty, cleanse, purify them, and leave them naked of all opinion, belief, affection; make them like a white paper, dead to itself and to the world, that God might live and work in it, drive away the old master, to establish the new” (Peter (Pierre) Charron, *Of Wisdom*, translated by Samson Leonard (New York: De Capo Press, 1971 (before 1612; reprint)), p. 242). Notice also the similarity between this formulation and Descartes’ project in the *Meditations*.

³⁹ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, translated and edited by Roger Ariew (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2005), p. 311.

death, these few points should be sufficient for helping to explain his take on dying to the world.

When one focuses on death, and what comes after it, in the way Pascal describes, one experiences a sense of urgency and individual responsibility in life that one might not experience otherwise. And this sense of urgency and responsibility can lead one to alter one's life in various ways, avoiding matters that do not pertain to one's decision about the eternal. Consider Pascal's claim:

let us ... judge those who live without thinking of the ultimate end of life, who let themselves be guided by their inclinations and their pleasures without reflection and without concern, as if they could annihilate eternity by turning their thought away from it, and think only of making themselves happy for the moment (p. 221).

This passage suggests that by turning to thoughts of death and what comes after it, one might be led to avoid worldly ideas and passions. It is precisely this excising of worldliness—i.e. the body of sin, which consists of human pride and desires (p. 47)—that is meant when the *New Testament* speaks of dying to the world.

But beyond Pascal's view of death and the decision it induces, the full implications of this dying to the world remain to be seen. Dying to the world is ultimately a disregarding, or hatred (p. 81), of the worldly self, which includes one's selfishness, self-confidence, self-reliance etc.; and this dying is necessary in order for an individual to be open to receiving Christ through grace, as Augustine suggests. Pascal states that "true conversion consists in self-annihilation before that universal Being whom we have so often irritated ... there is an insurmountable opposition between God and us, and ... without a mediator there can be no communion with him" (p. 107). There are many different ways in which one can understand how "having" a self might prevent having a

relationship with God, but perhaps the most important impediment, according to Pascal, is the self-confidence and self-reliance that are manifested in the use of reason.

For the sake of existing in the world, it seems that there is nothing more valuable to a human being than reason. More often than not, it serves people well in dealing with the world, and it has therefore received an apparently well-deserved vote of confidence. But as Pascal, and Augustine before him, explains, there is an opposition between God and the world, worldly reason included. The opposition between God and reason is quite apparent when one considers the numerous difficulties of Christian doctrine, whether it is the virgin birth, the divinity and resurrection of a man named Jesus, or Pascal's personal favorite: original sin. The purpose of recognizing such opposition is, according to Pascal, to acknowledge that reason can only go so far (but not as far as the Jesuits and scholastics claim), and that dying to the world includes, in some sense, dying to reason. Pascal states that we cannot know ourselves in God "through the proud exertions of our reason, but through its simple submission" (p. 37). By suspending or dying to reason at significant moments, one liberates another faculty, which humans can use to gain knowledge, or something like it. The heart, or faith, is roughly a non-rational capacity by which principles, in this case Christian principles, can be felt.⁴⁰ Just after introducing his famous wager, Pascal asserts, "it is the heart that experiences God, and not reason. Here, then, is faith: God felt by the heart, not by reason. The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know" (*Pensées*, pp. 215-6).⁴¹ This anti-rationalist line of Christian thought, and the

⁴⁰ The idea that reason might somehow prevent faith, and must therefore be cut off (at least temporarily), surely resonates with Christ's own words in the gospels about cutting off limbs and gouging out organs that cause one to sin (*Matthew* 5:29-30, 18: 8-9; *Mark* 9: 43-7).

⁴¹ I take this last, and seemingly paradoxical, statement about unreasonable reasons to mean a couple of things: first, that something might seem ridiculous to an outsider, but make perfect sense to those "in the know," and second, that some course of action or belief might seem like a very bad idea (perhaps in the sense that a desirable outcome is unlikely—see the wager) and yet it is still possible to explain why

general focus on death, both physical and metaphorical, that leads to it, which Pascal inherits and develops, will have an obvious impact on Kierkegaard, and perhaps a less direct, but nonetheless significant, impact on Heidegger.⁴²

The Epicurean Strain: Beginning with the “Letter to Menoecus”

The Epicureans. If what distinguishes the Platonic strain of the philosophy of death is an appeal to an afterlife and an attempt to make death seem important in the less than perfect present worldly life, then what signifies membership in the Epicurean strain is a denial of any meaningful post-mortem extension of particular subjective experience and an attempt to render death irrelevant in life. In the “Letter to Menoecus” Epicurus combats one of humankind’s greatest fears by pointing out that death, “the most horrifying of evils, means nothing to us, then, because so long as we are existent death is not present and

someone might proceed along this course. With this statement, Pascal might be interpreted as sneaking some degree of reason back into Christianity in order to aid faith after excluding it temporarily in order to form faith.

Despite the fact that the heart is capable of things that reason is not, Pascal does not believe that the heart ought to be left to its own devices. Therefore, it might be said that Pascal is closer to the scholastics than Luther. Reason has a place in the service of Christianity according to Pascal and thus reason and faith must work together within the aspiring Christian. He states, “if we submit everything to reason, our religion will have nothing mysterious and supernatural. If we offend the principles of reason, our religion will be absurd and ridiculous” (p. 53). (Pascal does acknowledge that Christianity is, in a sense, foolish, but this foolishness is obviously not entirely incompatible with reason (pp. 90, 212).) It is because Christianity must, in some sense, be compatible with reason (or at least be able to offer “reasons” in its defense from the perspective of faith) that Pascal emphasizes the importance of at least some minimal amount of verifiable evidence in the form of miracles. (He also spends a great deal of time discussing the importance of fulfilled prophecy as evidence in favor of the truth of Christianity (pp. 96-102, 239-261).) He claims, “we would not have sinned in not believing in Jesus Christ, lacking miracles” (p. 54).

⁴² Although there have surely been developments and variations on death-related issues within different Christian sects up to the present day (and I certainly don’t mean to belittle what are no doubt some very fascinating views), I take it that the Platonic strain, insofar as it survives in certain forms of contemporary Christianity, remains, for my broad purposes, more or less as I have described it. Additionally, given that the philosophical tradition has for the most part either radically reinterpreted Christianity (as in Hegel and Schopenhauer) or moved away from Christian doctrines entirely, I feel that it is appropriate to end my brief account of the Platonic strain here. In fact, it is at the very point historically where my discussion of this strain slows down that the Epicurean strain, with its focus on scientific worldly matters and the resulting doubts about an afterlife, really takes off.

whenever it is present we are nonexistent.”⁴³ This paradoxically attractive claim about death has been the subject of a great deal of philosophical discourse, both in the ancient world and in the present day. Before pressing on to consider its influence, however, it will be necessary to point out its sources.

As already suggested, Epicurus takes up the alternative view, briefly considered in the *Apology*, which Plato elsewhere seems to find less attractive—death begins nonexistence. In fact, Epicurus goes about his consideration of death in much the same way that the character Socrates does in his famous defense, i.e. by pointing out the mistakes made in common discourse on the subject (p. 180/124-6).⁴⁴ But as much as Epicurus might have Platonic connections, he seems to address the views of another prominent thinker from his era as well. In driving home his most famous claim from above, Epicurus seems to rule out, definitively, the possibility of posthumous harm that Aristotle (384-322 BCE) downplays but will not ultimately deny.⁴⁵ In order to see how Epicurus does what Aristotle cannot, one must explain two important aspects of Epicurean thought that underlie his beliefs about death. Because only a few short writings from Epicurus have survived, it will perhaps be helpful to supplement what Diogenes Laertius has preserved with *The Way Things Are (De Rerum Natura)*, a poem written by the first century BCE Roman Epicurean, Titus Lucretius Carus.

⁴³ Epicurus, “Letter to Menoeceus,” in *The Philosophy of Epicurus*, translated and edited by George K. Strodach (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1963), p. 180/125 (the latter number refers to the paragraph from the tenth book of Diogenes Laertius’ *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, where Epicurus’ letters have been preserved).

⁴⁴ Notice the similarity in expression here as compared with the *Apology* at 29b.

⁴⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by W. D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908) 1100a10-1101b9.

It is perhaps somewhat unclear which camp Aristotle ultimately falls into on this issue of posthumous existence, but it is certainly the case that he does not explicitly rely on any notion of such existence in considering the possibility of posthumous harm. For an interesting related claim about Aristotle on posthumous existence, see Bonnie Kent, “Rethinking Moral Virtues: Scotus on the Virtues” in *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus*, edited by Thomas Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 363.

The first aspect of Epicurean doctrine that must be taken up is his religious understanding. Like many of his fellow Greeks, Epicurus does not deny the existence of the gods; however, he does encourage focusing on “the pure conception of the gods.” Such a conception precludes the attribution to the gods of various human qualities and shortcomings, as one sees in the works of Homer (Epicurus, p. 179/123-4). According to Epicureanism, not only are the gods very much unlike human beings, they also seem to be quite uninterested in human beings. Rather, the gods seem to be absolutely content in just being themselves. Lucretius states,

The gods majestic, and their calm abodes
Winds do not shake, nor clouds befoul, nor snow
Violate with the knives of sleet and cold;
But there the sky is purest blue, the air
Is almost laughter in that radiance,
And nature satisfies their every need,
And nothing, nothing, mars their calm of mind.⁴⁶

Since the gods seem content being wrapped up in themselves, Epicurus belittles the idea that they are somehow involved in the judgment of human behavior and the handing out of penalties for misbehaving in the world (Epicurus, p. 179/124). Since the gods are not interested in punishing humans, it is but a short step to the denial of the sort of hell that Homer describes. In fact, Lucretius makes a point of revisiting Greek literature and discrediting several famous tales of suffering in Hades, concluding his list by claiming that if anyone ever has the experience of hell, it is in life (Lucretius, pp. 114-6). All the more reason, according to the Epicurean, not to fear death.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Titus Lucretius Carus, *The Way Things Are*, translated by Rolfe Humphries (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1968), p. 86.

⁴⁷ It seems that pessimism about life in the world is not always limited to the Platonic strain.

The second aspect of Epicurean doctrine that must be taken up is their atomistic metaphysics.⁴⁸ At the heart of Epicurus' famous statement about why it is irrational to fear death is the idea that in death there is no longer a subject able to suffer harm (Epicurus, p. 180/125). And this idea relies on the Epicurean belief that everything is made up of tiny particles of various shapes and sizes that come together occasionally, hold together temporarily, and eventually disperse again (Lucretius, p. 87). At the moment of death, the particularly tiny particles that make up the human mind or spirit and animate the body, imperceptibly evacuate the corpse left behind. Lucretius states,

... mind acts, we know,
Quicker than anything natural we see.
But anything so mobile must consist
Of particles very round and smooth indeed,
And very small indeed ...
How delicate spirit is, or soul, or mind ...
When death's calm reassurance takes a man,
And mind and spirit have left him, you perceive
Nothing at all subtracted from the body (p. 92).

Since death is simply the dispersal of one's atoms, both those of the mind and eventually those of the body, there is no question of an enduring subject to be harmed by death or anything that happens afterwards, and so, there is clearly nothing to fear in death.⁴⁹ Thus, not only does the Epicurean do away with fear of suffering in hell after death, but the Epicurean even does away with the idea that there is anyone left at all to experience fear, or the objects of fear, after death. Furthermore, just as there is no one left to experience fear, it would seem that there is no one left that can be harmed after death, and so,

⁴⁸ Epicurus is in some ways a follower of Socrates' contemporary and so-called "Presocratic" atomist, Democritus, but with the notable difference that Epicurus is not a hard determinist. Rather, he introduces the notion of chance (and choice) into atomic theory via his idea of the capacity of atoms to spontaneously "swerve" from their ordinary falling trajectory (Epicurus, pp. 185/134, 245).

⁴⁹ Patrick Stokes provides a similar account in "The Power of Death: Retroactivity, Narrative, and Interest," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vols. 9 and 10, edited by Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2006), pp. 388-9.

Epicurus seems to have definitively answered Aristotle's bizarre question about the possibility of posthumous harms.

What remains to be considered is Epicurus' further claim that death, as the dispersal of one's atoms, should not bother the living since it has not happened yet. Oddly, Epicurus even believes that his understanding of death should comfort the living "by removing the yearning for deathlessness" (Epicurus, p. 180/124). While his explanation as to why there is no existence after death, and therefore nothing to fear after death, might seem rather compelling, it is much less obvious why one's own death should not trouble one still capable of being troubled. Of course, this latter idea makes some sense when seen in the light of Epicurus' overall goal of promoting the good life (*eudaimonia*) of tranquility (*ataraxia*) and pleasure (*hedonia*), but even if one shares an interest in this sort of life, it still is not altogether clear why one's own death should not be considered deeply problematic. Epicurus argues that since one's own death is not a problem once it happens, it should not be viewed as a problem before it happens (p. 180/125). Furthermore, Lucretius points out humans' relative lack of concern about their nonexistence before birth and argues that if this nonexistence does not bother anyone, then neither should postmortem nonexistence (Lucretius, pp. 110, 114).⁵⁰ But do these arguments not betray an impoverished understanding of death's interaction with life? Fortunately, the Epicurean treatment of death is an issue that will come up repeatedly in the history of philosophy, e.g. in the work of modern proponents of this pagan doctrine,

⁵⁰ This argument is traditionally called the "asymmetry argument" or the "argument from asymmetry." Without explicit reference to Lucretius, Augustine seems to offer a response as he suggests several analogies to explain why we ought to be more concerned about the future of our souls than about their origins: e.g. "there is no harm done to someone sailing to Rome if he has forgotten the port from which he set out, as long as he remembers where he is headed" (*On Free Choice*, p. 113).

in the writings of detractors like Kierkegaard and Heidegger, and even in the more recent musings of contemporary Anglo-American philosophers.⁵¹

The Stoics. Of the various schools of thought that deal heavily with death, the Stoics are one of the most troublesome to categorize. The earliest Stoics are practically contemporary with Epicurus,⁵² but many of the key Stoic writers, e.g. Lucius Annaeus Seneca (c. 4 BCE-65 CE) and Epictetus (c. 50-c. 130), come well after Epicurus and Lucretius; and some even seem influenced by Epicurean doctrine.⁵³ Stoicism also has a complicated relationship with Christianity. The close proximity between them is perhaps the main reason why it is noticeably more difficult to categorize the Stoics in terms of the dichotomy of death that I am describing. Stoicism, of course, had a huge influence on Christianity during the latter's formative years in the very Stoic Roman empire,⁵⁴ prior to Christianity's rise to prominence around the time of Augustine.⁵⁵ Nonetheless, the Stoics

⁵¹ One interesting treatment from a contemporary analytic philosopher deals entirely with the criticism of Epicurean views on death (and responses to this criticism) throughout history, from the ancients to the present day (James Warren, *Facing Death: Epicurus and his Critics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004)). Some of the more recent criticisms will be discussed later in this chapter.

⁵² It might be suggested that their close connections to the Cynics actually make Stoic ideologies chronologically prior to those of the Epicureans, but it must be remembered that certain Epicurean doctrines borrow heavily from earlier thinkers such as Democritus.

⁵³ In fact, no complete early Stoic documents (e.g., those of Zeno and Chrysippus—both flourishing mostly in the third century BCE) are extant. See Josiah B. Gould, *The Philosophy of Chrysippus* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1970), p. 1; and D. A. Rees, "Introduction" in *Meditations* (by Marcus Aurelius) (London: Everyman's Library, 1961), p. xiv. On the issue of possible Epicurean influence on Stoics, see Gould, p. 30; and George G. Strem, *The Life and Teaching of Lucius Annaeus Seneca* (New York: Vantage Press, 1981), pp. 121, 163.

Murphy simply groups the Epicureans and the Stoics together under the "pagan conception" (p. 44) of death, but given my association of a couple of prominent pagans, Socrates and Plato, with the Christian view of death, I think Murphy could have been more careful in his characterization.

⁵⁴ Although the Stoics, like the Epicureans and Cynics, are a Greek school of thought, the Stoics attained perhaps their highest level of notoriety during the first two centuries of the common era under Roman emperors such as Nero (the great persecutor of early Christians), whose tutor was the famed Stoic Seneca, and Marcus Aurelius (121-180), who was himself an important Stoic author (Rees, pp. vii-xviii; Strem, pp. 35-110).

⁵⁵ On the topic of this influence, Gould actually states that it is in "the third century A.D., when Stoicism itself begins to lose ground and to be absorbed piecemeal into Neoplatonic and Christian thought" (p. 13). Consider, for example, the very Stoic attitude of *memento mori* (and the related perseverance in the face of physical suffering and martyrdom) that has been an important aspect of Christian thought throughout Christian history. However, as shown in my account of the Christian appropriation of the Platonic strain of

are very similar to the Epicureans on the two issues that seem to matter for the sake of my account. They are, for the most part, without a clear notion of an individualistic afterlife and they often seek to diminish the significance of the deaths of individuals.

Like the Epicureans, the Stoics also seem opposed to what traditional fear-mongering religions have to say about death and what comes after. For example, Epictetus states, “death is nothing terrible, else it would have appeared so to Socrates. But the terror consists in our notion of death, that it is terrible.”⁵⁶ Death is a perfectly natural, non-harmful part of existing that must not be fought against if tranquility (*ataraxia*) is to be attained. But in order to understand death in this way and become tranquil, one must have a proper understanding of the divine’s place in a largely determined natural world. The Stoics, in contrast to the Epicureans, believe that God, which is simply the universe itself, is actively involved in human affairs. Perhaps the primary way that God is involved in human affairs is through the divine spark that animates and allows perception in each human being. Just as God is the divine fire that takes in, permeates and animates the entire universe, human souls do the same on a much smaller scale (Gould, pp. 127, 155-6). Despite this relationship to the divine, however, the Stoics do agree with the Epicureans that the ‘gift’ of soul is more like a rental that

the philosophy of death, it is not essential that every Christian writer emphasize personal physical death in the same way. For example, while Martin Luther has many similar things to say about dying to the world, he seems to approach the issue of physical passing away in a manner that is at least in tension with the claims of Pascal.

⁵⁶ Epictetus, *The Enchiridion*, translated by Thomas W. Higginson with an introduction by Albert Salomon (Indianapolis, IN: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1955), p. 19/5 (the latter number refers to the paragraph in the standard numbering of the text).

Another thinker with (qualified) Stoic sympathies who follows Plato’s Socrates on death issues is Marcus Tullius Cicero, the first century B.C.E. Roman thinker and political figure. In providing an excellent overview of ancient Greek views on death and the post-mortem situation of the soul, he seems to lean towards a continued existence (and explicitly away from Epicurus), while maintaining an open and optimistic outlook on both post-mortem possibilities (Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Cicero: Tusculan Disputations I*, edited and translated by A. E. Douglas (Chicago: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 1985), esp. pp. 33-49).

must be ‘given back’ (Epictetus, pp. 20-1/11). Death is simply the reintegration of an individual spark into the divine fire that makes up the universe. Thus, while there may be some kind of continued existence in this reintegration, such existence does not seem to be the personal, individualistic afterlife that Plato and the Christians seem interested in; and if one’s death is the end of a particular subjective experience, there is surely nothing to be feared in death.⁵⁷

Despite their general agreement with the Epicureans on the irrationality of fearing death given certain metaphysical realities, it might at first glance appear that the Stoics are more in line with the Christians when it comes to the relevance of death in life. Surely, some of the Stoic views on this issue had an impact on the Christians, as I have already suggested. After all, they both often recommend a focus on thoughts of death with the goal of an improved life. For example, Epictetus states, “let death and exile, and all other things which appear terrible, be daily before your eyes, but death chiefly; and you will never entertain an abject thought, nor too eagerly covet anything” (p. 24/21). This passage and many others like it in Stoic writings could just as easily have been written by Pascal,⁵⁸ or as will become apparent, Kierkegaard. Such similarity in the use of thoughts of death is certainly enough to give one pause before denying the Stoics a place in the Platonic strain of the philosophy of death.

⁵⁷ With thinkers that span over half of a millennium, the Stoics are clearly a diverse group, whose various members do not see eye to eye on every issue. For example, there seem to be different views on the nature and duration of post-mortem existence—some Stoics even hold that individual souls subsist (although it remains unclear what this means in terms of something like subjective awareness) beyond death for a time before rejoining the primordial substance in the next “conflagration” (Gould, pp. 32-3, 127-8). At the risk of overlooking some very interesting nuances, I find it helpful, for the sake of keeping my account manageable, to synthesize a general interpretation based on credible secondary sources, especially Gould and Strem (esp. pp. 151-8), while referring when necessary to my paradigmatic Stoic figure, Epictetus.

⁵⁸ Despite this apparent similarity, “Pascal violently rejected the megalomaniac pride of the Stoic philosopher” (Albert Salomon, “Introduction” in *The Enchiridion*, p. 7).

However, if these sorts of thoughts are enough to put the Stoics in line with the Christians, then one ought to include the Epicureans in this line of thinking about death as well, since both Epicurus and Lucretius dedicate large portions of their work to ponderings about death. The obvious difference is that while Christians turning to thoughts of death for the sake of life-improvement generally have an eye toward how their post-mortem situation is affected, Epicureans and Stoics are at most hardly concerned with such things in their peculiar use of thoughts of death. A related issue here is that the Epicureans and the Stoics, unlike the Christians, often “counsel that we should [at least to some degree] desensitize ourselves to death by thinking of it constantly” (Jeffrie G. Murphy, p. 44n).⁵⁹ That is, while the goal of pondering death for the Christian is usually to learn to embrace it and be changed by it, in many instances the goal of doing so for the Epicureans and Stoics is to attain an attitude in which death means little (and in some cases, nothing) to them. In fact, the Stoics pursue this indifference to the point at which suicide becomes a perfectly viable option in a life that has outlived its usefulness (Strem, p. 153). While their views on suicide may not be perfectly in line with those of the Epicureans either, Stoic views on this topic are surely helpful in distinguishing the Stoics from the Christians.⁶⁰

A further feature of Stoic doctrine that also distinguishes them from the Christians on the topic of death is the notion that there is nothing particularly evil about the world (Epictetus, pp. 26-7/26-7). While the Stoics surely treat worldly life with a detached “take

⁵⁹ There is the further possibility, which at least Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger seem to address, that the Epicurean and Stoic view of death opts not to consider aspects of death that the (authentic) Christian might take into consideration.

⁶⁰ In fact, their respective views on suicide might be a third, perhaps less essential, difference between the two strains of the philosophy of death. Although Epicurus rejects the Stoic notion that there is an appropriate stage of life for suicide, he is not opposed to it in general (Epicurus, pp. 180-1/126-7). On the other hand, Christians are known for their prohibition of suicide, and this prohibition seems like another possible connection to Platonic thought given what Socrates says in the *Phaedo* at 61e-62d.

it or leave it” attitude, there is not so much Christian-style opposition to the world in Stoicism. Without such world-hate, it hardly makes sense to include the Stoic treatment of death in my account of Platonic/Christian dying to the world, even if there are some important parallels between them. With this final distinction, it seems clear that, so far as death is concerned, the Epicureans and the Stoics are joined in their opposition to the Platonic strain of the philosophy of death. This connection of Epicureans and Stoics will find further support in the appropriation of their ancient teachings by various modern thinkers.

Early Modern Appropriation. After a long period of intellectual domination by the medieval Christian tradition, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw a renewed interest in the pagan thought of the post-Aristotelian Hellenistic schools of philosophy. While such ancient thought was extremely influential in the general metaphysical and epistemological works of an increasingly deistic, and even atheistic, philosophical community, its influence is especially obvious in the case of the philosophy of death. Like the Epicureans and the Stoics before them, thinkers such as Montaigne (1533-1592), Benedict de (Baruch) Spinoza (1632-1677), and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716) seek to establish the insignificance of individual human deaths. For example, Montaigne disapprovingly claims that “we set too much importance on ourselves. It seems that the universe somehow suffers by our annihilation” (Montaigne, p. 458). In the course of denying self-importance in the face of death, some of these modern thinkers also display vaguely Epicurean and Stoic metaphysical beliefs that lead to the denial of, or at least indifference toward, the possibility of post-mortem continuance of particular

subjectivities.⁶¹ In some cases, there is even an appreciation for the views on suicide of these ancient Greek schools.

While Montaigne's essays are easily identifiable as precursors to Pascal's discussions of the certainty of death, the uncertainty of its when, the importance of constant thinking about it, and the sense of urgency and opposition towards worldliness that such thoughts produce in life, he clearly belongs to the Epicurean strain of the philosophy of death (Montaigne, pp. 57-61). In essays such as "That to Philosophize is to Learn to Die" and "Of Judging of the Death of Others," Montaigne actually makes constant reference to Epicurean and Stoic thought, particularly that of Lucretius and Seneca.⁶² As Jeffrie G. Murphy says above about these ancient thinkers, it seems that Montaigne's purpose in recommending a constant meditation on death is to produce a "disdain for death" (p. 57), "to strip it of its greatest advantage against us ... rid it of its strangeness," and to free us from fear (p. 60).⁶³ Furthermore, he states, "it is impossible that we should fail to feel the sting of such notions at first. But by handling them and going over them, in the long run we tame them beyond question" (p. 61). Montaigne's discussion of death is aimed at mastering life, not by making death a significant deadline,

⁶¹ Concerning Montaigne, although he does not go out of his way to say much about the possibility of an afterlife, his frequent discussion of death as annihilation or the "end of the road," suggests either that he does not believe in an afterlife, or that such beliefs have no meaningful impact on his consideration of death (pp. 64, 66-67).

⁶² Montaigne even paraphrases both Epicurus' famous mantra and Lucretius' asymmetry argument (pp. 64-6).

⁶³ By the end of "That to Philosophize is to Learn to Die," Montaigne claims, in true Epicurean fashion, that since death is clearly not so terrifying itself, it must be our cultural and religious practices surrounding death that produce such great fear in us (p. 68).

moment of transition, or way of life⁶⁴ as the Platonic strain asserts, but by reducing death's impact on life.⁶⁵

Besides preaching this sort of Epicurean/Stoic desensitization on the issue of death, Montaigne also cultivates an attitude of detachment from worldly existence that resembles very closely what I have attributed to the Stoics, but not the Christians (p. 61). Montaigne, like the members of both of these groups, is ready to give up his life, but while he acknowledges Christian "contempt for life" (p. 64), he adheres to the Stoic idea that "life is neither good nor evil in itself" (p. 65). And just as this indifference towards life in general leads the Stoics to recommend taking one's own, but only when the situation truly calls for it, Montaigne does not rule out suicide as a viable option in extreme cases (pp. 57, 67). In fact, his "Of Judging of the Death of Others" is dedicated to considering the difficulty of committing suicide and he even provides several accounts of those who have done it well and those who have not (pp. 460-2).

Although Spinoza has a great deal less to say about suicide in particular and death in general than Montaigne, Spinoza's refusal to waste his time on the topic is motivated by the very same Epicurean and Stoic attitudes. That is, given that there is life to be lived in the here and now, concerns about a time when this will not be the case are unproductive at best, and so, an indifference to death must be cultivated. In explaining the divergence from Montaigne's appropriation of Epicurean and Stoic thought, Jeffrie G. Murphy states, "Spinoza, on the other hand, suggests that we should try to avoid thinking

⁶⁴ Montaigne does speak briefly of death as an integral aspect of one's very being in the sense that everyone exists as "dying" (p. 65).

⁶⁵ The difference here is between "living as though you are dead" and "living as though death doesn't matter."

A tangential but nonetheless interesting point of connection, worth considering elsewhere, concerns Montaigne's claim that death naturally and rightly seems to mean less to the old, the sick, and the dying than to the young and healthy (p. 63), which is reminiscent of one of Socrates' famous arguments in the *Apology*.

of death entirely, to forget about death in the pursuit of the values of life” (44n). At the heart of Spinoza’s views on death is his very Stoic understanding of God, which is really just the strictly determined universe itself.⁶⁶ Again following the Stoics, Spinoza believes that if there is any freedom in such a universe it consists of aligning one’s understanding with the way things will happen anyway (pp. 244-254).⁶⁷ Because death is part of God’s will, i.e. nature’s way, excessive struggle with or fear of death simply demonstrates a misrelation to, or misunderstanding of, life. In order to ensure a proper relation to life Spinoza thus ignores death:

A free man is one who lives under the guidance of reason, who is not lead by fear ... but who directly desires that which is good ... in other words ... who strives to act, to live, and to preserve his being on the basis of seeking his own true advantage; wherefore such an one thinks of nothing less than of death, but his wisdom is a meditation of life (p. 232).

But apart from the life-disrupting nature of thinking about it, there is another reason why Spinoza believes that one should not bother with concerns about death. Like the Stoics with their divine spark (and the Epicureans with their indestructible atoms), Spinoza believes that death does not destroy everything that a person is. Some aspect of the mind is eternal and Spinoza seems to believe that there is some consolation in knowing that one’s existence will continue. However, as in the case of the Stoics, Spinoza does not seem to believe that such continued existence resembles the particular subjectivity we become so attached to (pp. 259-267). (Of course, for Spinoza such attachment already betrays a misunderstanding of the nature of things.) Perhaps

⁶⁶ Baruch Spinoza, *The Ethics*, in *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, vol. 2, translated by R. H. M. Elwes (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1955), pp. 54-70.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Epictetus’ claim: “demand not that events should happen as you wish; but wish them to happen as they do happen, and you will go on well” (p. 20/8).

It is not the case that Spinoza agrees with the Stoics on all things. In fact, he explicitly opposes the Stoic notion of willfully eliminating or overcoming the emotions (Spinoza, pp. 194-5, 244). Also, on the issues of pleasure and God’s involvement in human affairs, Spinoza actually seems to side with the Epicureans against the Stoics (pp. 217-20, 256).

borrowing certain things from Spinoza, while vehemently rejecting others, Leibniz comes to some very peculiar conclusions in his portrayal of death and post-mortem existence.

Although Leibniz denies Spinozist monism⁶⁸ in favor of an almost Epicurean infinite plurality of “atoms of nature” called “monads,”⁶⁹ they both describe the durability of the ultimate reality from which individual humans come and to which they will return. I must be careful not to suggest that monads are to be understood as precisely the same sorts of elementary material particles that Epicurus describes.⁷⁰ But one need not become too enmeshed in Leibnizian metaphysics in order to grasp the fact that so far as death is concerned, monads are just like Epicurean atoms—indivisible and indestructible. Everything that we take to exist consists of monads and all apparent change and destruction is really nothing more than an alteration in the “perceptions” and relations of monads (“Monadology,” pp. 148-59). Thus, nothing is ever really destroyed, but rather everything is simply in a constant state of transition, including human beings.⁷¹ The “soul,” like all of reality, is just another monad, albeit one that has temporarily taken a place of prominence (“Monadology,” pp. 150-1, 159). At death, this monad, no different than the others, continues to exist, but not necessarily as we understood it beforehand. Leibniz states, “Never ... is there metempsychosis nor transmigration of souls,” but neither is there “perfect death” or “entire destruction” (“Monadology,” pp. 160-1; cf. “New System,” pp. 140-1). Even though Leibniz’s conclusions in the *Monadology* are

⁶⁸ As suggested above, God is the one and only substance that makes up the natural order, or universe (Spinoza, pp. 54-9). Cf. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, “Letter to Molanus (?), On God and the Soul,” in *Philosophical Essays*, translated by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989), p. 242.

⁶⁹ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Monadology and Other Philosophical Essays*, translated by Paul Schrecker and Anne Martin Schrecker (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1965), p. 148.

⁷⁰ Cf. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, “New System of Nature,” in *Philosophical Essays*, translated by Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989), p. 142.

⁷¹ Similarly, Leibniz also explains that “complete generation” (“Monadology,” p. 160) never really happens either. Cf. “New System,” p. 140.

primarily metaphysical in nature, the implications of this understanding of death for practical life are clear enough: do not let death disturb you since it does not really happen anyway.

However, despite a seeming harmony with some of the Epicurean and Stoic sympathies that Spinoza displays, Leibniz apparently refuses to relinquish belief in post-mortem continuation of subjective experience. This makes him an interesting case that does not fit neatly into either the Platonic strain or the Epicurean. Although he may never offer a completely satisfying account of what such continued existence would be like, Leibniz does suggest the possibility of the reduction, at death, of a human to an imperceptible state of hibernation from which it might be resuscitated in order to be held accountable for its previous behavior (e.g. “Molanus,” p. 243; “New System,” p. 141). While Spinoza seems uninterested in propping up any traditional theology, Leibniz still seems to consider himself in the Christian tradition regardless of his rather unorthodox views on the soul and the afterlife.⁷²

The Nineteenth Century Germans. The German-speaking authors discussed here exert more influence on Kierkegaard and Heidegger than perhaps any others considered thus far, which makes sense given their historical and locational proximity to my primary subjects. Beginning with Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), one can see some

⁷² Speaking of those who seem to affirm Christianity (or at least some deistic version of it) while espousing potentially heretical views on death-related issues, consider David Hume’s “Of Suicide” and “Of the Immortality of the Soul” in *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, edited by Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1987), pp. 577-598. Writing in the eighteenth century, and thus not really an early modern thinker, he ought to be mentioned here briefly for several reasons. Hume is both a valuable bridge between the early modern views on death of thinkers like Spinoza and the nineteenth century explosion of attitudes on the topic, and also an indication that the English-speaking world was heading in the same direction as the Continent. But perhaps the primary reasons he belongs in the present account are his explicitly Stoic arguments on behalf of suicide and against the immortality of the personal soul, and his reliance on something like the Lucretian asymmetry argument (Hume, pp. 580, 583, 591-2, 598). However, given the extreme similarity of Hume’s views on these matters to those of the thinkers I have already discussed, it is perhaps unnecessary to present them in detail here.

of the ideas that underlie the existential philosophy of death. Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), who does not hide his contempt for Hegel, but seems to appreciate Spinozist and Leibnizian views, is a far better indicator of the future of the Epicurean strain of the philosophy of death. By the end of the century, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), who was in his youth an adherent of Schopenhauer's pessimism,⁷³ actually takes a direct shot at the Platonic strain, especially as seen in the form of Christian dying to the world.⁷⁴

There are several places that one could focus on in giving an account of Hegel on death, but perhaps the most pertinent for what is to come is his discussion of "lordship and bondage" or the "master/slave dialectic." Although this particular section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is complicated by its political implications, including its significance for later adherents and critics like Karl Marx (1818-1883),⁷⁵ I will attempt to emphasize what it seems to suggest about humanity facing death. Even this specific issue, however, is a contentious one as there is disagreement about how much weight one ought to put on Hegel's claims about facing death, particularly in the relevant section.⁷⁶ But debate about the centrality of death to Hegel's overall project is of little consequence for

⁷³ In one of his earliest works, Nietzsche actually states, "I am one of those readers of Schopenhauer who when they have read one page of him know for certain they will go on to read all the pages and will pay heed to every word he ever said. I trusted him at once and my trust is the same now as it was nine years ago ... I understand him as though it were for me he had written (*Untimely Meditations*, edited by Daniel Breazeale and translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 133). See also, Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ*, translated by R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 39.

⁷⁴ As opposed to Hegel and Schopenhauer who simply seem to offer radical reinterpretations of Christianity.

⁷⁵ In Marx's criticism of the master/slave dialectic, one can see an anticipation of Nietzsche's criticism of Christianity. His early *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* suggests an opposition to the exchange of the material goods we actually do have for the promise of some future ideal goods that we will likely never receive (Karl Marx, *Selected Writings*, edited by David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 84-7). This opposition underlies his famous claim, in *Towards a Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right"*, about religion being the opiate of the people (pp. 63-4).

⁷⁶ For some key discussion in this debate see Alexandre Kojève, "The Idea of Death in the Philosophy of Hegel," in *Interpretation*, vol. 3 (Winter 1973), pp. 114-56; and M. J. Inwood, "Hegel on Death," in *International Journal of Moral and Social Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Summer 1986), pp. 109-22.

my present account of his place in the history of the philosophy of death, given his apparent influence on both Kierkegaard and Heidegger on this topic. What is of some concern at this point, is determining how well Hegel fits into the Platonic/Epicurean dichotomy that I am trying to explain. While some thinkers, such as Alexandre Kojève (who mentions Spinoza and Leibniz as key precursors to Hegel), believe that Hegel's views on death lead him to deny both God's existence and the possibility of post-mortem continuation of subjective experiences,⁷⁷ others suggest that Hegel is right in line with the Christian tradition.⁷⁸

Robert C. Solomon points to three key issues that must be considered in order to grasp Hegel's views on Christianity: the "unhappy consciousness," the "beautiful soul," and "revealed religion" (Solomon, p. 614).⁷⁹ Solomon associates the unhappy consciousness with the self-denial and asceticism of early Christianity (Solomon, p. 620). In order to understand this association it is necessary to see that in *Phenomenology's* development of consciousness up to this point, it has come to be aware of two separate aspects of itself—the temporal/contingent/bodily and the eternal/necessary/soulful (pp. 616-7). It is the paradoxical unity of these opposites that one finds in Christianity, which

⁷⁷ Consider, for example, Hegel's claim that "death is the *natural* negation of consciousness" (G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (PS), translated by A. V. Miller, with analysis of the text and forward by J. N. Findlay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 114).

⁷⁸ For discussion of these issues see, for example, Kojève pp. 120-4; John Burbidge, "Man, God, and Death in Hegel's *Phenomenology*," in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 42, no. 2 (December 1981), pp. 183-96; Inwood, pp. 116-9; Deland Anderson, "The Death of God and Hegel's System of Philosophy," in *Sophia*, vol. 35, no. 1 (March-April 1996), pp. 35-6; and Robert C. Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 580-9.

On Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) as another important precursor to Hegel's views on death, see Piotr Hoffman, *The Human Self and the Life and Death Struggle* (Gainesville/Tampa, FL: University Presses of Florida, 1983), pp. viii, 3, 65. For more on death-related issues in Hobbes' thought, see Mark Murphy, "Hobbes on the Evil of Death," in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 82 (2000), pp. 36-61; and J. G. A. Pocock, "Time, History and Eschatology in the Thought of Thomas Hobbes," in *Politics, Language and Time* (London: Methuen and Co., 1972), pp. 148-201.

⁷⁹ While I find Solomon's account of these sections helpful, his interpretation of Hegel's often obscure text is not beyond reproach. For example, consider J. N. Findlay's alternative interpretation of the unhappy consciousness and beautiful soul (PS, pp. 527, 576-7).

will eventually lead this form of consciousness to despair. After all, it just does not seem to make any sense to claim that the temporal/contingent/bodily aspect with which one tends to associate oneself is related to the eternal/necessary/soulful. That is, it is unclear how there could be anything divine and permanent in a corporeal and mortal human. Thus, consciousness is left with the unhappy realization that there is no way of understanding these aspects of one's nature as compatible. In order to relieve the pain of this apparent incompatibility and connect with the eternal/necessary/soulful, consciousness, with the help of a mediator, is forced to make a series of temporal/contingent/bodily sacrifices (PS, pp. 136-7). Hegel states, "through these moments of surrender, first of its right to decide for itself, then of its property and enjoyment, and finally through the positive moment of practising what it does not understand ... it has ... truly divested itself of its 'I'" (p. 137). In this self-denial, Christianity as unhappy consciousness seems to find a kind of slavish peace, but for Hegel such peace is hardly the highest form of human existence (pp. 137-8). In fact, Christianity as unhappy consciousness is not even the highest form of Christianity.

The beautiful soul, apparently standing in for Jesus of Nazareth (Solomon, p. 624; perhaps one of Solomon's more controversial readings), seems to be another manifestation of the unhappy consciousness (PS, pp. 399-400), but this time less focused on metaphysical difficulties than on moral ones (Solomon, p. 622). The beautiful soul abstains from moral judgment and instead substitutes forgiveness. The claim at the heart of this substitution is that human morality is an uncertain and tenuous enterprise. Humans are constantly faced with paradoxical "damned if you do, damned if you don't" kinds of choices; and there is also the issue of cultural relativism to cloud matters. Given

difficulties like these, the beautiful soul affirms human fallibility and weakness, refusing to make moral judgments (pp. 623-4). While Hegel seems to see some reconciliatory value in Christian forgiveness (PS, pp. 407-8), he is critical of the understanding of Christianity as imitation of Jesus. Within the very humility and unassertiveness that is the goal of the beautiful soul, epitomized by Jesus' allowing himself to be put to death, Hegel sees precisely the sort of self-denial that he has a problem with in Christianity as the unhappy consciousness (PS, p. 577; Solomon, pp. 624-5). Hegel states, "this 'beautiful soul' ... is disordered to the point of madness ... it does in fact surrender the *being-for-self* to which it so stubbornly clings; but what it brings forth is only the non-spiritual unity of [mere] being" (PS, p. 407). In other words, the beautiful soul surrenders itself leaving behind an emptiness that is hardly the highest development of humankind (Solomon, p. 625).

Unsatisfied, Hegel goes on to consider a third understanding of Christianity, in his discussion of revealed religion, which abandons the importance of Jesus Christ (and the imitation of his self-denial by the early Christians) in favor of something like the community of the Holy Spirit (Solomon, p. 626). Hegel states,

this self-revealing Spirit is *in and for itself*, is not elicited by, as it were, unraveling the rich life of Spirit in the community and tracing it back to its original strands, to the ideas, say, of the primitive imperfect community, or even to the utterances of the actual man himself (PS, p. 463).

According to commonly held Christian (and in this case, particularly Lutheran) theological views, it is through the Holy Spirit that one is finally able to find unity with the Divine (Solomon, p. 626)—after the death of Jesus Christ has cleansed humanity, it is possible for God, as this Spirit, to take up residence within human beings (PS, p. 460). Hegel obscures this theological teaching in order to emphasize the realization of the

presence of divinity in humanity, rather than the story of the divinity of a particular man (Solomon, p. 629). This realization marks, for Hegel, the highest form of Christianity, if not the highest form of human being. He states,

the *death* of the divine Man, *as death*, is *abstract* negativity, the immediate result of the movement which ends only in *natural* universality. Death loses this natural meaning in spiritual self-consciousness ... death becomes transfigured from its immediate meaning, viz. the non-being of this *particular* individual, into the *universality* of the Spirit who dwells in His community, dies in it every day, and is daily resurrected (PS, p. 475).

What Hegel seems to be getting at is that Christ's death/self-denial signifies both that Christ is to be cast off, and that the community of humans can find its divinity in itself in the here and now and not in some future heaven (Solomon, p. 629).

But regardless of Hegel's ultimate conclusions about the Christian God and post-mortem existence, it is significant that he emphasizes the importance of, in some sense (or at some stage of development), passing through death in order to live properly or become a proper self.⁸⁰ And it is in his discussion of lordship and bondage just before his account of the unhappy consciousness that this struggle for self-understanding most closely connects with death. We depend on "the other" to know ourselves—"I" am only in the sense that there is a "not-me," and so part of what makes up my existence as "me" is "external" to me. However, it seems that it is only through further distinguishing oneself from the other that a more genuine self-awareness can really take place. In a couple of passages loaded with political implications, Hegel states, "they *recognize* themselves as *mutually recognizing* one another" (PS, p. 112), but

each seeks the death of the other.... Thus the relation of the two self-conscious individuals is such that they prove themselves and each other

⁸⁰ I believe that it is his bizarre combination of both Platonic/Christian and Epicurean ways of dealing with death (i.e. transforming death's meaning into something else, without this something else being a personal afterlife) that makes Hegel's account the closest ancestor of the existential philosophy of death.

through a life-and-death struggle ... they must raise their certainty of being *for themselves* to truth ... it is only through staking one's life that freedom is won (PS, pp. 113-4).⁸¹

By risking one's life trying to bring about the other's death, one hopes to gain independence from the other. But insofar as the other cannot actually be killed so long as I continue to be (I am always in some way dependent on the other), the result of this struggle is merely the situation of winner and loser, master and slave. Interestingly though, as in the case of Christian opposition to worldly flourishing, winning is a kind of losing and losing a kind of winning.

While the master *seems* to have achieved the desired goal of secure and independent understanding of itself (given the subjugation of the claims of the other on this self), the opposite has actually occurred. In winning, the master loses awareness of an integral aspect of itself and falls into a lifeless and shallow relationship to the world, which becomes a collection of mere objects of amusement. To the master, even the slave is simply an object for service and production (PS, pp. 114-7). If there is any value to be found in this situation, according to Hegel, it is not located in the master, but in the slave. Not only does the latter have a more authentic relationship to the objects of the world, because in making and working with these objects one invests oneself in them and encounters them as pieces of oneself rather than as objects of mere amusement (p. 118), but also, the slave continues to encounter the master as other. This encounter manifests itself as fear of death, a profound sense of anxiety that the master has little, if any, access to. Hegel states,

⁸¹ Hoffman is critical of Hegel's account of the life and death struggle in passages like this; he claims both that it is an impossible scenario and that it is unnecessary for individuals to prove themselves in such a way. Nonetheless, Hoffman appreciates aspects of Hegel's account such as its description of the nuances of reality that the slave comes to grasp despite the fact that he or she need not actively risk life in order to face their impending death (Hoffman, pp. viii-ix, 92-103).

its whole being has been seized with dread; for it has experienced the fear of death, the absolute Lord. In that experience it has been quite unmanned, has trembled in every fibre of its being, and everything solid and stable has been shaken to its foundations. But this pure universal movement ... is the simple, essential nature of self-consciousness ... this moment of pure being-for-self is also *explicit* for the bondsman, for in the lord it exists for him as his *object* ... through his service he rids himself of his attachment to natural existence in every single detail (p. 117).

By maintaining the fear in the face of death that the master has tried to eliminate in subjugating the other, Hegel seems to suggest that the slave actually achieves the self-awareness that the master sought in vain. What is more, it turns out that such an understanding is not found in bold assertion of one's self and interests, but rather in detachment from these "selfish" ways of existing in the world. Although this early account of detachment or self-denial does not seem to be Hegel's end goal, something like it seems to be of particular importance to Schopenhauer.

In *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer dedicates an entire chapter to considering diverse philosophical and religious views on death ranging from the treatments of Plato and Epicurus to the approaches of Hinduism and Buddhism.⁸² Schopenhauer believes that philosophy and religion owe their existence primarily to the need for rationalizing comfort in the face of death. Rationality both exposes our mortality, and offers this comforting compensation as well. Following Indian and Epicurean lines of argument, Schopenhauer seeks to diminish the significance of death's certainty in human life by pointing out that it is really of no concern since subjective experience is extinguished in death. He is less disposed to Platonic or Christian attempts

⁸² Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vols. 1-2, translated by E. F. J. Payne (Dover: The Falcon's Wing Press, 1958), v. 2, pp. 465-8.

Interestingly, Schopenhauer suggests that Eastern ideas about reincarnation rely on something like the Lucretian insight (pp. 467-8) that we ought to be as concerned about what came before as what comes after—if we can "demonstrate" an afterlife to ourselves, then why not a pre-life as well (pp. 474-7).

to comfort with the thought that death is an important moment of transition to something better if a life has been lived properly. In fact, Schopenhauer sees these attempts as less rational, and more like examples of wishful thinking without much evidence to support them.⁸³ When the plausibility of such strategies is seriously doubted, as it is in nineteenth century Europe under the subversive influence of socialists and Hegelians,⁸⁴ he claims that their former proponents (European Christians) are left despairing, while those who took reason's true consolation from the beginning are undisturbed (pp. 463-5).

After this initial description of the overall problematic concerning death, Schopenhauer embarks on an account of the "empirical viewpoint" (p. 464), which, by observing nature, discloses widespread anxiety in the face of the supposed greatest of harms—annihilative death. This anxiety, Schopenhauer claims, is due to the fact that all existence is "Will," and "Will-to-life" when manifested in animal form. Fear of death is the innate and irrational, or at least pre-rational, companion to our basic metaphysical being as Will-to-life. Nonetheless, Schopenhauer suggests several arguments, drawing from the ancients, both Western and Eastern, as to why one might attempt to overcome

⁸³ Schopenhauer does not believe in utter annihilation, but he also does not believe in prolonged subjective experience, and is thus quite in line with both Buddhists and Epicureans. He has something like an understanding of the conservation of energy (life force—our true inner nature) and matter. His view of the imperishability of reality might be understood in an Epicurean atomistic/materialist way or even in a Berkeleyan idealistic way, which he seems to believe are really just the same ideas from opposing viewpoints and are reconciled here in some sort of Leibnizian view of eternal natural forces (pp. 464-5, 471-5).

⁸⁴ Here we see criticism of both Hegel and maybe (anticipatorily) Marx, whose *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* was written the same year that the second edition of Schopenhauer's *magnum opus* was published (which included this chapter on death for the first time).

Schopenhauer claims that the nineteenth century misunderstanding of Christianity by its opponents "is evidence of a mental obscurity to be explained only from the fact that the minds of those men, unfortunately like thousands of others at the present time in Germany, are completely ruined and for ever confused by that miserable Hegelism, that school of dulness, that centre of stupidity and ignorance, that mind-destroying, spurious wisdom that people are at last beginning to recognize as such. Admiration of this school will soon be left to the Danish Academy alone; in their eyes, indeed, that coarse and clumsy charlatan is a *summus philosophus*" (p. 616). Interestingly, Schopenhauer was aware of the situation in Denmark in 1844 that so disturbed Kierkegaard.

one's bare nature as will or desire and give up the fear of death. All of these arguments focus on the idea that death is really no harm, even if it is annihilation.⁸⁵ In fact, *a la* Socrates and Voltaire (p. 465), it may well be that death is a good thing, especially if it turns out that death is not total annihilation. And empirically speaking, even though my subjective experience seems to have ended in death, there is no reason to hold that my life force (will) or its general material manifestation⁸⁶ will ever cease “in and with the whole of nature” (p. 473). Since no existence really ceases, from nature's perspective the death of particular individuals means nothing, and the best of us, in a Platonic sense,⁸⁷ who are able to abstract from our narrow perspective to this general one can view death and even life as indifferently as nature does, as a constant cycle of renewal (pp. 472-7).⁸⁸

By moving beyond the merely empirical and instead adopting the perspective of nature in general, Schopenhauer transitions to what he calls the “metaphysical understanding” (p. 484). From this point of view, one sees that the species has relative permanence (and considered broadly enough, absolute permanence) and so more truth or reality than the very temporary particular (pp. 478-83).⁸⁹ It is therefore not in the individual, which misunderstands Will-to-live as fear of death, but rather in the species that true Will-to-live manifests itself, “free from that delusion of the individual” (p. 485).

⁸⁵ He gives an excellent phenomenology of old age and death (pp. 468-9), seen subjectively as the cessation of consciousness—a phenomenon associated below with brain function.

⁸⁶ Schopenhauer speaks briefly of atoms on page 479.

⁸⁷ Although Schopenhauer claims to be in line with Plato on several points, e.g. the reality and permanence of general ideas/forms and some of the views on death offered in the *Apology* (p. 465), he seems less interested in the views on death and the afterlife offered in the *Phaedo*. Thus, despite his Platonic influence, Schopenhauer's views are clearly representative of the Epicurean strain of the philosophy of death, which, as stated, begins with Socrates' consideration of death as annihilation in the *Apology*.

⁸⁸ Schopenhauer points out that this is also the Epicurean view and the view of the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the *Upanishads*—the veil of illusion (thinking particulars are significant) must be pulled back. He even cites Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) on this issue of realizing that our particular subjective perceptions (phenomena) do not give us the true universal reality (noumena).

⁸⁹ In these pages, there is a great deal of Darwin anticipation on the propagation of species, Nietzsche anticipation on eternal recurrence, and Parmenides and Plato references on the unchanging nature of reality despite the illusions of change.

Despite these claims, Schopenhauer does not mean to suggest that the temporary subjective perspective is entirely insignificant when compared with the more permanent objective nature of things. This subject/object division, when properly considered, is nothing more than two ways—“macrocosm and microcosm”—of speaking about the same underlying reality (pp. 485-8). In fact, Schopenhauer points out that it is only through the subjective perspective (representation) that the objective (will) is known at all. Given its participation in this ultimate reality, where the subjective and objective are mere aspects (see also pp. 496-7), even subjectivity can be said to be imperishable.

As evidence of this imperishability, Schopenhauer offers a questionable thought experiment: I can try to think a time when I will not exist, but in my representation of such a time, I am present as the representer. Thus, grasping my own death is difficult if not impossible. Could the world then go on without me? In some sense, the answer is “no” and Schopenhauer cites Spinoza on the issue of our constant feeling of being eternal (pp. 486-7). At this point Schopenhauer embarks on a long cosmological argument to establish the necessity and imperishability of all that is, including me, in which he claims that the Parmenidean insight⁹⁰ about this necessity and imperishability is what underlies the various philosophical and religious doctrines about eternity and rebirth. The one minor exception, of course, is Christianity, which is inconsistent but gets things half right when it posits “the restoration of all things” (p. 489).⁹¹ The inconsistency is that it posits

⁹⁰ Of whatever is, the fifth century BCE thinker claims “that it is and that it is not possible for it not to be” (*A Presocratics Reader*, edited by Patricia Curd and translated by Richard D. McKirahan (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1995), p. 45).

⁹¹ It may appear that the Christian combination of Indian (via Egypt) and Jewish thought improves upon the Jewish doctrine of birth (creation) and death (annihilation), but Schopenhauer points out that at least the Jews were consistent (p. 488).

a beginning, or birth, to go with its notion of no end, but, Schopenhauer points out, something cannot come from nothing.

Besides this inconsistency, Schopenhauer goes on to criticize other aspects of Christian doctrine. He acknowledges that the sort of imperishability of subjectivity that he speaks of is not the sort of prolongation of individuality that some may despair about. Schopenhauer chastises this latter notion for its attachment to derivative and merely instrumental rationality, or consciousness, rather than to true being as Will-to-life.⁹² This selfish attachment leads to a devaluing of both the eternity of existence that comes before our individualizing births and the numerous individualities that might spring up through our lives and deaths. And what good would a prolonged individual consciousness do anyone anyway? After all, Schopenhauer claims, our lives are miserable and to extend them indefinitely would lead to boredom, at best, even in a “better world” (p. 492).⁹³

The primary problem for belief in prolonged individual consciousness can be addressed by turning to Kant’s doctrine of the ideality of time.⁹⁴ On this view, all notions of birth and death rely on the temporal form of our knowledge, and thus death is solely a matter for the phenomenal realm of experience, but not a matter of noumenal reality.

⁹² This consciousness is simply the “product of a brain-function that has arisen for the purpose of mere self-maintenance” (p. 491), so that the individual will survive long enough to serve the primordial Will-to-live. Since consciousness is a mere by-product or tool of basic Will-to-live, why then turn on this fundamental reality in order to obsess over a secondary phenomenon (pp. 490-2, 498-500)?

⁹³ He also points out that the notion of prolonged individuality in another world is often suggested in order to connect our behavior here with reward or punishment elsewhere, but following Kant, Schopenhauer claims that behavior done out of inclination is without merit. Thus, he believes that there is a fundamental ethical flaw in positing an afterlife for the purposes of reward or punishment. For more on the issue of ethics and the afterlife in Kant and Schopenhauer, see Chris Surprenant, “Kant’s Postulate of the Immortality of the Soul,” in *International Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 48, no. 1, Issue 189 (March 2008), pp. 85-98; and Sami Pihlström, “William James on Death, Mortality, and Immortality,” in *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, vol. 38, no. 4, (Fall 2002), pp. 605-28.

⁹⁴ Schopenhauer also sees Kant dissolving Lucretian asymmetry concerns. Since time is part of our temporary subjective self-conscious phenomenal experience, the ultimate objective unchanging noumenal reality is atemporal or eternal. Citing Plotinus, Schopenhauer claims that our subjective sense of finitude is but an apparent reflection of a real eternity. For the noumena, there is no before or after to be concerned about (pp. 479, 484, 489-90).

Because noumena cannot be known, however, there arises something like an antinomy of death—i.e. as far as we can know, we die, and yet so far as what we cannot know is atemporal, death cannot happen. Fortunately for Schopenhauer, noumena are not quite as mysterious as they are for Kant, and thus he can achieve a better account of death that avoids such an antinomy. Since the noumenon is will and, as stated, consciousness (the knowing capacity) is the mere phenomenal representation of this ultimate reality, death can be the phenomenal cessation of consciousness without impacting the will. The problem with philosophy up to this point, Schopenhauer says, is that it has failed to recognize the supremacy of will over the intellect or consciousness. Rather it made the intellect supreme in comparison with the body, not realizing that the intellect is nothing more than the by-product of bodily (brain) function, and both are simple manifestations of will. Schopenhauer believes that once we realize our true nature as will, unaffected by death, our phenomenal attachment to prolonged individuality will fade (pp. 494-500).

In a helpful summary of his chapter thus far, Schopenhauer states that will, or will-to-live, represents itself phenomenally in consciousness as fear of death (a mechanism for self-preservation). But since will in itself does not know anything, it remains blind to the fact that it cannot be extinguished. Conscious knowledge (and the world that it knows),⁹⁵ on the other hand, as another mere passing phenomenal representation of will (albeit a particular one), can be snuffed out, but is capable of realizing that death cannot affect its true being. The fear of death becomes a problem for us when we make the easy, but not insurmountable, error of failing to separate the will “from the intellect that has fallen to its lot through the course of nature” (p. 500).

⁹⁵ It is not the case that my ego perishes while the world goes on without me. The world is, like my ego, a mere phenomenal manifestation of reality that is particular to me. When I go, so does the world I represent, but reality—will—continues on (pp. 500-1).

Schopenhauer concludes his chapter on death with an extended discussion of reincarnation—not of particular souls but of will itself (palingenesis, not metempsychosis). He cites a great deal of historical evidence about the pervasive belief in some form or another of reincarnation. Even the Jews, Muslims and Christians have been known to express certain notions of at least metempsychosis. In the case of Christianity, the notion of original sin represents reincarnation's primal insight about the continued passing on of existence (pp. 504-7, see also 603-8). Schopenhauer's final comments in the death chapter are about death as a release from the determinism of the phenomenal world to the freedom of reality, and about the possibility of eventual release from will-to-live entirely. This is Nirvana or Enlightenment—pure will, not will-to-live (p. 508).

In a later chapter, Schopenhauer considers such release or self-denial in great detail. Abstracting from certain key Christian doctrines, such as the rebirth of a new self once the old one has been done away with, he actually claims that the primal insight in this and all religions is the annihilation of the individual. Schopenhauer states,

Individuality, of course, is inherent above all in the intellect ... but individuality is also inherent in the will, in so far as the character is individual; yet this character itself is abolished in the denial of the will (p. 609).

For not only the religions of the East, but also true Christianity has throughout this fundamental ascetic character that my philosophy explains as denial of the will-to-live, although Protestantism, especially in its present-day form, tries to keep this dark. Yet even the open enemies of Christianity who have appeared in most recent times have attributed to it the teaching of renunciation, self-denial, perfect chastity, and generally mortification of the will ... and they have thoroughly demonstrated that such doctrines are essentially peculiar to original and genuine Christianity ... as it was developed in the writings of the Church Fathers from the kernel of the New Testament (pp. 615-6).

But while, according to these passages, he picks up on the key notion of dying to the self and the world that is found in the Platonic strain of the philosophy of death,⁹⁶ he stops there, seeing death as the ultimate goal—“it would be better for us not to exist” (p. 605). Not only is there no interest in prolonged subjective existence in Schopenhauer, but also, as with the other thinkers in the Epicurean strain, it seems that his primary purpose in dealing with these issues at all is to find tranquility in regarding the subject’s annihilation in death as inconsequential, or even preferable (p. 609). My account of the Platonic strain says, “give up this life for better life;” Schopenhauer says, “give up this life.”

In Nietzsche’s later works, he abandons the pessimism about life that Schopenhauer expresses, and with it the appraisal of Christianity as a noble (however inelegant it may be in its grafting of the Indian to the Hebrew) attempt to get over attachment to life. In fact, it is Nietzsche’s apparent hope for the only life that we have, which leads him to a ferocious criticism of Christianity. *The Anti-Christ* states,

if one shifts the centre of gravity of life *out* of life into the ‘Beyond’—into *nothingness*—one has deprived life as such of its centre of gravity. The great lie of personal immortality destroys all rationality, all naturalness of instinct—all that is salutary, all that is life-furthering ... so to live that there is no longer any *meaning* in living: *that* now becomes the ‘meaning’ of life ... Christianity has waged a war to the death against every feeling of reverence and distance between man and man ... against everything noble, joyful, high-spirited on earth, against our happiness on earth (pp. 167-8).

Of course, Nietzsche is in line with Schopenhauer on the issue of personal immortality, but the reason for Nietzsche’s vehement opposition to it is quite different. While

⁹⁶ Schopenhauer actually refers to nearly every thinker that I included in my earlier discussion when offering his interpretation of Christian self-denial: Plato (p. 608), Jesus Christ (p. 608), Paul (pp. 603-4, 608), Clement (p. 617), Plotinus (p. 612), Augustine (pp. 603-4, 617), Luther (pp. 603, 607), and Pascal (p. 615). He even seems to criticize the rationalistic apologetics that I suggest is at least mildly opposed to proper Christian self-denial (pp. 605, 611).

Schopenhauer rejects the “personal” aspect of such thinking, but appreciates the hatred of life behind it, it is this very hatred that Nietzsche objects to.

Nietzsche’s problems with the aversion to life go back to the very beginning of my account of the Platonic strain of the philosophy of death. Just as Schopenhauer points out, Nietzsche’s *Twilight of the Idols* asserts that, “in every age the wisest have passed the identical judgment on life: *it is worthless* ... Even Socrates had had enough of it” (p. 39). But Nietzsche claims that Socrates’ apparent longing for death in the *Phaedo* is really among the first moments in Western culture’s long history of decadence and weariness. Socrates, who is not blessed with many physical gifts, takes revenge on all that is natural and strong in human existence, even to the point of explaining that the body, the world it inhabits, and life itself are but insignificant, or perhaps evil, imitations of a glorious reality in which all of his own personal shortcomings will be rendered irrelevant (*Twilight*, pp. 39-42). The problem with this sort of idea is that “*the value of life cannot be estimated*. Not by a living man, because he is a party to the dispute, indeed its object, and not the judge of it; not by a dead one, for another reason” (p. 40). Even if Socrates’ attack on life is interpreted more charitably,⁹⁷ Nietzsche’s twist on the famous Epicurean mantra still applies.

Moreover, it applies to other death-oriented strategies, namely the Christian. It may well be the case that there is a “better” world beyond death, but given that we have little reason or evidence to suggest that this is so, it seems like a mixture of bitterness and foolishness to long for such a world at the expense of the one we have. This treatment of

⁹⁷ Nietzsche does consider the possibility, which Plato seems to suggest, that Socrates is best interpreted as a quasi-divine savior who was sent as a corrective for a crumbling Athenian society. Nietzsche’s ultimate conclusion about this possibility is that Socrates’ ‘cure’ is no better than the Athenian ‘disease’ (pp. 42-4). Suicide will take care of my head cold, but I wouldn’t say it returns me to health.

life is akin to gouging out an eye because you are displeased with its lack of x-ray vision, despite the fact that you have no reason to think that you should have this ability or that your actions will improve the situation. Nietzsche states,

the ‘real world’ has been constructed out of the contradiction to the actual world ... To talk about ‘another’ world than this is quite pointless, provided that an instinct for slandering, disparaging and accusing life is not strong within us: in the latter case we *revenge* ourselves on life by means of the phantasmagoria of ‘another’, a ‘better’ life.... To divide the world into a ‘real’ and an ‘apparent’ world, whether in the manner of Christianity or in the manner of Kant (which is, after all, that of a *cunning* Christian—) is only a suggestion of *décadence*—a symptom of *declining* life (p. 49).

Instead of such a declining existence that flees to death out of “sour grapes” and cowardice, Nietzsche—finding a place in the Epicurean strain of the philosophy of death—suggests an embracing of life, regardless of what it brings, and shows a corresponding disinterest in death.⁹⁸ Recalling the lessons of *The Birth of Tragedy* he states, “the tragic artist is *not* a pessimist—it is precisely he who *affirms* all that is questionable and terrible in existence, he is *Dionysian*” (*Twilight*, p. 49).⁹⁹

Death in Twentieth Century Analytic Philosophy. Following these atheistic, non-Christian (or in some cases subversively unorthodox Christian) trends, analytic philosophy seeks a less metaphorical, more precise, or perhaps scientific, understanding

⁹⁸ Although he generally avoids extended discussion of death, choosing rather to focus on life, there is a fair amount of attention paid to death in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (for a discussion of death in earlier writings such as *The Gay Science*, see Graham Parkes, “Death and Detachment,” in *Death and Philosophy*, edited by Jeff Malpas and Robert C. Solomon (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 86-97). In sections such as “On the Preachers of Death” and “On Free Death,” Nietzsche comes to many of the same conclusions that one finds in his later work about those who preach death (“or ‘the eternal life.’ It’s all the same to me”) out of fear or bitterness at life (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, edited by Adrian Del Caro and Robert B. Pippin and translated by Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 31-2). Rather, he approvingly states, “the consummated one dies *his* death, victorious, surrounded by those who hope and promise. Thus one should learn to die; and there should be no festival where such a dying person does not swear oaths to the living! To die thus is best ... free for death and free in death ... do not allow your death to be a slander against mankind and earth” (pp. 53-5). Nietzsche even suggests that Jesus might have “learned to live and to love the earth” (p. 55) if he had just lived longer.

⁹⁹ In terms of Platonic imagery, one might see Nietzsche as rejecting the allegory of the cave—there may be value at the bottom that is missed by always trying to get out (pp. 42-3).

of the language we use in discussing death. For example, death is often said to be the greatest harm, so the question becomes “is this a mistaken view (as Epicurus claims), or if not, what are the ways that we can understand the harmfulness of something that we will likely never experience?” It will not be possible to provide a complete overview of the diverse work on death in this largely English speaking tradition, but it should be possible at least to point out some key trends.¹⁰⁰ Although it is probably accurate to say that this tradition builds on the thought of previous English speaking philosophers like Hobbes and Hume, it is certainly true that analytic philosophy really begins to find itself in the work of thinkers like logical positivist A. J. Ayer (1910-1989)¹⁰¹ and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951). The latter is another native German speaker (actually influenced by Schopenhauer) who briefly points out that “death is not an event in life: we do not live to experience death. If we take eternity to mean not infinite temporal duration but timelessness, then eternal life belongs to those who live in the present.”¹⁰² There is certainly an almost Nietzschean emphasis on the value of this life to be found in this passage, but there is an even more familiar voice present as well. To get to the true roots of the analytic response to death, one must go all the way back to the Epicurean position.

Even though Epicureanism is not totally opposed to belief in divinities, the fact that Epicurean divinities are not actively involved, or interested, in human existence

¹⁰⁰ There are, however, three recent books that provide a more thorough overview: Christopher Belshaw, *Annihilation: The Sense and Significance of Death* (Stocksfield, UK: Acumen, 2009); Ben Bradley, *Well-Being and Death* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009); and Steven Luper, *The Philosophy of Death* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹⁰¹ Although an atheist, whose views were influenced by both Hume and the Vienna Circle logical positivists, Ayer actually had a near-death experience toward the end of his life that raised some doubts for him about his formerly firm belief that there is no post-mortem continuation of his subjective experience (A. J. Ayer, “My Death,” in *Language, Metaphysics, and Death*, 2nd ed., edited by John Donnelly (New York: Fordham University Press, 1994), pp. 226-36).

¹⁰² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, translated by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge and Keegan and Paul, 1961 [1921]), p. 87 (6.4311). Just before this he echoes Schopenhauer, stating, “so to at death the world does not alter, but comes to an end” (6.431).

leaves the door open for the appropriation of Epicurean views on death by contemporary atheistic philosophers. After all, divinities that do not impact worldly affairs and promise no afterlife, good or bad, represent little threat to an atheist worldview. It would therefore cause little surprise to discover that analytic thinkers are attracted to Epicurean ideas, particularly given that the present scientific account of death also maintains, with certain obvious differences (e.g. no soul atoms), that death is just the relatively rapid and permanent dispersal of atoms that used to be “mine.” However, by surveying the analytic landscape, one quickly discovers that the Epicurean take on death does not enjoy great popularity. Patrick Stokes claims that this lack of popularity is due to the simple fact that “there is something profoundly counterintuitive” and “indigestible” about the Epicurean position (2006, pp. 387-8). Nonetheless, it is important to notice that analytic philosophers certainly do not ignore this position.

It might be fair to suggest that for these thinkers Epicurus establishes the foundation of the only reasonable way to look at death. That is, while his conclusion may be problematic, arguing that death is the end of one’s individuality—and at least raising the question as to why death should matter to the living given that, in a sense, death is not even part of living—is a good way to begin dealing with this topic. Regardless of their ultimate opinion of the Epicurean position, many analytic philosophers find these claims worthy of attention,¹⁰³ which is certainly not the case for the rarely considered views on death of the Platonic/Christian tradition. Despite the tone of my discussion thus far, I do not mean to suggest that these contemporary thinkers only approach Epicurean views on

¹⁰³ In response to Steven Luper-Foy’s “Annihilation,” Stephen Rosenbaum points out that, “however inane and absurd he may feel Epicurus’s reasoning was, he, like numerous others, takes the argument seriously enough to devote considerable intellectual effort to its defeat” (“Epicurus and Annihilation,” in *The Metaphysics of Death*, edited by John M. Fischer (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 293).

death with semi-respectful criticism. As it turns out, Epicurus is not without his defenders among analytic philosophers. It will therefore be helpful to provide a brief description of some of the ideas of both the detractors and the defenders.¹⁰⁴

The main reason why the Epicurean position on death is so unpalatable, according to thinkers such as Thomas Nagel and George Pitcher, is that, contrary to certain common feelings, it does not allow for the possibility that death or post-death events can harm an individual that has died since the individual is no longer around to experience such harm. Nagel, however, believes that one need not experience something as harmful in order for actual harm to be done. He considers the possibility that “there are ... evils that consist merely in the deprivation or absence of possible goods, and that do not depend on someone’s *minding* that deprivation” (Nagel, p. 64). As an example of such evil or harm, Nagel offers up the loss of a good reputation. He famously points out that a perfectly content individual might still be harmed when slandered even if this individual is unaware that such slander has taken place (p. 65). If Nagel is right about harms that one does not experience as such, then it seems possible that the dead, who do not experience at all, can still be harmed.

But before declaring the Epicurean problem solved, it must first be determined when a dead individual might be harmed. After all, it would seem a bit odd to say that a corpse lying in the ground is harmed by anything going on above ground. It may, of course, be true that a corpse could be “harmed” in the same sense that any physical object could be damaged, but this is certainly not the sort of harm to a person that is in question

¹⁰⁴ One issue that I will regrettably not be able to address in great detail here is the analytic response to Lucretius’ asymmetry argument. For an example of a response to this argument, see Thomas Nagel, “Death,” in *The Metaphysics of Death*, edited by John M. Fischer (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 67.

here (p. 67). In response to the problem of when the dead are harmed, Pitcher suggests that death has a bizarre sort of retroactive effect (in the sense of “making true” what was perhaps previously indeterminate) on the now concluded life of the individual.¹⁰⁵ In the sense that the individual was engaged in various projects that were left incomplete by the event of death, or even in the sense that the deceased had an interest in the well-being of loved ones who have fallen on hard times since his or her death, it seems possible to ascribe to the once living individual harm in the form of frustration of projects and interests like these (Pitcher, pp. 165-7). In other words, with all due respect to both Aristotle and Epicurus, one’s own death, and what happens afterwards, can seriously affect the happiness of one’s own life (pp. 163-4, 8).

Among those “analytics” who are not so quick to deny the Epicurean position, I highlight Jeffrie G. Murphy and Stephen E. Rosenbaum. Murphy attempts a resurrection of what he describes as the pagan view of death. This is the Epicurean and Stoic view that seeks to discredit the fear of death as irrational, passed down through Montaigne and Spinoza, in whom Murphy claims to find the more nuanced view that while irrational fear of death is a problem, not all fear of death is irrational. Setting Murphy aside for a more detailed discussion in what is to follow, I turn briefly to Rosenbaum, who offers a dedicated defense of Epicurus from the assault of thinkers such as Nagel. After taking some questionable liberties in his restatement of what Epicurus is really up to, Rosenbaum goes on to conclude that Nagel is guilty of making the common mistake of

¹⁰⁵ George Pitcher, “The Misfortunes of the Dead” in *The Metaphysics of Death*, edited by John M. Fischer (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 166-8. I realize that Pitcher disavows the retroactivity of backwards causation, but I am not using the word “retroactive” in this problematic sense. My non-problematic use will become clear when I discuss a similar notion in the work of Kierkegaard.

failing to distinguish between dying, death, and the dead.¹⁰⁶ Of course, because Epicurus does not make this distinction either, it takes some argument on Rosenbaum's part just to explain that Epicurus is primarily interested in discussing the state of being dead (pp. 122-3). While I believe that Rosenbaum does not give enough attention to the Epicurean rebuke (which I have already found problematic) of those who agree that being dead is the end, and yet still find their impending lack of life disturbing,¹⁰⁷ his problem with Nagel is sufficiently and clearly dealt with. Regardless of his other claims about Nagel, I believe that Rosenbaum quite simply (and understandably) cannot wrap his mind around the notion of a harm that cannot be experienced.¹⁰⁸ Although I cannot continue at this point to describe the debate that rages on between thinkers like Rosenbaum and Pitcher, it should at least be clear by now that the Epicurean position is an important part of the ground on which the analytic battle over death takes place.

Having approached the present in my account of the Epicurean strain, I will now transition from the discussion of some key moments in the history of the philosophy of death to a consideration of the work of two thinkers who represent an important alternative to this bilateral history. Before moving on to Kierkegaard, however, I feel it

¹⁰⁶ Stephen E. Rosenbaum, "How to Be Dead and Not Care: A Defense of Epicurus," in *The Metaphysics of Death*, edited by John M. Fischer (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 134. While dying is technically the living process that leads to the moment of death, which separates the dying from the dead, the term "death" is often used ambiguously to discuss all three of these issues (pp. 120-1). This is an ambiguity which Heidegger seems to revel in.

¹⁰⁷ Rosenbaum does discuss this issue briefly, but he seems to dismiss it as irrelevant to the main thrust of Epicurus' argument (pp. 132-3). With no confusion in my use of terms, I take it that Epicurus' claims about why our living status as dying should not disturb us are at least as important as his claims about why the state of being dead is nothing to us.

¹⁰⁸ Rosenbaum astutely points out that Nagel's slander analogy (on which his argument relies heavily) fails because while it shows how one might be harmed without experiencing it, the idea of being harmed after death is different because one *cannot* experience it (pp. 126-7). I am less impressed by Rosenbaum's response to Nagel's critique of the asymmetry problem (pp. 128-9), because I tend to agree that there is some sort of life-oriented difference between pre-natal and post-mortem nonexistence: prior to my birth there never had been a "me" to be disturbed about not existing, but by the time of my death, there had been a "me" to be disturbed. I realize that Rosenbaum sees no need to describe the situation in this way, but it does seem like a perfectly accurate asymmetrical description from a certain point of view.

necessary to reiterate a couple of caveats about the preceding portrayal of the Platonic and Epicurean strains of the philosophy of death. To be clear, both strains recommend a change in attitude towards death (from the typical attitude of fear), but one makes this change by trading fear of death for potential misery in life and hope for something better later on, and the other by trading fear of death for relative tranquility now and no hope for a future life.

While I will suggest in the coming chapters that Kierkegaard and Heidegger offer a sort of “new” compromise between these two strains, I do not mean to discount the various ways that these strains already interact and influence each other throughout history. For example, it would be foolish to ignore the significant “ancestral” relationships I describe between Plato/Socrates and the Stoics, the Stoics and the early Christians, or Christianity and various nineteenth century thinkers. My goal in offering this account of two fairly distinct strains on the specific topic of death is to describe as thoroughly as possible the two prominent philosophical attitudes that I see uniquely merged in the work on this topic by Kierkegaard and Heidegger. I should also point out, once again, that my account is by no means intended to be exhaustive. There is just too much written by philosophers on the topic of death, and more written every day, to offer the definitive historical account of death in philosophy. Thus, while I have surely omitted someone deserving of attention, or simply not paid enough attention to a thinker deserving of more, I take this chapter to be a sufficient description of the ground on which the existential philosophy of death stands.

Chapter 3: Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy of Death

It is no secret that Kierkegaard's work is deeply entrenched in the Christian tradition, especially in its protestant form, and that in this regard he is indebted to thinkers such as Augustine and Luther on a wide array of topics. He is also quite clear that when it comes to the issues of death and the afterlife, broadly construed, any account one might offer would be incomplete without some encounter with the pre-Christian pagan thinkers Socrates and Epicurus.¹⁰⁹ Before exploring the particular roots of Kierkegaard's philosophy of death, however, it is necessary to have some familiarity with the nature of his way of dealing with death. Thus, this chapter will consist of two major sections: the first will trace a consistent project related to death throughout Kierkegaard's authorship, while the second will explain how this project can be viewed as a kind of blending of the insights of the Platonic and Epicurean strains of the philosophy of death. It is in this latter section that it will be possible to consider what Kierkegaard specifically appropriates and rejects from the thinkers in these two strains, including how he might, and in some cases actually does, respond to these various thinkers.

¹⁰⁹ Of course, he does not say this explicitly, but I do not think that such a statement is out of line given the prominent roles that these thinkers play in Kierkegaard's discussion of death related issues.

I mention Socrates here rather than Plato because Kierkegaard seems to draw a more significant distinction between them than I am usually comfortable doing. For example, while he is often intrigued by how Socrates lived his life, he is less impressed by Platonic metaphysics (e.g. JP, v. 3, p. 527/SKS 23, p. 187; v. 4, pp. 212-3/SKS 22, p. 377). As I have already explained, I am not sure if it is appropriate to associate Plato's character "Socrates" closely with the historical figure. I am, furthermore, a bit wary of distinguishing between when this character speaks the words of the historical figure and when this character speaks on behalf of Platonic metaphysics. For an example of Kierkegaard's willingness to make such a distinction, see *The Concept of Irony* (CI), translated and edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 66/SKS 1, pp. 125-6.

Kierkegaard's Death Project

The name Kierkegaard is practically synonymous with death. Before dying at a relatively young age himself, he endured the deaths of all but one of his immediate family members. In fact, his father believed that he was doomed to see all of his seven children die before they turned 34 (Christ supposedly died at age 33) because he had cursed God as a young man ... and he almost did (only Søren and Peter surpassed this age) (JP, v. 1, p. 511; v. 5, pp. 140-1, 555/SKS 27, forthcoming). Given these facts, it is beyond ironic that the name Kierkegaard is identical with the word for “graveyard” in Danish. It should come as no surprise, then, that a thinker so well acquainted with mortality would have a great deal to say about death. Indeed, various issues pertaining to death come up constantly throughout Kierkegaard's writings. For example, in one of his earliest works, the pseudonymous *Either/Or* (1843), he introduces the reader to the *Symparankromenoi*, the “Fellowship of the Dead.”¹¹⁰ And in some of his last works, such as *For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourself!* (1851), he describes his notion of Christian dying to the world in detail. This section will provide a thorough description of some of the many ways that death comes up in Kierkegaard's authorship. This turns out to be a very complicated matter, however. It is not that his claims about death are somehow hard to follow when taken in isolation, but rather, it is not immediately clear if or how these

¹¹⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or* (EO), vols. 1-2, translated and edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), v. 1, p. 137/SKS 2, p. 137. Interestingly, in a journal entry from 1838, before writing any books (and five years before the publication of *Either/Or*), Kierkegaard considers what sort of work he would like to produce and says the following: “I was just searching for an expression to designate the kind of people I would like to write for, convinced that they would share my views, and now I find it in Lucian: *παράνεκροί* (one who like me is dead), and I would like to issue a publication for *παράνεκροί*” (JP, v. 5, p. 115/SKS 18, p. 107).

claims are meant to be integrated with each other.¹¹¹ I intend to suggest an account of such integration by following a train of thought through several key texts in which death is most prominent.¹¹²

¹¹¹ An expanded version of the biographical and authorial issues mentioned in this paragraph can be found in the "Introduction" to *Kierkegaard and Death*, edited by Patrick Stokes and Adam Buben (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, forthcoming 2011).

¹¹² Because Julia Watkin is perhaps the only author who has previously attempted to provide a comprehensive account of Kierkegaard's various texts that deal with death (although Theunissen has high praise for Eva Birkenstock's dissertation, *Heisst philosophieren sterben lernen?* (Freiburg and München: Alber, 1997), which deals with the connections between a few of these texts on the topic of death (Theunissen, p. 326)), it seems worth offering a brief assessment of her account (I choose to focus on Watkin's more recent work on this topic rather than her dissertation both because the former relies heavily on the latter, and because I want to deal with the most up-to-date articulation of her view). Watkin claims that a major theme in Kierkegaard's authorship is the critique of what she calls the "immanentist" view of existence (Julia Watkin, "Kierkegaard's View of Death," in *History of European Ideas*, vol. 12, no. 1, edited by Anne Loades and George Pattison (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1990), p. 65). In all its forms, this view focuses on existence in the here and now of the natural order of things, and does not put much stock in some sort of transcendent afterlife (pp. 66-70). Thus, Watkin seems to make something like the distinction I suggest between the Platonic and the Epicurean strains in the philosophy of death, where the former overlaps with what she calls the "transcendentalist" view and the latter with the immanentist. But she then goes one step further and includes Kierkegaard in the former category. While I find much of her account quite helpful, I have some concerns.

First, one benefit of my historical account is that it allows one to see nuances in making this sort of distinction that I think Watkin overlooks. She is right to emphasize the importance of beliefs related to the afterlife, but perhaps there is value in paying more attention to the way death is allowed to penetrate this life. Of course, one might suggest that death's role in one's life depends upon one's views about the afterlife, and this is no doubt part of the story, but there may be other reasons for wanting, or not wanting, death to play an active role in one's life. With Watkin's rigid distinction she seems to miss the fact that Plato's allegedly immanentist view of death and the afterlife has, for all practical purposes, a great deal more in common with the transcendentalist view of the early Christians than with the more obviously immanentist view of the Epicureans. But, to be fair, although Watkin relies on Kierkegaard's questionable distinction between Socrates and Plato, she does allow that the former but not the latter marks a movement toward the transcendentalist view (Watkin, pp. 68-9). I am afraid, however, that there is no escaping my criticism of her dichotomy when it comes to the categorization of Kierkegaard and, briefly, Heidegger (p. 65). She may well be right that Kierkegaard believes in something like a transcendent afterlife while Heidegger does not, but this is far from being the most important factor in determining their places in the philosophy of death. Once the notions of "dying to the world" and "methodological atheism" are properly characterized, as they soon will be, one will see that these two thinkers are not so easily distinguished (although this issue will have to be dealt with in greater detail in the appropriate place, see, for example, Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the World* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991), p. 312). Because Kierkegaard does not allow his transcendentalist views a place of prominence and Heidegger methodologically sets such issues aside, concerns about the afterlife almost fade into irrelevance as one realizes that they are offering a radical, "living with death," alternative to the options of the traditional philosophy of death. If one wants to make a list of who believes in heaven and who does not, then Watkin's account might be sufficient, but it simply is not nuanced enough to characterize accurately the philosophy of death, or Kierkegaard's place in it.

A related complaint about Watkin's account is that it does not get at the heart of what Kierkegaard is up to. She is absolutely correct that Kierkegaard is critical of something like the immanentist position, but as I have been suggesting, this criticism does not necessarily come from the opposite camp. Rather, at the risk of splitting hairs, one might say that both camps are under attack from his notion of "dying to the world."

Death in the Early Writings. Before discussing the most significant texts in Kierkegaard's death project, there are several early texts that must be mentioned due to their relevance for specific death-related issues that come up throughout his authorship. For example, the earliest inklings of the relevant train of thought appear in his first published book—a review of Hans Christian Andersen's *Only a Fiddler*—entitled *From the Papers of One Still Living* (1838).¹¹³ In criticizing Andersen's inability to express a consistent "life-view" in his writing, Kierkegaard states, "the life-view proper commences first ... at the hour of one's death" (EPW, p. 77/SKS 1, p. 33). What he seems to mean by this is that rather than consisting of the simple sum of worldly experiences or ideas that one has had, a proper view on one's life is the sort of retroactive or "backward" understanding of oneself from the perspective of death that is able to show a consistency to the self despite the distracting variety of such experiences (pp. 76-8/pp. 31-4). Kierkegaard is accusing Andersen of trying to grasp personalities while caught up in the bustle of life, which is difficult and maybe impossible to do, instead of adopting the settled perspective from which it might be possible to take in what a life is all about.¹¹⁴

Although these ideas are not yet fully developed, particularly when it comes to explaining

Watkin certainly discusses such dying (pp. 73-4), which leads to a new way of life (that is still not necessarily a transcendent afterlife), but I believe that this dying, rather than simply an anti-immanentist platform, must be acknowledged as the deeper concern that binds Kierkegaard's dealings with death together from the very beginning. There is no doubt that Kierkegaard espouses belief in the afterlife as Watkin points out, but he is also critical of those who would focus excessively on this belief and forget that what is essential for existence is not whether something happens to the dead but finding the proper way of living as though already dead. I am sure that Watkin grasps what is essential according to Kierkegaard (p. 73), but it seems that in describing his views on death it would be best to leave behind the constraints of the traditional binary opposition that Watkin relies upon.

¹¹³ Already the title indicates some familiarity with mortality, and it may well be in reference to the deaths of both his father (which concluded the previously-mentioned disastrous 1830s for the Kierkegaard clan) and his mentor Poul Martin Møller during the few months leading up to the book's publication. See George Pattison, "'Cosmopolitan Faces': The Presence of the Wandering Jew in *From the Papers of One Still Living*" in *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vol. 1, edited by Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999), p. 109; and Søren Kierkegaard, *Early Polemical Writings* (EPW), translated and edited by Julia Watkin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. xxiv.

¹¹⁴ See Watkin's helpful "Historical Introduction," especially EPW, pp. xxx-xxxii.

how one adopts such a perspective, even at this early stage Kierkegaard is clearly trying to work out “a dead and transfigured personality” as opposed to a “many-angled, worldly, palpable one” (p. 82/p. 37).

In both his dissertation, *The Concept of Irony* (1841), and the six sets of upbuilding discourses that were published in conjunction with the various early pseudonymous works (1843-1844), Kierkegaard attempts to fill out this understanding of death’s relevance in life. In the former, he does so through a detailed examination of death’s “retrospective” (CI, p. 64/SKS 1, 124) view on life described in some of Plato’s dialogues; and in the latter, he does so by focusing more on a properly Christian understanding of death. Although there is much in these texts that relates to Kierkegaard’s philosophy of death—the criticism of Platonic/Socratic “dying to” that will be discussed in the next section is particularly important—perhaps the most thoroughly considered issue is the proper relationship to the afterlife.¹¹⁵ As Tamara Monet Marks points out, despite his obvious appreciation for the Socratic subjective appropriation of the afterlife in *Irony*, Kierkegaard is concerned about the absence of any existential angst in Socrates’ attitude. While he is willing to live as though there will be an afterlife, taking all of the necessary precautions in this life to prepare himself (e.g. doing what the gods ask of him), Socrates is not especially disturbed by what he sees as the very “live” possibility that there will be no afterlife whatsoever. The Christian, however, is meant to be much more concerned about his or her post-mortem situation, and Marks claims that it

¹¹⁵ Among several issues that Kierkegaard mentions but does not yet discuss in detail here (see “At a Graveside,” where they are taken up in much greater detail) are death’s equality, the certainty of death, the uncertainty it causes, and the atemporal urgency or anxiety that arises when thinking properly about this uncertainty (Søren Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* (EUD), translated and edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 184-6, 272, 280/SKS 5, pp. 188-91, 267, 274). He also speaks briefly of what is involved in Christian dying to the world (EUD, p. 325/SKS 5, p. 315), which, as already mentioned, he will not fully describe until several years later.

is this passionately faithful hope for what comes next, rather than the Socratic “take it or leave it” attitude, that Kierkegaard ultimately sides with.¹¹⁶

While Kierkegaard works on this explanation of the proper Christian relationship to the afterlife under his own name, his pseudonyms take up death-related issues from other perspectives. For example, Julia Watkin argues that the occasional quips about death in the first volume of *Either/Or*¹¹⁷ are an attempt to show how death seems to sap the meaning from life when viewed from an aesthetic perspective. In the second volume, Judge William responds by trying to describe how death can actually give meaning to life from an ethical point of view, in which one learns how to “die to” one’s selfishness in order to participate in something more permanent than the soon to be dead worldly self (Watkin, pp. 66, 71-2). One might suggest that Johannes de Silentio, the author of *Fear and Trembling* (1843), has a similar goal in mind when he claims that “infinite resignation is the last stage before faith, so that anyone who has not made this movement does not have faith, for only in infinite resignation do I become conscious of my eternal validity.”¹¹⁸ Using Abraham as the model for such faith, Silentio explains that it is only in the willingness to give up (or “die to”) everything one holds most dear in life that one can become ready to trust in the possibility that God will provide (FT, pp. 20, 46-7/SKS 4, pp. 116-7, 140-2). One way of putting this might be that one must give up the worldly attachment to the notion that one gives one’s own life meaning so that one can allow all

¹¹⁶ Tamara Monet Marks, “Kierkegaard’s Understanding of the Afterlife,” in *Kierkegaard and Death*, edited by Patrick Stokes and Adam Buben (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, forthcoming 2011). As one can tell by looking at the positive assessment of Socrates on this topic in *Postscript*, Kierkegaard’s relationship to both Socrates and the afterlife are extremely complicated issues. Fortunately, Marks’ paper is a helpful guide in dealing with all of this.

¹¹⁷ These are scattered about the “Diapsalmata” and “The Unhappiest One” sections in EO, v. 1, pp. 19-43, 219-30/SKS 2, pp. 27-52, 213-23.

¹¹⁸ Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling and Repetition* (FT and R), translated and edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 46/SKS 4, p. 140.

such meaning to be bestowed by God. When one's meaning comes from the right relationship to God, then it no longer relies on the transient temporal self, but is rather grounded in the eternal.¹¹⁹

In Vigilius Haufniensis' *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844) one can see, among many other things, an attempt to explain this intersection of eternity with temporality in "the fullness of time"¹²⁰ of "the moment" (*øjeblikket*).¹²¹ This explanation and its perhaps less than obvious connection with death, which should become more apparent in Kierkegaard's subsequent works that really emphasize death, will prove to be enormously influential on Heidegger's understanding of these matters. Thus, Haufniensis' discussion of futurity, possibility, freedom, repetition, and anxiety will be quite helpful in the next chapter. For now, there is just one brief death issue here worth drawing attention to, again largely for its possible impact on Heidegger's account. In a long footnote to his

¹¹⁹ In Abraham's case (and as progenitor of the Israelites and paradigm for the way they are supposed to relate to God, his is the prototypical Hebrew case), worldly blessings are not simply the product of his labor or the fruit of his loins, but the gifts of an eternal God for whom all things are possible.

¹²⁰ This is the Christian notion of the kairological (the Greek *καιρος* originally means something like "the appropriate time"), as opposed to chronological, sense of time, which suggests that an otherwise insignificant chronologically temporal moment or event might take on atemporal or eternal significance (e.g. *1 Corinthians* 15:51-55; *Galatians* 4:4). The prime example is the life of Christ. From an ordinary horizontal "timeline" understanding of time (say, along the x-axis of a Cartesian coordinate plane), the birth, actions, and death of a man are unremarkable (having only some finite y-axis vertical value), but given the eternal repercussions of Christ, as God, being born, acting, and dying, any particular point on the line has infinite vertical value. Similarly, human lives and actions can take on such significance through the proper relationship with Christ.

¹²¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety* (CA), translated and edited by Reidar Thomte in collaboration with Albert B. Anderson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 90/SKS 4, p. 393.

This connection that I am tracing between these early works is no accident. It might be appropriate to see Kierkegaard's early pseudonyms as offering consistently intensifying perspectives on death and the eternal: the more developed the awareness of eternity, the more death matters. This is a theme that will continue to develop through *Postscript*, where death in its different senses becomes more and more significant as the complex Christian sense of the eternal is approached in "Religiousness B." This account of a progression is also helpful for understanding the relationship between *Anxiety* and the late pseudonymous work, *The Sickness unto Death*. The phenomenon of anxiety is merely a mental or psychological malady since Haufniensis has not yet made the "qualitative leap" (CA, pp. 91-2/SKS 4, pp. 394-6) to understanding humans as eternal spirit that is necessary for interpreting this malady as the spiritual sickness (or living death) of despair, or (Christianly speaking) sin.

discussion of the moment, Haufniensis suggests that there might be degrees of death, and of the anxiety related to death. He states,

death declares itself more terrible the more perfect the organism is ... the higher man is valued, the more terrifying is death. The beast does not really die, but when the spirit is posited as spirit, death shows itself as the terrifying. The anxiety of death therefore corresponds to the anxiety of birth (CA, p. 92/SKS 4, pp. 395-6).

Not only is he implying that physical passing away is somehow distinct from meaningful death, but he is also pointing out that unless humanity is understood in the proper way, human existence runs the risk of having no more meaning than that of animals, whose births and deaths seem relatively insignificant. This proper way of understanding human existence is a central topic in Kierkegaard's later work.¹²²

Death in the Middle Writings. Although clearly not far from his mind early on, between 1845 and 1847 death becomes a major theme in Kierkegaard's work. The first text to express Kierkegaard's death project in great detail is the final discourse from *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*, entitled "At a Graveside" (1845).¹²³ Here

¹²² There are surely other brief dealings with death in Kierkegaard's early writings that have some relevance for his later discussions of the topic. For example, Johannes Climacus introduces the image of a dance with the thought of death in *Philosophical Fragments* (Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments and Johannes Climacus* (PF), translated and edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 8/SKS 4, p. 217), an image that comes up again as soon as "At a Graveside." (For a thorough examination of Kierkegaard's use of this metaphor, see Edward F. Mooney, "Transfigurations: The Intimate Agency of Death," in *Kierkegaard and Death*, edited by Patrick Stokes and Adam Buben (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, forthcoming 2011)). As it is not my goal, however, to become bogged down in exploring every minor usage of the imagery of death in Kierkegaard's authorship, I take it that the preceding consideration of these few early texts is a sufficient indication of the full-blown philosophy of death that he is about to unleash.

¹²³ Interestingly, Kierkegaard's pseudonymous *Stages on Life's Way*, which also contains three major sections and is published the day after *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*, contains a brief discussion of the common use of the language of death to describe failed erotic love that is similar to what is said in *Repetition* (both discussions of this topic are by the pseudonym Constantin Constantius). Cf. Søren Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way* (SLW), translated and edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 31, 53-5/SKS 6, pp. 36, 55-7; and R, pp. 181-2/SKS 4, pp. 52-3. For consideration of the relationship between the three parts of *Stages* and the three discourses, including the connection of Constantius' discussion in "In Vino Veritas" (the first part of *Stages*) with "At a Graveside," see SLW, p. xi; and Andrew J. Burgess, "The Relation of Kierkegaard's *Stages on Life's Way* to *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*," in *International Kierkegaard*

Kierkegaard explains, “the thought of death gives the earnest person the right momentum in life and the right goal toward which he directs his momentum.”¹²⁴ But how exactly does an “earnest” (*alvorlig*) person approach death and realize the proper momentum and goal? To begin with, the earnest individual must focus primarily on his or her own death. Rather than treating death simply as “the human condition,” Kierkegaard believes that its most important lessons cannot be had unless “you are thinking it as your lot” (TDIO, pp. 73, 75/SKS 5, pp. 444, 446). Failure to focus on one’s own death can lead one into the “mood” (*stemning*) of objectivity.¹²⁵ While in such a mood, one might well think about death often, but not in the way that can have any meaningful impact on one’s own life according to Kierkegaard. By thinking regularly of one’s own death, it is possible to avoid thinking of death in only general terms.

Kierkegaard also states that, “death is indefinable—the only certainty, and the only thing about which nothing is certain” (p. 91/p. 460).¹²⁶ While one’s death will certainly come, it is uncertain when it will happen or what, if anything, it might mean for the one who has died. Kierkegaard claims that failure to keep the certainty of death in mind might lead to the mood of excessive sorrow at the loss of a loved one. This is the mood of an individual who, shocked at an unexpected death, becomes so distraught that they are unable to adequately address their responsibilities (TDIO, p. 75/SKS 5, p. 446).

Commentary, vol. 11, edited by Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), pp. 261-285.

¹²⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions* (TDIO), translated and edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 83/SKS 5, p. 453.

¹²⁵ Kierkegaard’s use of *stemning* in “At a Graveside” is reserved for inappropriate ways of thinking about or approaching death. He does not consistently use this term in this pejorative sense in his other works.

¹²⁶ Michael Theunissen claims, “the whole issue turns on remembering the certainty of the ‘that’ and the uncertainty of the ‘when’” (p. 322). I agree with Theunissen that the certainty and the uncertainty of death are indispensable aspects of thinking earnestly about death. However, I think that Kierkegaard emphasizes other aspects as well because he believes that even if one grasps the certainty and the uncertainty of death, it is still possible for one to fall into an inappropriate mood towards death. I do not mean to claim that Theunissen fails to realize the significance of these other aspects, as this claim would be false; I simply want to explain my departure from his organization of the relevant issues.

By focusing on the certainty of death, one knows, genuinely knows, that such losses will occur, and thus, no death is so unexpected that it can cause such obstructive distress. In the case of the failure to keep the uncertainty of death in mind, Kierkegaard claims, among other things, that one might fall into a mood of procrastination. This is the mood in which one believes for any number of reasons (youth, health, etc.) that one will continue to live for a long time (pp. 79-80, 91/pp. 449-51, 460). Thus, such a person puts off thinking about death. When one truly realizes the uncertainty that death could happen at any moment and in any way, one understands that the thought of death cannot be so easily set aside for another occasion.

Kierkegaard continues on to make several claims about having an appropriate fear of death, including the following: “earnestness does not scowl but is reconciled with life and knows how to fear death” (p. 88/p. 457). Without this knowledge, it seems that there are two ways to fear death inappropriately. The first is the insufficient fear of death, which Kierkegaard believes might lead an individual to fear life more than death (pp. 81-2/pp. 451-3). If death has no foreboding character, then one might be quick to choose it as an option in the face of difficulties in life (pp. 86-8/pp. 455-7). On the other hand, if one has an excessive fear of death, then one might be unwilling to risk one’s life in the ways that are necessary for the sake of dealing with the responsibilities of existing (pp. 83-4/pp. 453-4). By walking some sort of a middle path between these two extremes of the inappropriate fear of death,¹²⁷ one might be able to realize the life that Kierkegaard has in mind when he recommends the earnest thought of death.

¹²⁷ It might seem mildly inappropriate to imply that Kierkegaard is suggesting some kind of Aristotelian moderation with respect to how much one ought to fear death. Rather, Kierkegaard seems to want to maintain death’s full frightening nature while simultaneously pressing forward into life towards death. Even though there is no appropriate degree of fear here, I find the terms “insufficient” and “excessive”

Pointing out that “death itself produces a scarcity of time for the dying” (p. 84/p. 453), Kierkegaard believes that the earnest individual—the one who keeps in mind the aspects of thinking about death described above and thereby grasps his or her own precarious position—will feel a profound sense of urgency. This sense of urgency is the momentum, the “retroactive power in life” (p. 99/p. 466) that invigorates it by seeping backwards into one’s existence from one’s impending death, when appropriately related to. With no time to waste, one learns not to spend it on “vain pursuits,” or “accidental” (or “incidental”) matters (pp. 75, 96/pp. 446, 464), which demand results in the external world. Results take time, and as Kierkegaard has pointed out, time cannot be guaranteed. Instead, he thinks that one should embrace one’s temporal uncertainty and make concerns that do not require a specific amount of time the priority. These non-time-dependent concerns are not about what one accomplishes in the external world, but about how, internally, one does whatever one is doing (p. 96/p. 464).¹²⁸ By emphasizing the issue of how one is going about whatever life activities one is engaged in, Kierkegaard’s thought of death leads one to “die to” (as he will eventually describe it) the vain “what” concerns that the world is so focused upon.

Kierkegaard certainly has a great deal more to say about the earnest thought of death in “At a Graveside.” For example, he goes on to explain how the thought of death’s equality helps one “to renounce worldly comparison” (TDIO, p. 91/SKS 5, p. 459) with others. But Kierkegaard’s dealings with physical passing away and related concerns are

helpful for understanding two common ways that one can fail to fear death properly. And the middle path must be understood as existing in the tension between fearing death and living life, and not as the golden mean of fear. Kierkegaard states, “let death keep its power ... but let life also keep the right to work while it is day” (p. 84/p. 454). I am grateful to Andrew Burgess for helping me to clarify this point.

¹²⁸ Here one can see how Kierkegaard connects thinking about death with the kairological sense of time Haufniensis discusses in *The Concept of Anxiety*. Focusing on “how” concerns that have no necessary temporal duration might allow one to give eternal significance to whatever one is doing temporally.

not exhausted by this short discourse. In fact, he discusses various matters related to death in other works that must now be considered. In several of his subsequent writings, Kierkegaard spends a great deal of time pondering the suffering, persecution, and martyrdom of early Christians, the remembrance of the deceased, and the figurative martyrdom of “dying to the world,” which will turn out to be the end goal and crown jewel of Kierkegaard’s writing on death.¹²⁹

Concluding Unscientific Postscript to “Philosophical Fragments” (1846) is unique among the key texts (from this middle period) in the train of Kierkegaard’s thought that I am tracing both in its breadth of scope and in the fact that it is written under pseudonym. Its author, Johannes Climacus, following up on related work in his *Philosophical Fragments* (1844), attempts to offer an account, from the perspective of an outsider, of “climbing” up the steps involved in becoming a Christian.¹³⁰ He does this, however, with numerous detours along the way, including various discussions of topics that often initially seem only loosely related to the primary purpose of the book. Among these sorts of discussions is a short reflection on death and immortality in the context of the alleged difficulty of becoming subjective (CUP, v. 1, pp. 165-77, 201-2/SKS 7, pp. 153-63, 184-5). The consideration of death makes several of the same points that are

¹²⁹ The account of Kierkegaard’s life with the earnest thought of death in “At a Graveside” that I have presented here is largely based on the more complete account that I offer in “Living with Death: Kierkegaard and the Samurai,” in *Kierkegaard and Japanese Thought*, edited by James Giles (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 141-58.

¹³⁰ This brief and general statement of the nature of *Postscript* does not express two key issues, which need not be thoroughly dealt with here, that seriously complicate matters in this text overall. First, it seems that there is no final step here for humans, but rather a reckless, blind leap made possible only by the grace of God, who provides “the condition” for such a leap (this important issue will be dealt with later in this chapter); and second, at the end of the book Climacus revokes what he has written so as to leave behind no ladder for others to use to follow him (Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to “Philosophical Fragments”* (CUP), vols. 1 and 2, translated and edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), v. 1, pp. 576, 618-21/SKS 7, pp. 523, 561-4). On the first point, see Marie M. Thulstrup, “The Significance of Mortification and Dying away (to),” in *Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana Edenda Curaverunt*, vol. 2, edited by Marie M. Thulstrup (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzels Boghandel, 1978), p. 162.

made in “At a Graveside” concerning issues such as the certainty and the uncertainty of death, but Climacus’ primary interest seems to lie in a further refinement of that discourse’s discussion of appropriating the thought of death (pp. 166-7/pp. 154-5). In a slight redirection, Climacus now suggests that by determining how an individual relates to death, it is possible to detect how developed this individual is subjectively. But just like the graveside discourse, he maintains that the certain uncertainty of death, thought subjectively (and constantly), will manifest itself in the lives of those who think it, not just in their words, but in their actions and attitudes as well (pp. 169-70/pp. 157-8).

In a similar vein, Climacus takes up the proper subjective approach to the “indefiniteness” (p. 176/p. 163) of the afterlife. Despite the best efforts of Hegelians and Christian apologists to establish on objective grounds that there will be an immortal afterlife of some kind or another, Climacus believes that these sorts of objective accounts miss the point. Rather than trying to remove the indefiniteness surrounding one’s own personal immortality by dissolving the concerns of particular individuals in arguments about the abstract eternity of humanity,¹³¹ Climacus claims that this indefiniteness cannot really be avoided and instead ought to be conscientiously preserved. Because the question that most people ask is about what *I*, in particular, should believe comes after *my* own death and about how *I* should live in the light of this belief, a detached objective answer about the nature of the universe or the general permanence of things is no answer at all and the indefiniteness remains. The task then, *a la* Socrates, is to determine how to live

¹³¹ Although these sorts of issues will come up again when considering Kierkegaard’s reaction to the thinkers who provide such arguments, perhaps a brief explanation here will be helpful. Marks sees Climacus making a distinction between “revisionist” (e.g. Hegelian) arguments that dodge the issue of personal immortality by offering up some kind of less specific eternity or permanence, and “traditional” (i.e. apologetic) arguments that omit the importance of an individual’s struggle with faith in his or her own immortality by attempting to demonstrate the necessity of immortality in general given the nature of the universe (Marks, forthcoming).

given that this uncertainty cannot be gotten rid of once and for all (CUP, v. 1, pp. 201-2/SKS 7, pp. 184-5). Like keeping one's own impending death in mind at every moment, keeping focused on the pressing issue of one's own insecurity with respect to one's own personal immortality is to practice subjectivity—to focus on self-development. This activity can occupy an individual for a lifetime, leaving no chance for speculation about abstract issues that are of no essential concern for a particular existing individual.¹³² But why is Climacus so interested in attaining the subjective perspective with the help of the encounter with death and immortality, and what does this perspective have to do with the overall project of explaining what it is to become a Christian in *Postscript*?

Climacus points out early on that subjectivity must be cultivated because there is no objectively becoming a Christian (e.g. CUP, v. 1, pp. 16, 129-30/SKS 7, pp. 25, 121-2). Unfortunately, according to Kierkegaard, and Climacus as well, Christians in mid-nineteenth century Copenhagen have apparently come to hold the view that one's Christianity can almost be demonstrated objectively by looking at a map. This is a view in which everyone is a Christian “of sorts as a matter of course” (p. 586/p. 533) simply by virtue of being born (and baptized with no awareness) in Christendom. It is due to the rise of this effortless, diluted version of Christianity that Kierkegaard believes one ought to consider the difficult plight of early Christians. In a journal entry from 1850, he states,

in the early days people were almost surprised to find that life had a few joyful days ... because they understood that this life was ordained to suffering, also suffering for Christianity. Nowadays Christianity has come

¹³² David D. Possen, “Death and Ethics in Kierkegaard’s *Postscript*,” in *Kierkegaard and Death*, edited by Patrick Stokes and Adam Buben (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, forthcoming 2011); Marks, forthcoming. In this paragraph I have attempted to synthesize the accounts of both Marks and Possen on the issue of immortality in *Postscript*, since I believe that they each focus on different key aspects of what Climacus is up to. What I do not attempt to deal with here is the disagreement between them on the significance of Climacus’ use of Socrates as the model for the subjective relationship with immortality. This is an issue that is best put off until the next section when I can properly address Kierkegaard’s complicated dealings with Socrates.

to mean gratifying oneself in a purely secular manner and clinging tightly to this life (JP, v. 4, p. 399/SKS 24, pp. 38-9).

In order to free oneself from such an attachment to life, Climacus, in tune with this journal entry, suggests that one must learn to accept as the early Christians did that the life of a true Christian is necessarily one of suffering (CUP, v. 1, p. 458/SKS 7, p. 416). Such suffering in its most extreme form is the martyrdom that the early Christians faced, but it also takes the shape of the figurative martyrdom of “dying to immediacy” and to “oneself” (pp. 460-3, 472, 597-8/pp. 418-21, 428, 542-3). Dying in this sense is really a series of sacrifices that an individual must make in order to be a true Christian. These sacrifices, which will be described in greater detail in Kierkegaard’s later texts, may include giving up worldly goods, bodily security, and comfort, but they certainly include “the martyrdom of faith (to crucify one’s understanding)” (p. 559/p. 508). This loss of understanding, which is contrary to all objective demonstration, is necessary for subjectively appropriating what turns out to be the core belief of Climacus’ (and as we shall see, Kierkegaard’s) Christianity¹³³—the paradoxical mortality of the immortal God as demonstrated by death on the cross (p. 578/p. 525).

Following *Postscript*, Kierkegaard’s unshielded Christianity begins to come to the fore as his work turns in a new direction.¹³⁴ Although *Upbuilding Discourses in Various*

¹³³ I do not mean to suggest that there is no important difference between Kierkegaard’s signed works and those written under the pseudonym Johannes Climacus. For example, I think Kierkegaard’s overall relationship to the thought of Hegel is quite a bit more complicated than Climacus’. But their views on the nature of Christianity are often so similar, that it is not necessary to make any real distinction here. Nonetheless, I continue to credit the claims that are made in *Postscript* to Climacus because Kierkegaard asks that his “poetically actual” pseudonymous authors be cited for the claims they make (CUP, v. 1, pp. [625, 627]/SKS 7, pp. 569-71).

¹³⁴ The reasons for this new direction need not be delved into here in any detail, but there has been a great deal written on both Kierkegaard’s intention to discontinue his writing after *Postscript* in order to become a rural pastor, and also on his change of heart in the light of his struggle with *The Corsair* periodical. For a brief overview of these issues, see the Hongs’ “Historical Introduction” to Søren Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* (UDVS), translated and edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. ix-xiv. Although I see a fairly smooth transition from

Spirits (1847), one of the first texts in the so-called “second authorship,” does not deal extensively with death, there are a few passages worth mentioning as a way of transitioning to the more direct explicitly Christian works after 1846. Much of what is said about death in this text comes in the first discourse, commonly known as “Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing.” Here one can see both a hint of the way Kierkegaard will suggest using one’s relationship to the dead to help cultivate an untainted self-understanding (UDVS, pp. 54-5/SKS 8, pp. 164-5) in *Works of Love* (1847), and also a still further development of the lessons of urgency described in “At a Graveside.” In fact, Kierkegaard’s discussion of the ever-present “eleventh hour” in “Purity” uses much of the same rhetoric of that earlier discourse to point out that death permeates life from beginning to end,¹³⁵ and undermines ordinary temporal sensibilities of what is essential by discrediting the notion that we still have some time left (UDVS, pp. 14-6/SKS 8, pp. 129-31).

Unlike “Graveside” though, this discourse provides a little more description of precisely *what* we are to do in the dire situation of the eleventh hour—we are to take responsibility for our guilty past in regret and move freely into the future with repentance before God. This merging of one’s temporal guilty self with what Kierkegaard describes as “repentance in the sense of freedom with the stamp of eternity” (p. 16/p. 131), can only happen in the urgent fullness of time of the eleventh hour. In other words, fearful

the first to the second authorship on the topic of death and dying to the world, there are some more jarring differences on other topics. Most notably, the use of the “indirect communication” of pseudonymity—pseudonyms are no longer the driving force in Kierkegaard’s writings, and when they are used (e.g. H.H. and Anti-Climacus), they tend to inhabit perspectives explicitly entrenched in Christian dogma.

¹³⁵ See also “Part Two” of *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, entitled “What We Learn from the Lilies in the Field and from the Birds of the Air,” pp. 202-3/SKS 8, pp. 298-9. Kierkegaard will also make basically the same points in a later discourse (1849) on lilies and birds (Søren Kierkegaard, *Without Authority* (WA), translated and edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 28, 40-1/SKS 11, pp. 32, 44-5).

and humble repentance in the face of impending doom can give eternal significance to one's otherwise unremarkable worldly existence by liberating one's actions from the shackles of purely temporal meaning (pp. 15-6, 152-3/pp. 130-1, 248-9). Like *Postscript's* crucifixion of the understanding, both "Purity" and "Part Three" of *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, "The Gospel of Sufferings," describe this liberation in terms of "dying to" temporal/worldly sagacity (pp. 113-4, 257/pp. 215-6, 355). As an example of being dead to worldly interpretation of otherwise worldly events, consider Kierkegaard's example of the martyr on his way to die who only sees and speaks to God in gratitude, despite being paraded before a malicious crowd (p. 336/pp. 426-7).

One can find a similar connection of martyrdom and dying to worldliness in the "Christian deliberations"¹³⁶ of *Works of Love* where Kierkegaard states,

Let us now think of a Christian witness. For the sake of this doctrine, he ventures into battle with the powers that be who have his life in their hands and who must see in him a troublemaker—this will probably cost him his life. At the same time his contemporaries, with whom he has no immediate dispute but who are onlookers, find it ludicrous to risk death for the sake of such fatuousness. Here there is life to lose and truly no honor and admiration to gain! Yet to be abandoned in this way, only in this way to be abandoned, is Christian self-denial! (WL, p. 196-7/SKS 9, pp. 195-6).

Not only does this passage describe a genuine readiness for martyrdom, and express the sort of dying to worldly understanding and selfhood that has come up throughout the key texts of the middle period (a dying that will become absolutely crucial in his later writings), but it also displays an explicit Christian sharpening (now with a vested interest in becoming Christian not seen in *Postscript*) of matters that pertain to death. Since the

¹³⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love* (WL), translated and edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 3/SKS 9, p. 11.

bulk of the death discussion found in this text takes place in a short discourse entitled “The Work of Love in Recollecting One Who Is Dead,” it will be most worthwhile to focus on the ways that death shows up there.

Like the other dealings with death of this period, there is a moment here in which Kierkegaard once again revisits one of the themes from “At a Graveside”—earnestness in this case. In discussing the earnestness of death, however, Kierkegaard adds a further condition that he does not make especially clear in the graveside discourse (although, I will eventually attempt to explain that it is present even there). He states, “to the earnestness of death belongs that remarkable capacity for awakening, this resonance of a profound mockery that, detached from the thought of the eternal, is an empty, often brazen, jest, but together with the thought of the eternal is just what it should be” (WL, p. 353/SKS 9, p. 347). Although he does not make explicit what he has in mind when he speaks of the eternal here, it seems reasonable, based on the overall character of the book and other claims made on the very same page, to assume that Kierkegaard is referring to the relationship with the Christian God. What he seems to mean then, is that thinking of death must be done for the purpose of grasping one’s relationship with God if it is to have any more value than not thinking of death at all. Thinking of death on its own is just another transient, temporal, worldly activity that can add no more meaning to an already transient, temporal, worldly life, but this is not so when the lasting significance of something eternal is involved. And for a Christian, involvement with God is only possible through a proper connection to Christ, especially to his death and resurrection. Thus, the alleged earnestness of death is really only superficial unless it somehow reflects

Christ's example. It would seem that Kierkegaard is now openly attempting to Christianize the contents of "At a Graveside."

In accord with his now openly Christian project of dealing with death, Kierkegaard's primary goal in the discourse on the deceased is the description of Christian love for the dead. Although there is much about this description that need not be discussed here, it must be noted that, in the end, the discourse is less concerned about actual practices, such as burial, visiting the cemetery, and speaking of loved ones long gone, than it is about using love for the dead to teach oneself how to love the living properly.¹³⁷ Kierkegaard states,

the work of love in recollecting one who is dead is thus a work of the most unselfish, the freest, the most faithful love. Therefore go out and practice it; recollect the one who is dead and just in this way learn to love the living unselfishly, freely, faithfully. In the relationship to one who is dead, you have the criterion by which you can test yourself (WL, p. 358/SKS 9, p. 351).

Perhaps most important of all of the ways that death comes up in *Works of Love*, for the sake of understanding Kierkegaard's death project, is this idea that loving the dead helps individuals do away with their selfish worldly love for others. This sort of love, Kierkegaard explains, is the preferential love of particular individuals, such as lovers and friends, over the rest of humanity. Kierkegaard goes on to explain that this sort of love is contrary to Christian love, which is meant for all of humankind, even one's enemies (p.

¹³⁷ Although this application of proper love for the dead is undeniably significant in this discourse (and there has been much written on this topic—e.g. by M. Jamie Ferreira and Pia Søltoft), there is also much that could be said simply about loving the dead themselves. Despite very different approaches, Jeremy Allen and Patrick Stokes both offer compelling explanations as to how one can love the dead given that there is seemingly no one there to love. See Jeremy Allen, "The Soft Weeping of Desire's Loss: Recognition, Phenomenality and the One Who is Dead in Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*," in *Kierkegaard and Death*, edited by Patrick Stokes and Adam Buben (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, forthcoming 2011); and Patrick Stokes, "Where are the Dead? Earnest Imagination and Remembrance," in *Kierkegaard and Death*, edited by Patrick Stokes and Adam Buben (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, forthcoming 2011).

19/p. 27). Because the dead can be absolutely nothing for the living, there is nothing about the dead that one can prefer. Thus, loving the dead is practice for loving non-preferentially, or unselfishly. Loving the dead as Kierkegaard recommends helps people “die to” their worldly attachments to others.

Death in the Late Writings. If the writings of the middle period are characterized by a general emphasis on death and its significance for Christian dying to the world, then the writings from 1848 and beyond can be described as a further intensification of such dying. The first text from these later writings to manifest such intensification is *Christian Discourses*. Although the same issues about death’s certainty and uncertainty that come up in the early upbuilding discourses and the one at the graveside are still present here, Kierkegaard now speaks openly of the Christian use of the thought of death.¹³⁸ And as before the purpose of this thought is what Kierkegaard often emphasizes in this text—getting over the attachment to all things earthly, human, and temporal in order to open oneself to Christ and the eternal life that comes with faith in him. Kierkegaard states, “if there is no next day for you, then all earthly care is annihilated . . . then either you are dying or you are one who by dying to temporality grasped the eternal, either one who is actually dying or one who is *really* living” (CD, p. 72/SKS 10, p. 81).¹³⁹ What this passage suggests is that so long as one is bound to the perishable things of a rapidly decaying existence, one participates in death, but one is said to be truly alive by participating instead in something that can never die—the resurrected divinity (who, as a

¹³⁸ Søren Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses and The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress* (CD), translated and edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 27, 257/SKS 10, pp. 39, 270.

¹³⁹ In this passage one can again see Kierkegaard’s emphasis on the atemporal or kairological sense of the fullness of time of the present moment. Tomorrow has no significance for one who comes into the right relationship with the eternally present meaning of a Godly life. See also *The Lily in the Field and the Bird of the Air*, where Kierkegaard briefly discusses the irrelevance of death for those who receive Christ’s promise of “*this very day*” as seen in *Luke 23:43* (WA, pp. 44-5/SKS 11, pp. 47-8).

human, established the pattern for passing from death to life) (CD, pp. 208, 258/SKS 10, pp. 216-7, 271). Furthermore, since the world is a place of death, in order not to die with it in one sense one must die to it in another. That is, one must sacrifice a certain way of life that is deemed insignificant and temporary¹⁴⁰ so as not to rule out the meaningful and everlasting Christian way of life (pp. 17, 184, 242-3/pp. 29, 194-5, 248-9). While Kierkegaard's most helpful explanations of this strange distinction between death and death seem to be found in the writings that follow *Christian Discourses*, the importance of death in the latter sense—dying to the world—shows up quite explicitly throughout this work of 1848.

Even Kierkegaard's discussion of the afterlife in *Christian Discourses* seems to emphasize aspects of dying to the world. In "There Will Be the Resurrection of the Dead, of the Righteous—and of the Unrighteous," he takes issue with the prevalence of demonstrations of the immortality of the soul in his day. As in *Postscript*, this issue is one that is essentially not meant to be fodder for abstract speculation. Unlike the discussion in Climacus' text, however, which follows the Socratic argument from ignorance, this explicitly Christian treatment takes another approach and faithfully affirms that personal immortality is a given.¹⁴¹ By ruling out human demonstrations of immortality as

¹⁴⁰ Kierkegaard states, "a person must die to finitude (to its pleasures, its preoccupations, its projects, its diversions), must go through this death to life ... and realize how empty is that with which busyness fills up life, how trivial is that which is the lust of the eye and the craving of the carnal heart" (CD, p. 172/SKS 10, p. 183). If Kierkegaard doesn't emphasize the good news of the rebirth on the other side of such death, it is because he understands himself as speaking to a world that has grown soft, taking the joyous benefits for granted. He focuses on the nastiness of the "death first" because he thinks nineteenth century Copenhageners need to hear it. There is more on this topic to come, particularly in connection with Luther.

¹⁴¹ As is often the case when one of Kierkegaard's works deals with the afterlife, a discussion of Socrates is not far behind (CD, pp. 218-9, 241-2/SKS 10, pp. 226-7, 247-9). Once again Marks provides a helpful consideration of Socrates' place, in this case relative to the discussion of the afterlife in *Christian Discourses*. However, while I agree with her account of Kierkegaard's assessment of Socrates, I think she may overstate her case when it comes to contrasting this text with *Postscript* on the importance of the objective fact of immortality (Marks, forthcoming). There is surely some difference between the two works on this point, but given that they both go out of their way to emphasize the uneasy subjective issue of how

somehow missing the point of simply believing, Kierkegaard is already suggesting a dying to worldly “shrewdness” (*Snildhed*) (CD, p. 213/SKS 10, p. 221) that is necessary for grasping Christian doctrines in the way that is appropriate to them. But beyond this sort of dying, which will be described in greater detail in *For Self-Examination*, Kierkegaard identifies two other worldly bonds related to immortality that must be broken.

The first concerns the notion that faith in immortality is something like a longing for a continuation of one’s worldly existence. This notion displays both an unchristian attachment to the world that must be overcome and a misunderstanding of one’s task with respect to one’s immortality. In order to clear up any misunderstanding, Kierkegaard, following Paul, equates immortality with judgment and claims that the only issue related to immortality that a Christian need be concerned about is how he or she stands with respect to the fact that there will be a judgment of the dead (pp. 205-9/pp. 214-8). With the task of being concerned about how one will be judged laid out, Kierkegaard turns to the second worldly bond that must be broken. This bond is the human “sureness” (p. 210/p. 218) that convinces so-called Christians that a positive judgment is secure. While such security may have a place in worldly affairs, as Climacus already points out, the task with respect to immortality is one that lasts a lifetime, and as such, it cannot be completed in life in the way that would be necessary for worldly security. Kierkegaard states, “is there not bound to be unsureness in fear and trembling until the end ... *my* salvation is not yet decided” (p. 212/p. 220). Without such a decision, Kierkegaard believes that a

one relates to immortality (see especially CD, p. 244/SKS 10, pp. 250-1), the difference is perhaps rightly overshadowed by the similarity. There is little doubt that Kierkegaard believes in something like a traditional Christian afterlife and ultimately eschews Socratic ignorance on this topic (in *Christian Discourses*), but in neither text is the objective issue allowed to play a prominent role.

Christian must do away with the human tendency to become comfortable and satisfied with one's efforts.

For a more comprehensive list of problematic human tendencies one must turn to *The Sickness unto Death* (1849), one of Kierkegaard's most famous works. It might not be immediately clear how *Sickness* fits into the present account of Kierkegaard's overall death project. Based on the title alone though, it is clear that this text deals with death in some sense; and in fact, it deals with the other sense of death that *Christian Discourses* suggests while emphasizing dying to the world. This treatment of death, in addition to its pseudonymity, serves to distinguish *Sickness* from Kierkegaard's other late dealings with the topic.

Sickness is not directly involved in the further explication of dying to the world, but is rather wholly absorbed in describing the state of individuals who seem in need of such dying to the world. The sickness unto death is nothing more than a human's state of despair, which Anti-Climacus, the book's pseudonymous author, will later identify as sinfulness when interpreted Christianly.¹⁴² He states, "in the whole book, as the title indeed declares, despair is interpreted as a sickness, not as a cure.... Thus, also in Christian terminology death is indeed the expression for the state of deepest spiritual wretchedness, and yet the cure is simply to die, to die to (*at døe, at afdøe*) the world" (SUD, p. 6/SKS 11, p. 118). Since, in the discussion of death that surrounds *Sickness* Kierkegaard is mostly interested in what this passage calls "the cure," it might seem possible to leave Anti-Climacus' thorough discussion of the ailment of spiritual death (by

¹⁴² Despair is basically failing to be a proper self, and sin is failing to be a proper self while having some sense that God demands such selfhood of a person (Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death* (SUD), translated and edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 13, 77-9/SKS 11, pp. 129, 191-3).

worldly association) out of my account of Kierkegaard's project of explaining dying to the world. However, it would be strange to focus on the discussion of a cure without some awareness of a disease, and so, I must acknowledge that there is a strong relationship between *Sickness* and my overall account of Kierkegaard on death. Nonetheless, without directly referring to despair or sin, one might suggest that I have already made an effort in this account to describe the despair-like symptoms (e.g. pp. 31, 45, 58-9, 112/pp. 147, 160, 173-4, 223-4) that dying to the world is up against ("what"-concerns, objectivity, preferential love, selfishness, etc.). Given that the dead way of life that one must die to has not been neglected in my account thus far, and the fact that the association of death and despair in *Sickness* is a topic that has been well-covered recently,¹⁴³ it seems appropriate to return to the explanation of the more beneficial sense of living death.

The discussion of dying to the world in *For Self-Examination* is the culmination of the train of thought (i.e. Kierkegaard's death project) that I have been tracing through Kierkegaard's works. It is in this text that Kierkegaard offers his most thorough account of this sort of figurative martyrdom by laying out the difficult task of serving Christ through imitation. Since Christ died on the cross for mankind, each and every individual who would be a follower of Christ must follow him in death.¹⁴⁴ But even if it is unlikely

¹⁴³ Both George Connell's "Knights and Knaves of the Living Dead: Kierkegaard's Use of Living Death as a Metaphor for Despair" in *Kierkegaard and Death*, edited by Patrick Stokes and Adam Buben (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, forthcoming 2011), and Podmore's "'To die and yet not die': Kierkegaard's Theophany of Death" (forthcoming) offer excellent discussions of the metaphor of despair as a zombie-like living death. Podmore's account, which largely agrees with mine, even continues on to consider how "dying to" is a treatment for this condition.

¹⁴⁴ Anthony Imbrosciano, "Inevitable Martyrdom: The Connection Between Faith and Suffering in Kierkegaard's later writings," in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 36, 1994, p. 105.

that one will find violent biological death on the Christian path,¹⁴⁵ what matters most is that, if by the grace of God one is able to stay on it, one approaches the sort of death Christ suffered and becomes as good as dead, at least so far as the ways and wisdom of the world are concerned.

Kierkegaard, echoing *Luke* 14:26,¹⁴⁶ claims that, “in a certain sense ... love of God is hatred toward the world.”¹⁴⁷ Returning to the real beginning of my account, Kierkegaard’s earnest thought of death in “At a Graveside” surely suggests this sort of

¹⁴⁵ Concerning physical martyrdom, it should be mentioned that Kierkegaard actually believed for a time that he would be martyred for his statements against the church (Andrew J. Burgess, “Kierkegaard, Moravian Missions, and Martyrdom,” in *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vol. 18, edited by Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007), p. 191). In his late works he offers two apparently conflicting views on the appropriateness of martyrdom while writing under two different pseudonyms. As H. H. he writes, “no individual human being or no individual Christian dares ... to let others become guilty of putting him to death for the truth” (WA, p. 88/SKS 11, p. 92). On the other hand, as Anti-Climacus he seems to claim that martyrdom is representative of the highest sort of Christianity (Søren Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity* (PC), translated and edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 226-7/SKS 12, pp. 221-2). For a more detailed account of these issues see my “Background for a Comparison: Kierkegaard and the Samurai,” in *Kierkegaard and Religious Pluralism: Papers of the AAR Kierkegaard, Religion, and Culture Group, and the Søren Kierkegaard Society*, edited by Andrew J. Burgess (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007), pp. 25-8.

¹⁴⁶ See FT, pp. 73-5/SKS 4, pp. 165-7, where Silentio discusses the meaning of this passage in detail. Drawing a distinction between Cain and Abraham, Silentio points out that God does not demand actual hatred, but a willingness to give up even what you love the most in the world. Søltoft sees a similar interpretation of hatred toward the world in *Christian Discourses*, especially in the discourse “‘See We Have Left Everything and Followed You; What Shall We Have?’ (Matthew 19:27)—and What Shall We Have?” (Pia Søltoft, “Is Love of God Hatred of the World?,” in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2007*, translated by Bartholomew Ryan and James Weber (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), pp. 65-79). However, in her eagerness to distance Kierkegaard (and Christianity) from the usual connotations of “hate,” she might make too many concessions to some of the worldly bonds (e.g. those between family members) that I have argued Kierkegaard, both in *Christian Discourses* and elsewhere, believes must be loosened or done away with altogether (Søltoft is right, though, to point out Kierkegaard’s emphasis on humility, honesty, and grace, given the fact that humans might not be capable of giving up worldliness on their own). To be clear, I do not take Kierkegaard to advocate something like asceticism or monasticism, but if there are to be Christian relationships with those in the world, I take Kierkegaard to claim that they must not be worldly relationships. Søltoft points out that just as God loves his creation, love is the proper way for a Christian to relate to this creation. What she seems to overlook is that in its corrupt and fallen state, renunciation is the proper way to relate to the creation; hatred is in some sense the proper way to love God. Matters in the world are backwards after the fall, and redemption, life through death, is necessary. Participation in Christ’s death, which is a snub of all aspects of worldliness, must come before any truly loving relationship with others is possible. Although these ideas are present throughout Kierkegaard’s works, they are perhaps most forcefully stated in his late journals (1851-1855) (e.g. JP, v. 3, pp. 279, 281-2, 287-9, 294-5, 297, 302/SKS 24, p. 330; 25, pp. 60-2, 313-4, 329-30, 370-2; 26, pp. 342-4; 27, forthcoming).

¹⁴⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination and Judge for Yourself!* (FSE and JFY), translated and edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 85/SKS 13, p. 105. Cf. CD, pp. 184, 242-3/SKS 10, pp. 194-5, 248-9.

hatred, but such thinking on one's part, even if coupled with the thought of the eternal as *Works of Love* recommends, cannot bring about a properly Christian dying to the world. In this sense, dying to the world is only possible through God's grace.¹⁴⁸ Kierkegaard states, "the life-giving Spirit is the very one who slays you; the first thing the life-giving Spirit says is that you must enter into death, that you must die to . . . in order that you may not take Christianity in vain" (FSE, pp. 76-7/SKS 13, p. 98).¹⁴⁹ Only with God's help can an individual die to the world and avoid making his or her Christianity into what "At a Graveside" understands as a worldly "what" concern. That is, only through divine assistance can one entirely overcome the impulse to view the new life in Christ that comes after this dying in "immediate continuation" with the previous worldly life;¹⁵⁰ decisively breaking with the worldly self and its corresponding concerns about what it has or has not done to make itself Christian is necessary for accepting the new life based on faith in God's mercy alone (FSE, pp. 76-7, 81/SKS 13, pp. 97-9, 102). Thus, dying to the world even includes abandoning the selfish notion that one has the ability to use thoughts of death to complete one's Christian training on one's own, despite the usefulness of such thoughts along the way.

In fact, as it turns out, Kierkegaard is opposed to any sort of aspiring Christian's dependence on him or herself. He explains,

the apostles were indeed dead, dead to every merely earthly hope, to every human confidence in their own powers or in human assistance. Therefore,

¹⁴⁸ See the first footnote in my discussion of *Postscript*.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. JFY, p. 98/SKS 16, forthcoming. Although *Judge for Yourself!* is intended to be the "Second Series" of *For Self-Examination* and was written shortly after, it was not published until years later for reasons that Kierkegaard himself provides in an appended note of 1855 (see the "Historical Introduction" to FSE and JFY, pp. xi-xiii; and JFY, p. 215/SKS 16, forthcoming). While none of this information is particularly relevant for my present purposes, the close connection in content of these two works is worth mentioning. Despite the fact that dying to the world is not dealt with in such great detail in the later work, there is much similarity between the two on this topic.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. CD, p. 205/SKS 10, pp. 214-5.

death first; you must first die to every merely earthly hope, to every merely human confidence; you must die to your selfishness, or to the world, because it is only through your selfishness that the world has power over you; if you are dead to your selfishness, you are also dead to the world (p. 77/p. 99).¹⁵¹

As seen here, dying to the world and to selfishness includes dying to all human powers, assistance, and confidence. Among the abilities that Kierkegaard believes are, Christianly speaking, useless, and maybe even detrimental, is reason.¹⁵² He states, “the way is narrow—it is ... impassable, blocked, impossible, insane (*afsindig*) ... to walk this way is immediately, at the beginning, akin to dying ... along this way sagacity (*Klogskab*) and common sense (*Forstand*) never walk—‘that would indeed be madness (*Galskab*)’” (FSE, pp. 61-2/SKS 13, p. 84). But why is Christian life madness, and thus apparently irrational? Because it has as its core belief that Christ (a man) entered into the paradoxical situation of finding life in death (or, as God, the paradoxical situation of a mortal immortal). Similarly, in imitation, prospective Christians must die to the world in order to be born again (pp. 60-1/pp. 83-4). In both cases, reason and experience, which argue unceasingly that death only comes after life (and that worldly goods are to be enjoyed, not denied), seem to be wrong. To sum up, as suggested in the preceding discussions of *Postscript*, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, and *Christian Discourses* (among others), dying to the understanding is a necessary prerequisite for

¹⁵¹ See CD, p. 184/SKS 10, pp. 194-5 for another description of the apostles’ dying to the world, and compare both texts with the distinction that Kierkegaard offers between the apostles and the modern clergy with respect to “dying to” at JFY, pp. 116, 132-3/SKS 16, forthcoming.

¹⁵² Anti-Climacus also claims that more than “a little self-denial” might be in order, when it comes to the use of reason or understanding, if faith, which is the only way to grasp the “essentially Christian,” is to flourish (SUD, p. 99/SKS 11, p. 211).

appropriating, through faith, the backwards situation that is being a Christian,¹⁵³ but since killing off reason is no easy task, humans are in need of a divine nudge.¹⁵⁴

Kierkegaard gives the Christian situation another interesting spin in the final text that I will mention in connection with his death project. After three years without a publication, Kierkegaard unleashes his final attack on the diluted version of Christianity preached by the Danish church through a series of pamphlets entitled “The Moment” (1855).¹⁵⁵ This title is a clear reference to the *New Testament* kairological fullness of time, mentioned throughout Kierkegaard’s work, in which an ordinary temporal being might come to take on atemporal or eternal significance by relating properly to God. In this text, Kierkegaard describes the paradoxical situation of Christianity by pointing out that this God who has infinite love for humans is also their greatest enemy. In order to take part in God’s love, he demands suffering of us; he demands death to what we really are—worldly beings (TM, pp. 177, 294/SKS 13, pp. 227, 352).

In a short reflection on deathbed regret about what one has failed to do with the only life one gets, Kierkegaard depicts the almost hilarious triviality of lamenting some particular unfulfilled wish, e.g. seeing Paris, which surely could have no significant effect

¹⁵³ Kierkegaard states, “faith is against understanding (*Forstand*); faith is on the other side of death ... when you died or died to yourself, to the world, then you also died to all immediacy in yourself, also to your understanding” (FSE, p. 82/SKS 13, p. 103). Despite the strong language Kierkegaard uses in describing dying to reason, there may be a sense in which reason or understanding itself is not the enemy, but rather the need to find worldly support by offering reasonable explanations of the things one thinks, says, or does (p. 68/p. 90). For more on this issue see Carr’s discussion of “anti-rationalism” in her papers from 1996 and 2001.

¹⁵⁴ This account of dying to the world in *For Self-Examination* is largely based on the more complete version that I offer in Buben (forthcoming 2011). For an excellent account that focuses on the relationship between *Postscript* and *For Self-Examination* concerning the issue of “dying to,” see Sylvia Walsh, “Dying to the World and Self-Denial in Kierkegaard’s Religious Thought,” in *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vol. 21, edited by Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2002), 169-198.

¹⁵⁵ He actually does publish several similarly themed articles in the few months leading up to *The Moment*, but he had been “silent” for the three years prior to this. See the Hong’s “Historical Introduction” to Søren Kierkegaard, *The Moment and Late Writings* (NA and TM), translated and edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. xxix-xxx.

on the situation of the deathbed given that, Paris or no Paris, such worldly experiences are all just a matter of killing time. With this earthly temporal situation, he contrasts the possibility of looking back from the deathbed having used “the moment” of life well—“so it rightly relates itself to eternity” (p. 294/p. 352). Missing out on the fleeting pleasure that is Paris hardly compares to missing out on the everlasting meaning of a loving relationship with God (pp. 293-5/pp. 351-3). And yet, practically speaking, loving God means suffering in (or dying to) the world when we would rather just visit the Louvre. In order to reconcile our sinful worldly “past” with our forgiven eternal “future,” we must use the “present” moment of existence to die to the worldly associations that make this future impossible.

Is Dying to the World Only for the Aspiring Christian? It is necessary to answer this question given the explicitly Christian themes of the train of thought I have laid out, particularly in the case of Kierkegaard’s later writings. There is a sense in which I believe that Kierkegaard’s death project is inherently Christian. After all, one cannot deny that in nearly every text discussed above death seems to come up in the context of how one can become Christian. Even in the case of “At a Graveside,” which for the most part seems to treat death on its own terms, there is at least an implicit Christian understanding.

Consider the statement that, “the person who is without God in the world soon becomes bored with himself—and expresses this haughtily by being bored with all life, but the person who is in fellowship with God indeed lives with the one whose presence gives infinite significance to even the most insignificant” (TDIO, p. 78/SKS 5, p. 448).¹⁵⁶ It seems that Kierkegaard might need Christian theology in order to demonstrate that his

¹⁵⁶ This passage surely resonates with the more direct statement above from page 353 of *Works of Love* (SKS 9, p. 347).

approach to life through death is preferable to other possible attitudes towards death. After all, as George Connell points out, it is unclear why Kierkegaard believes that one should not simply ignore death in the tradition of Epicurus (TDIO, p. 73/SKS 5, p. 444) unless he also believes that ignoring death in this way works against a Godly life.¹⁵⁷ If even one of Kierkegaard's least religious discussions of death cannot stand without God, then it may be that Kierkegaard's death project is not meant for the nonbeliever.¹⁵⁸

I do not mean to suggest, however, that it is impossible for someone with no Christian interests whatsoever to be moved by some of the lessons learned in following this project. I only mean to assert that someone without Christian interests will find nothing in Kierkegaard's work to compel them to make such a project their own. If by chance a particular individual (e.g. Heidegger) or group of individuals with a different, but somehow comparable motivation is able to appreciate and make use of some feature of Kierkegaard's complex dealings with death, I would not be surprised.¹⁵⁹ However, putting Kierkegaard's ideas about death to work in nonreligious or different religious contexts only goes so far. Once the train of thought arrives at the station of intense dying to the world in his late writings, I believe it becomes much more difficult to sever the Christianity from his discussion of death.¹⁶⁰ With the peculiar notion of grace in play, it is hard to see how anyone but the aspiring Christian would find this idea of death useful.

¹⁵⁷ George Connell, "Four Funerals: The Experience of Time by the Side of the Grave," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vols. 9 and 10, edited by Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2006) p. 436. See also Buben 2008, p. 153. Neither Connell nor I make this point about Epicurus specifically.

¹⁵⁸ By the time Kierkegaard gets to his more explicitly Christian works, there is no doubt he believes that without Christ "it is a matter of indifference whether I live or die" (CD, p. 242/SKS 10, p. 248).

¹⁵⁹ In fact, I wrote a paper demonstrating the applicability of claims made in "At a Graveside" to samurai culture (Buben 2008, pp. 141-58).

¹⁶⁰ And if, as I suggest, his entire body of work is building up to such dying, then one must at least wonder about the legitimacy of attempting to isolate any of his works from his ultimately Christian project.

As one final point, it should be specifically mentioned that while the discussion of despair in *Sickness* is often treated as having certain non-Christian applications, once this discussion reveals despair as what the Christian would call sin in “Part Two,” this text becomes as inapplicable for anyone not aspiring to Christianity as *For Self-Examination*’s discussion of grace. But early on, Anti-Climacus claims that virtually everyone is in a state of despair (SUD, pp. 22-8/SKS 11, pp. 138-44), and given that despair is basically explained as the non-Christian understanding of sin, he appears to contradict my claim that Kierkegaard’s death project is essentially Christian by hinting that everyone, Christian or otherwise, might be in need of dying to the world. Despite this appearance, because Anti-Climacus, the super-Christian, represents a perspective so well entrenched in Christianity (JP, v. 6, pp. 119-20, 174-5, 177/SKS 22, pp. 128, 130, 135-6; 27, forthcoming; 28, forthcoming), it might just be that *Sickness* is suggesting that everyone is judged under the criterion of sinfulness and in need of a cure (SUD, p. 101/SKS 11, p. 213). In other words, it would be a mistake to believe that Anti-Climacus is displaying a tolerance for a plurality of views when he discusses despair prior to introducing sin. For anyone who does not share Anti-Climacus’ perspective, there seems to be no need either to agree with his diagnosis of humanity, or to accept his prescription.

Kierkegaard’s Appropriation and Criticism of the Tradition

In the works discussed in the preceding section, Kierkegaard’s formulation of what I am calling “the existential philosophy of death” has both interesting nuances that seem to show up only occasionally, and also a consistent emphasis on dying to the world and all

that such dying entails. The primary purpose of his discussing death at all is to suggest a way of life that is infused with the lessons provided by the knowledge that life as we ordinarily understand it must, one way or another, be overcome. In grappling with the precarious nature of life and all of its projects and activities, he hopes that his reader will come to see the insignificance of an ordinary life in the world. By the world's own standards, a life that ends at an inopportune moment might leave its meaning undetermined, since such meaning almost always seems to depend on what would have happened next. If life is to avoid this meaningless situation, then it must paradoxically stop looking for meaning in life, at least as it is ordinarily understood. And once liberated from ordinary, worldly attempts to find meaning, the moment of life can be understood as an opportunity to find meaning in something less transient than everyday existence. For Kierkegaard, though, there is only one thing with the permanence necessary to provide something more than worldly meaning—God. Given that the only way God allows an individual to attribute divine meaning to an otherwise decaying and insignificant existence is through following his son in overcoming this decadence, the moment of life must be urgently spent coming to terms with Christ. As essentially worldly beings our worldly efforts to overcome our worldliness necessarily fail, and so, we must thoroughly give up on ourselves and depend entirely on Christ's merciful redemptive act.

This dying to the worldly self in urgent concern about how one stands in relationship to Christ is necessarily fraught with fear and anxiety as there are constant pitfalls so long as one lives. Besides the danger that life might end without relating properly to Christ, there is also the possibility that one might approach such a relationship but then fall away again due to worldly temptation or suffering. Since there is a certain

anxiousness about one's very existence built right into a truly Christian understanding of life, Kierkegaard is opposed to attempts to become secure in one's Christianity or to overcome the pressure and fear related to death. This opposition immediately puts him at odds with both the Platonic and the Epicurean strains in the history of the philosophy of death. The conflict with the Epicurean strain is quite clear as practically all of the thinkers that I have associated with this strain attempt to explain in one way or another why individuals' deaths are of little consequence. The Platonic strain on the other hand, particularly as seen in some of the Christian thinkers I consider, might seem to agree with Kierkegaard about the urgency in life that an appropriate fear of death might engender. Ultimately, however, I will argue that even those thinkers from the Christian tradition who most closely approach Kierkegaard on death-related issues are still trying to offer worldly comfort by mitigating the fear of death with hope for an afterlife. While there is little doubt that Kierkegaard also hopes for an afterlife, he offers no mitigation but only more fear in this life due to the uncertainty of the subjective task of relating to what may come next.

Even though Kierkegaard's philosophy of death has its problems with these two strains, he certainly borrows a great deal from thinkers on both sides along the way. This is especially true in the case of the Platonic strain, from whose pillars he appropriates the very notion of dying to the world in the first place. In fact, his entire approach to death might be seen as a turning to *New Testament* Christianity, with constant reference to Socrates and the guidance of thinkers like Augustine, Luther, and Pascal, in order to combat the rise of Hegelianism (and German idealism in general) in the Danish church. However, while Kierkegaard obviously appreciates certain aspects of these "Platonic"

thinkers' views on the use of death for life, he sees some of their aforementioned mitigation and ideas about the afterlife as potentially detrimental or at least inapplicable given the state of Danish Christianity. From the Epicurean strain he obviously rejects the notion that the deaths of individuals are insignificant, while I would argue that its corresponding doubt regarding personal immortality is something that Kierkegaard takes very seriously indeed when he encourages his reader to focus on the faithful subjective task even in the face of objective opposition. Again, it is not the case that Kierkegaard gives up belief in a personal afterlife; but rather, he understands that nothing is to be gained by speculatively engaging with those who would argue against it. The purpose of this section is to show how Kierkegaard reacts to and learns from the insights of the Epicurean strain while acting as a corrective to the Platonic.¹⁶¹ To this end there will be two subsections, one in which I demonstrate what he borrows and rejects from the thinkers in the Platonic strain, and another in which I do the same with those in the Epicurean.

Kierkegaard on Socrates and Christianity. Kierkegaard's reception of Plato and Socrates is enormously complex and by no means static, even on the relatively narrow topic of death-related issues. As early as *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard devotes a great deal of text to discussing the *Apology* and the *Phaedo*. Although he often distinguishes

¹⁶¹ In a late journal entry (1851), Kierkegaard addresses the encroaching doubt of modernity, without touching on the afterlife specifically, when he contrasts "primitive" Christianity with the "traditional" or "historical" contemporary Christianity. As modern "scholarly doubt grows stronger and stronger and takes away one book after another" (JP, v. 1, p. 86/SKS 24, p. 444), Kierkegaard claims that merely traditional Christianity, which relies mostly on the objective "facts" of Christianity that modern research calls into question, loses hope. Primitive Christianity, on the other hand, avoids such hopelessness by focusing more on the subjective task of relating to God, regardless of rising objective doubt. Kierkegaard comes to see the doubt of modernity as practically doing a service to true Christianity by helping to expose the real nature of the "faith" of so-called Christians. On the issue of the afterlife, then, one could see why Kierkegaard might allow the doubt of the Epicurean strain to creep in—in order to correct a Christianity that has lost its primitivity and spends its time arguing about objective matters.

between the views of the historical Socrates and those of Plato in a way that I have already deemed questionable at best on several occasions, when it comes to “dying to” Kierkegaard’s dissertation seems to see the same basic problem with both of them. Kierkegaard surely acknowledges the significance of this ancient formulation of what will come to be understood in Christian terms as dying to the world,¹⁶² but he is not subtle in pointing out some key differences between the Platonic view and the Christian. Perhaps the most important difference concerns one of the major themes of Kierkegaard’s later writings on death—the insufficiency of reason. While Platonists (and Neo-Platonists, for that matter) have what Kierkegaard identifies as the tendency of Pelagianism to make dying to into an individual intellectual accomplishment,¹⁶³ he points out that the truly Christian view is that the “contamination of sin” (CI, p. 76/SKS 1, p. 135) renders human intellectual capacities useless in this process. Another significant difference between Platonic and Christian dying to, according to Kierkegaard, is that the vagueness with which the Platonic presents the result of such dying indicates “weariness with life” (p. 77/p. 136) that the Christian does not share.¹⁶⁴ Whereas the Christian has an explicit longing for new life in mind when it recommends dying to the world, Kierkegaard takes the Platonic focus on being dead, and the lack of focus on new life, to mean that Platonism is simply trying to overcome individual existence (pp. 77-8/pp. 135-

¹⁶² Even in a late journal entry, Kierkegaard acknowledges that dying to the world has Platonic (although he actually says “Socratic”) roots (JP, v. 4, p. 217/SKS 24, p. 462).

¹⁶³ Robert Puchniak offers a concise but helpful account of the views of Pelagius, Augustine’s contemporary and opponent on issues of original sin and the nature of grace, in “Pelagius: Kierkegaard’s Use of Pelagius and Pelagianism,” in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 4, edited by Jon Stewart (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 123-6.

¹⁶⁴ Although I do not believe that Kierkegaard would ever suggest that proper Christian dying to the world is primarily motivated by life-weariness as he says about the Platonic version here, it is interesting to contrast the optimistic view of Christianity in *Irony* with the much darker view he offers once his critique of Christendom is underway in the authorship proper. For example, while Christian suffering is a constant theme in his later writings, in *Irony* he states, “the Christian does not dwell upon the struggle, the doubt, the pain, the negative, but rejoices in the victory, the certitude, the blessedness, the positive” (CI, p. 77/SKS 1, p. 135).

7).¹⁶⁵ After all, Plato does frequently condemn the imperfection and confusion of particularity.

Although early on Kierkegaard closely associates Plato and Socrates in discussing the problems of intellectual dying to, it is in dealing with this issue of life-weariness that the distinction between the views of Socrates and those of Plato, in what is actually the collection of writings attributed only to the latter, becomes very problematic. While the judgment of Plato seems to stick, Kierkegaard begins to let Socrates off the hook to some degree and will eventually designate him a champion of individual existence. Of course, Kierkegaard will still take issue, as previously pointed out, with Socrates on his avoidance of fear related to death and the afterlife,¹⁶⁶ but as Watkin claims, Kierkegaard comes to see Socrates as a step away from the Platonic notion of “dying to” towards the Christian (Watkin, pp. 68-70). By dividing Plato and Socrates in this way (despite the fact that Plato never makes such a distinction himself), one diminishes Plato’s role in

¹⁶⁵ In *The Concept of Anxiety*, Haufniensis also criticizes Platonic “dying away” for its inadequate notion of temporality that is wrapped up in recollection of the past and sees little significance in “the moment” of life. The more complete and robust Christian temporality, of course, sees the moment’s significance in binding a guilty past to a forgiven future, understood as eternity, in proper repetition (CA, pp. 89-90/SKS 4, pp. 392-3). The purpose of Constantius’ *Repetition* is to illustrate that such repetition (which, in contrast to recollection, is necessarily forward-looking) is only possible in the case of relating to the eternal; worldly connections or events can never be entirely repeated in every respect (for a similar formulation, see Wenche Marit Quist, “When Your Past Lies Ahead of You—Kierkegaard and Heidegger on the Concept of Repetition,” in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2002* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), pp. 78-9; van Buren offers a similar account of the Kierkegaardian problem with a backwards-looking Platonic dying away in *The Young Heidegger: Rumor of the Hidden King* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 193; but perhaps the most thorough account of the string of criticisms of the Platonic understanding of time and eternity found in Kierkegaard’s early works is Janne Kylliäinen’s “*Phaedo* and *Parmenides*: Eternity, Time, and the Moment, or From the Abstract Philosophical to the Concrete Christian,” in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 2, tome 1, edited by Jon Stewart and Katalin Nun (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 45-71). Thus, the moment is the opportunity for renewing one’s eternal commitment.

¹⁶⁶ In *Anxiety*, Haufniensis explains that without a notion of sin and its corresponding intensification of what is at stake in life, “the pagan view of death was milder and more attractive” (CA, p. 92/SKS 4, p. 395). As evidence of this mildness he refers to G. E. Lessing’s contribution to an eighteenth century debate on the way death is portrayed in art. In this essay, Lessing contrasts the pagan use of the genius peacefully and solemnly extinguishing a torch with the more disturbing use of the skeleton in the Middle Ages (*Wie die Alten den Tod gebildet* (How the Ancients Pictured Death) (Berlin: Bey Christian Friedrich Boss., 1769)).

portraying his character so powerfully and makes him into something of the proto-Epicurean Watkin seems to understand him as when lumping him in with the “immanentists.”¹⁶⁷ However, whether or not one gives Plato the credit he probably deserves and treats the views Kierkegaard attributes to Socrates as in some sense belonging to Plato, by considering Kierkegaard’s ever-shifting appreciation for Socrates, one can still come to an adequate understanding of what Kierkegaard ultimately retains and rejects from Plato’s writings on death issues.

While I have argued in the previous chapter that the view on the afterlife of most interest in Plato’s dialogues is a continued subjective experience, Kierkegaard focuses on the character Socrates’ use of irony to preserve uncertainty on this issue. As I have already suggested, although his dissertation is almost as critical of this ironic manifestation of the intellectual approach to dying to as it is of the version he rejects in Plato,¹⁶⁸ Kierkegaard’s later works seem to go back and forth between such criticism and

¹⁶⁷ I do not mean to suggest that Kierkegaard thoughtlessly makes an arbitrary distinction. As is clear from his dissertation, he is engaging an obviously well developed secondary literature on the issue of what is specifically Platonic and what can be properly attributed to the historical Socrates (see, for example, CI, pp. 29-32, 79-80/SKS 1, pp. 90-3, 138-9). Kierkegaard takes this issue seriously and acknowledges the difficulty of coming to conclusions while still continuing to speculate on the matter.

On the issue of Watkin’s categorization of Plato, which is certainly in line with Kierkegaard’s understanding in *The Concept of Irony*, the separation of Socrates’ claims about the nature of the afterlife he expects, even if he cannot be sure, from Plato’s allegedly more negative views has the troubling result of making it seem that Plato has no conception of personal immortality whatsoever. As I have described the Platonic strain in the previous chapter, treating Socrates as the literary figure he is, one can see Plato’s preoccupation with the possibility of a personal pre- and post-life existence. Having said all of this about why it is perhaps unfair and inaccurate to separate the two, however one understands their relationship, the sort of disembodied transmigration of souls discussed in Plato’s dialogues (and Neo-Platonic writings, which Kierkegaard only mentions once in his published works, and on this very topic (EO, v. 1, p. 300/SKS 2, p. 289)) remains at odds with the Christian notion of the resurrection of the body (e.g. CI, p. 74/SKS 1, p. 133; CD, pp. 205, 241/SKS 10, pp. 214, 247-8).

¹⁶⁸ In *Irony* it seems that Kierkegaard sees both Plato and Socrates as using speculation to overcome the fear of death. Plato seems to be arguing that since embodied life is an ailment, death is a great blessing, while Socrates never comes to a conclusion as to whether or not death is better than life, but leaves open the comforting possibility that it is. Although the young Kierkegaard seems to believe that Socrates’ view is superior in that it is perhaps not so quick to denigrate life, he sees both views as defective and accuses Socrates of a kind of intellectual deception (CI, pp. 77-9, 84-5/SKS 1, pp. 135-8, 141-2). Even as late as “At a Graveside,” Kierkegaard seems to have a similar view of Socrates (TDIO, p. 98/SKS 5, p. 465).

unchecked praise of Socrates' attitude toward death and the afterlife. To review, Climacus romanticizes this attitude for its focus on *how* one should live in the face of uncertainty surrounding *what* comes next (an objective matter of far less concern), while in *Christian Discourses* Kierkegaard rejects Socratic concerned ignorance in favor of committed belief that there will be a resurrection and a judgment. Both Marks and Watkin agree that, ultimately, Kierkegaard has to give up on Socrates in order to focus on uniquely Christian tasks, and indeed this seems true when Kierkegaard claims that Socrates must become "a very unimportant person, a sheer nonentity, a nobody" (CD, p. 241/SKS 10, p. 248). However, Marks in particular seems to miss the fact that this is not Kierkegaard's final word on a possible role for Socrates in Christian practice. In fact, in both his late journals (e.g. JP, v. 4, pp. 221-3/SKS 26, pp. 67-71) and *Anti-Climacus' Sickness*, Socrates' value seems to rise rather than diminish as one might expect after reading *Christian Discourses*. For example, *Anti-Climacus* states, "Christianity teaches that everything essential depends solely upon faith; therefore it wants to be precisely a Socratic, God-fearing ignorance, which by means of ignorance guards faith against speculation" (SUD, p. 99/SKS 11, p. 211).¹⁶⁹ Since Socrates is an ever-present force throughout Kierkegaard's writings, and often not one to be overcome, it might be accurate to claim that Plato's dialogues exert a greater influence on Kierkegaard's

¹⁶⁹ Another interesting aspect of this discussion of Socrates toward the end of *Sickness* is that *Anti-Climacus* seems to interpret Socratic irony or ignorance, not as an evasive intellectual game as Kierkegaard does in *Irony*, but as a pious form of being dead to understanding. Just before prescribing "a little" Socrates, *Anti-Climacus* states, "I consider it an outright ethical task, perhaps requiring not a little self-denial in these very speculative times, when all 'the others' are busy comprehending, to admit that one is neither able nor obliged to comprehend it" (SUD, p. 99/SKS 11, p. 211). Not only do passages like this seem to illustrate a change in Kierkegaard's view of Socratic dying to over time (see JP, v. 4, p. 214/SKS 24, p. 32 for an unrelated instance of reevaluating a harsh judgment of Socrates in the dissertation), but they also raise the possibility that *Postscript's* emphasis on the lifelong task of concerned ignorance, with Socrates as the model, about one's status with respect to the afterlife might remain significant in the later writings, perhaps undermining Marks' criticism that Possén makes too much out of Climacus' praise of Socrates on this issue (Marks, forthcoming; Possén, forthcoming).

understanding of dying to the world than any other text outside of the *New Testament*.

And yet, it is in the very turning to early Christian writings that Kierkegaard is able to focus on some of those instances that I have highlighted along the way in which Platonic dying to comes up wanting.¹⁷⁰

In fact, one can find Kierkegaard's concerns about transmigration of souls and the all too intellectual dying to the world, and perhaps also some of his appreciation for Plato's (*via* Socrates) taking death seriously in life, already well expressed in Augustine's criticisms of Platonism. But before moving on to Kierkegaard's reception of the early church father, it is necessary to say a few things about his complicated relationship to scripture. He sees himself as a kind of representative of *New Testament* Christianity, especially when dealing with dying to the world¹⁷¹ and the moment of vision,¹⁷² while his extreme emphasis on individuality, as opposed to the communal nature of the church so often depicted in this text, might be cause for thinking that his account is a bit of a departure.¹⁷³ For example, while Paul compares Christian individuals to parts of a unified body (*1 Corinthians* 12:12-30), Kierkegaard states in a late journal that

the New Testament's Christianity is anti-social.... the formula for New Testament Christianity is in hatred of oneself to love God: but to hate self is really a part of killing and hating the urge, the itch, for sociality, which

¹⁷⁰ In the end, Kierkegaard seems to take some (albeit common) interpretive liberties in using Socrates to express his concerns about both Platonic and even problematic Christian implementation of dying to the world. It seems that only once it becomes clear that dogmatic reliance on grace is necessary for the complete dying to the world that proper Christianity requires is Socrates of no help to Kierkegaard. I take it that something like this idea is behind the anti-Socratic discussion in *Christian Discourses*.

¹⁷¹ See, for example, JP, v. 1, pp. 146, 230-1; v. 3, pp. 267, 273, 278, 303-4/SKS 21, p. 328; 22, p. 346; 23, p. 334; 24, pp. 263-4; 27, forthcoming. It is also worth making special note of the resonance between dying to reason in *For Self-Examination* and his claim about Paul only using prudence (*Klogskab*) without danger once he "acts decisively against reason" (*Forstand*) and embraces "'total madness'" (*Galskab*) (JP, v. 3, p. 468/SKS 23, p. 74). Cf. also Luther's claim about the dangers of Aristotle and philosophy in general in the "Heidelberg Disputation."

¹⁷² His understanding of Paul's "moment" no doubt also relies upon Augustine's ample discussion of time, even if it is only via his general Lutheran background.

¹⁷³ I am grateful to Guignon for raising this issue with me privately. Dreyfus also mentions it briefly (p. 360).

is something most precious to the natural man. To hate oneself in association with others is not hating oneself—for association expresses loving oneself (JP, v. 3, pp. 301-2/SKS 27, forthcoming).¹⁷⁴

Furthermore, when it comes to objective articles of Christian belief and how they are used to comfort those afraid of dying, one might also wonder if Kierkegaard is straying somewhat. Compare, for example, the way Christ speaks of the afterlife to the penitent sinner on the cross, or the way Paul speaks of immortality's victory over death (*I Corinthians* 15:54-5), with Kierkegaard's claim (from a journal entry around the same time as the previous one) that “according to the New Testament Christianity is *restlessness*.... In Christendom's Christianity Christianity is introduced as a tranquilizer.... for in Christendom even eternity is used to tranquilize and to lend zest to the enjoyment of life” (JP, v. 3, p. 302/SKS 27, forthcoming). What could explain such seemingly glaring misrepresentations of scripture?

I think that these sorts of concerns can easily be assuaged when considering the situation that Kierkegaard finds himself in. It is not that he actively disagrees with the methods of Jesus and Paul,¹⁷⁵ but rather that he has a somewhat different battle to fight. This point is well stated in a journal entry from 1849:

with respect to the few Christians at that time everything was in order, for they were true Christians or at least fairly so. Furthermore, the Christian Church itself was still such a small plant that it was a sect in the world, which does help in keeping alert. But from the moment Christianity conquered *in the worldly sense* and all became Christians in the ridiculous manner which nowadays is jealously guarded by secular-ecclesiastic authorities—so that everyone is baptized as a child—from that moment on the prime polemical target must be the illusion that we are all Christians,

¹⁷⁴ Cf. JP, v. 1, p. 230/SKS 26, pp. 269-70, 275; 27, forthcoming; and SUD, pp. 120-1/SKS 11, pp. 231-2.
¹⁷⁵ Kierkegaard does occasionally take issue with Paul actually, although only in a very limited way, particularly when it comes to the relationship between imitation of Christ in dying to the world and grace (e.g. JP, v. 2, pp. 354, 368/SKS 24, p. 491; 26, p. 44). Kierkegaard surely acknowledges Paul's dying to the world, but seems to think that his emphasis on atonement and grace might be a bit too strong, given that a depraved humanity is likely to see in this emphasis an easy loophole that allows avoidance of the painful requirements of dying to demanded by Christ's “follow me” (*Matthew* 4:19).

and this polemical sighting must be sharper and sharper with each century that ‘established Christendom’ stands, for with every century the illusion grows (JP, v. 3, p. 467/SKS 22, p. 89).

While the early church was concerned with spreading and preserving its particular objective message in a world that was not always eager to hear it, Kierkegaard is faced with a world that claims it accepts the message but does not want to hear that it has lost the ability to live in accordance with it. Even though he understands that in order to secure the survival of the message, the early Christians had need of a certain kind of community, Kierkegaard believes that modern “Christians” might fail to understand that, even for the early Christians, the properly Christian task is to relate as an individual before Christ;¹⁷⁶ becoming Christian is more than merely joining a church (JP, v. 1, p. 245/SKS 26, pp. 398-9). Similarly, the early church was engaged in giving the new hope of eternity to a despairing world of death and misery, while Kierkegaard is faced with a lazy, self-satisfied, and overly secure world that needs to be reminded that existence has some real peril ... even for the so-called “Christian” in Christendom. Simply put, in the early days of Christianity people needed to hear about what they were suffering and

¹⁷⁶ A key example of this relationship is that the *New Testament* only mentions (adult) individuals, never groups, being baptized. While it might be pointed out that one is baptized into a community, it must be remembered that it is the individual choice to accept Christ in baptism, and the ongoing individual struggle to maintain this acceptance, that is the foundation for any subsequent communal membership.

What essentially distinguishes the Christian from the pagan or Jew, for Kierkegaard, is the mediation of Christ. For example, as redeemer, Christ steps into the middle of all relationships of culpability between humans and says “forgiven.” As a Christian, then, relating to other humans—e.g. in a community—is not done directly in the ethical manner of the pre-Christians, but indirectly by first relating to Christ who loves and redeems (*Colossians* 3:13; *1 John* 4:19). The community is always secondary to the individual relationship with Christ.

Patricia J. Huntington, focusing on *Two Ages*, provides a very helpful account of Kierkegaard’s view of authentic community from a non-religious perspective. Although her account focuses on the primacy of the individual’s relation to whatever brings a group together, she is ultimately unable to see how unimportant community is for Kierkegaard because she does not consider his more developed Christian perspective (“Heidegger’s Reading of Kierkegaard Revisited: From Ontological Abstraction to Ethical Concretion,” in *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, edited by Martin J. Matušík and Merold Westphal (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 49-50). At the very least, his late journal entries would not mesh well with her optimistic reading of Kierkegaard’s sense of community.

striving for, but in Kierkegaard's day they need to hear that suffering and striving are the prerequisite.

How Christian dying to the world is lost or corrupted is a complicated problem for Kierkegaard, with roots as deep as Paul himself.¹⁷⁷ As one might expect based on his criticism of Christianity once it has "conquered in the worldly sense," Kierkegaard's view of the various medieval proponents of Christian doctrine is often not complimentary.¹⁷⁸ Despite the fact that he is likely not well read in the works of some of its major proponents, he seems to see the entire medieval tradition as a gradual descent into the sort of rationalistic theological speculation that he is so critical of in his own time.¹⁷⁹ While he is supportive of both the life and many of the claims Augustine makes in distinguishing Christian orthodoxy from sectarian heresy (Puchniak, pp. 13-14), and even finds a certain passionate dedication in Anselm (JP, v. 1, pp. 11-12/SKS 25, p. 239; 27, forthcoming),¹⁸⁰ Kierkegaard follows Luther in his opposition to the late medieval scholastic trend (Bøgeskov, pp. 188-90).

¹⁷⁷ See the above reference to JP, v. 2, pp. 354, 368/SKS 24, p. 491; 26, p. 44.

¹⁷⁸ He does, however, seem receptive to the ideas of certain thinkers from the first couple of centuries after Paul. For example, Paul Martens briefly suggests that Kierkegaard's limited and indirect exposure to Irenaeus may have influenced his notion of dying to the world ("Irenaeus: On Law, Gospel and the Grace of Death," in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 4, edited by Jon Stewart (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 107-8).

¹⁷⁹ For more on Kierkegaard's general reading and reception of key medieval thinkers, see e.g. Robert Puchniak, "Augustine: Kierkegaard's Tempered Admiration of Augustine," in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 4, edited by Jon Stewart (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 11-22; Lee C. Barrett, "Anselm of Canterbury: The Ambivalent Legacy of Faith Seeking Understanding," in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 4, edited by Jon Stewart (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2008), pp.167-181; Benjamin Olivares Bøgeskov, "Thomas Aquinas: Kierkegaard's View Based on Scattered and Uncertain Resources," in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 4, edited by Jon Stewart (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2008), pp.183-206.

¹⁸⁰ In several places, Kierkegaard seems to approve of a similar passion in the monastic movement of the Middle Ages as well. Despite his concerns about this movement's excessive focus on externality and its own meritoriousness, he suggests that such dedication is preferable to the lukewarm, compromising attitude of modern Christianity. See, for example, Climacus' discussion at CUP, v. 1, pp. 401-5/SKS 7, pp. 365-9; and Kierkegaard's at JFY, p. 192/SKS 16, forthcoming.

There is little doubt that Kierkegaard is Augustinian to some degree in his understanding of the original absolute corruption of humanity and its rational capacities.¹⁸¹ In this connection, he would likely recognize Augustine's Pauline notion that grace through faith is necessary if one is to be redeemed and come into a proper relationship with the divine as an improvement upon any more Platonic or Pelagian attempt to figure out such a relationship on one's own. Augustine's Christian advance is, like Paul's, his dying to reason and self-reliance. However, Kierkegaard believes that whatever movement beyond Platonism Augustine initially represents, his willingness to supplement faith with the sort of rational explanation of theological difficulties that Paul would not provide demonstrates that Augustine is not sufficiently free of Platonism for the sake of Christianity.¹⁸² In a very critical journal entry from 1854, Kierkegaard states,

Augustine has nevertheless done incalculable harm. The whole system of doctrine through the centuries relies essentially upon him ... Augustine has reinstated the Platonic-Aristotelian definition, the whole Greek philosophical pagan definition of faith ... In the Greek view, faith is a concept which belongs in the sphere of the intellectual ... and we get the progression: faith—knowledge. Christianly, faith is at home in the existential ... in this purely personal relationship between God as personality and the believer as *existing* personality lies the concept of faith (JP, v. 1, pp. 71-2/SKS 25, pp. 432-3).

According to this passage, Augustine's method suggests that faith is belief without complete justification, and acts as the necessary starting point on the road to justified knowledge, while the properly Christian view sees faith purely as a relationship to be lived rather than understood. To make matters worse, it is this rationalistic tendency

¹⁸¹ Haufniensis actually mentions Augustine's formulation of original sin (CA, p. 27/SKS 4, pp. 333-4). See also the very helpful discussion of the relationship between Kierkegaard and Augustine on this particular issue in Lee C. Barrett, "Kierkegaard's 'Anxiety' and the Augustinian Doctrine of Original Sin," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vol. 8, edited by Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), pp. 48-52.

¹⁸² In an interesting aside, one late journal entry has Kierkegaard actually crying out to Socrates in criticism of a particular appeal by Augustine to numerical majority in support of his views (JP, v. 4, p. 220/SKS 26, p. 31).

toward knowledge in Augustine that sets a precedent which leads to a most unfortunate consequence in the history of Christian thought according to Kierkegaard. This consequence is exemplified by the full-blown attempt to perfect faith through understanding in the thought of figures such as Anselm and Aquinas.

Although Kierkegaard had little access to the writings of these scholastics, and only occasionally says anything about them, there are two other important clues that can help one piece together his views on the problematic version of dying to reason that they represent. First, just as Kierkegaard's appropriation of Augustine is at least as much the result of his upbringing and education in a Lutheran milieu as his probably limited direct acquaintance with Augustine's writings, Luther's opposition to scholasticism's natural theology is simply part of the air that one breathes in such a setting (Bøgeskov, pp. 183-4). Second and more importantly, are Kierkegaard's explicit criticisms of similar ideas in other thinkers. Perhaps the most illuminating instance of such criticism can be found in Climacus' discussion of the arguments for the existence of God that one finds in modern thinkers such as Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz (PF, pp. 39-43/SKS 4, pp. 244-8).¹⁸³ Since Climacus immediately rejects these arguments in favor of the "leap," there is little doubt that he (or Kierkegaard for that matter) would not have approved them in their scholastic formulation either. In fact, in the case of Anselm's devout appreciation for being allowed to develop the ontological argument, Kierkegaard points out in a late journal entry that "this prayer and this expression of thanksgiving are infinitely more proof of God's existence than—the proof" (JP, v. 1, p. 11/SKS 25, p. 239). Once again,

¹⁸³ Barrett also considers Hegel's attempt at a resuscitation of Anselm's ontological argument, which epitomizes, for Kierkegaard, the dangerous influence of such rational theology even in his own day ("Faith Seeking Understanding," pp. 173-4). Bøgeskov briefly makes similar points about Hegel in connection with Aquinas (Bøgeskov, pp. 184, 202).

for Kierkegaard, faith is a matter of living out a relationship with the divine—a relationship that has no need of rational arguments, and requires more dying to reason in general than scholasticism would allow.

Turning now to Kierkegaard's greatest predecessor when it comes to dying to reason, Luther is yet another figure whose complicated relationship to Kierkegaard is marked both by high praise and sharp criticism. In Kierkegaard's later published works, he speaks mostly in support of Luther, while the reformer receives a much more mixed review in Kierkegaard's journals from the same period. There have been numerous excellent papers written on the fascinating topic of Kierkegaard's appropriation of Luther, particularly in the past decade, and so, it should be easy to characterize Kierkegaard's understanding very briefly.¹⁸⁴ According to this understanding, Luther is an invaluable corrective to both the rationalism of medieval theology and the sense of merit found in monasticism and the sale of indulgences.¹⁸⁵ Kierkegaard appreciates that in order to combat these problematic attitudes, Luther reaches back to the denigration of human effort, rational or otherwise, and the corresponding emphasis on faith and grace that Augustine finds in Paul's letters. Unfortunately, thinks Kierkegaard, Luther goes so far in stressing divine grace's concession to human frailty that in correcting a history of error inadvertently set off by Augustine's defense of orthodoxy, Luther accidentally inaugurates an (in many ways) opposite, but still highly problematic, history that leads right up to Kierkegaard's own time.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ One older paper that is quite helpful for orienting oneself in the Luther-Kierkegaard relationship is Regin Prenter's "Luther and Lutheranism," in *Bibliotheca Kierkegardiana Edenda Curaverunt*, vol. 6, edited by Niels Thulstrup and Marie Mikulova Thulstrup (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzels Boghandel, 1981), pp. 121-172.

¹⁸⁵ See, for example, FSE, pp. 16-8/SKS 13, pp. 45-7; and JFY, pp. 132, 192-4/SKS 16, forthcoming.

¹⁸⁶ See JP, v. 2, p. 362; v. 3, pp. 82, 84-5, 100-4/SKS 23, pp. 323, 368; 25, pp. 201-2, 399-401, 476-7; 26, pp. 80, 166-7, 368-9, 426; and David Yoon-Jung Kim and Joel D. S. Rasmussen, "Martin Luther: Reform,

The problem that Kierkegaard points out is the world's tendency to take advantage of any concession one gives it. He states, "no wonder Luther very quickly got such great support! The secular mentality understood immediately that here was a break.... they understood at once how with a little lying this could be used to great profit" (JP, v. 3, p. 84/SKS 23, p. 368). Since Luther's most influential reformation documents claim that no human effort is sufficient for salvation, many of the reformation's supporters fail to realize that Luther's own life is a demonstration of the importance (dare I say "necessity") of making the effort to die to worldliness anyway, if only to show one's inability and dependence on a redeemer (FSE, p. 16/SKS 13, p. 45; and JP, v. 3, pp. 76, 94-5/SKS 22, p. 241; 27, forthcoming). The almost immediate, occasionally violent, outcome of the reformation, which Luther himself watched with horror firsthand, was the exact opposite of his intended overcoming of worldliness. While he saw an opportunity to overcome certain "religious" practices demanded by a corrupt worldly authority, many people took the idea that their salvation could not be earned by their own effort to mean that they could do anything they wanted in the world and things might work out for their souls anyway.¹⁸⁷ Without emphasizing the rigor of the law (as in Calvin), or as Kierkegaard sees it, the importance of *trying* to imitate Christ in dying to the world, Luther opens the door to the situation of rampant secular hedonism calling itself Christianity that Kierkegaard complains about in nineteenth century Denmark (e.g. JP, v. 2, pp. 362-4/SKS 25, pp. 201-4). Although Luther certainly becomes aware of the

Secularization, and the Question of His 'True Successor,'" in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 5, tome 2, edited by Jon Stewart (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 197-9.

¹⁸⁷ David Yoon-Jung Kim offers a very helpful account of the "Peasants' Revolt" of 1525 and the antinomian controversy that plagued Luther's reformation years in his "John Calvin: Kierkegaard and the Question of the Law's Third Use," in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 5, tome 2, edited by Jon Stewart (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 85-97.

dangers of misinterpreting his views and makes an effort in his later writings to clear up any misunderstandings about the rigors of Christianity,¹⁸⁸ Kierkegaard, particularly in the late journals, holds him accountable to some degree for his early excessive exuberance in the preaching of grace without works. The distinction between the two types of Luther's works on death that I discussed in the previous chapter offers an excellent illustration of the tension that Kierkegaard sees in Luther.

While Kierkegaard would no doubt also be critical of Luther's specific suggestions about avoiding reflection on personal death or treating death as something off in the distant future, Kierkegaard's primary problem with a text like Luther's sermon on preparing to die is its overall orientation towards comforting minds anxious about death. By taking the edge off of death as he does with his substitution of thoughts of eternal life and grace for those of sin, hell, and misery, Luther compassionately puts people at ease, but perhaps a little too at ease for their own eternal good. Kierkegaard believes that there is something useful in having a certain fear of death and the uncertainty of what comes next, albeit fear of an appropriate sort. He is certainly not asking that one become paralyzed by extreme terror, but simply suggesting that fearing death appropriately leads to an urgent decision and an appreciation for divine assistance in maintaining what is decided. To focus on grace to the exclusion of the difficulty is to give the impression that there is not still work to be done—faith is not a gift once and for all, but a relationship to be maintained “in fear and trembling” (JP, v. 3, p. 96/SKS 27, forthcoming).

¹⁸⁸ Kim outlines both Luther's written attempts to curb antinomian and secular interpretations of his views, and the efforts of his successors Philipp Melancthon (1497-1560) and John Calvin (1509-1564) (Kim, pp. 86-97). See also Lee C. Barrett, “Faith, Works, and the Uses of the Law: Kierkegaard's Appropriation of Lutheran Doctrine,” in *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vol. 21, edited by Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2002), pp. 88, 104-5.

At no point does Kierkegaard explicitly claim that Luther personally fails to grasp the necessary difficulty of dying to the world and remaining dead, but perhaps Kierkegaard would be less critical if the reformer had consistently written of suffering, persecution, and martyrdom as Luther does in the later writings I discussed in the previous chapter.¹⁸⁹ In these texts one can find a description of the sort of imitation of Christ's dying to the world (in fact, the sign of true Christianity here is suffering in the world) that Kierkegaard sees in the spiritual anguish that the younger Luther experienced but did not adequately publicize. However, even though Luther seems to get around to a proper explanation of the dialectic of works and faith, law and gospel, rigor and mercy, example and redeemer, or dying to and eternal life,¹⁹⁰ there is no doubt in Kierkegaard's mind that the explanation comes too late to stop the caricature of Christianity spawned by Luther's carelessness.

Although Pascal has a smaller impact on both Kierkegaard and the history of Christianity than Luther, there are certain similarities in how Kierkegaard views these two thinkers. Although he has many positive things to say about the life that Pascal lived and his Luther-like struggle with the scholastic views of the Jesuits (e.g. JP, v. 1, p. 222/SKS 25, p. 256), he ultimately seems to think that Pascal places a little too much emphasis on rational proof and thereby diminishes the difficulty of Christianity. It is the

¹⁸⁹ Kierkegaard seems to say as much in a journal entry from 1850 (JP, v. 3, p. 81/SKS 23, p. 314). In several entries from 1854, Kierkegaard even suggests that Luther should have become a martyr (JP, v. 3, pp. 97-100/SKS 25, pp. 303-4, 330, 399-400).

¹⁹⁰ Initially, Kierkegaard seems to agree that Luther grasps the dialectic. In 1849 Kierkegaard states, "the tragedy of Christendom is clearly that we have removed the dialectical element from Luther's doctrine of faith, so that it has become a cloak for sheer paganism and epicureanism. We completely forget that Luther urged faith in contrast to a fantastically exaggerated asceticism" (JP, v. 3, p. 70/SKS 21, p. 323). However, while he is right to think that Luther grasps the issue of faith versus works on some level, there is a larger dialectic at play in the history of Christianity, for which Kierkegaard seems to believe Luther lacks the perspective. In 1850 Kierkegaard compares Luther to his ancient standard for dialecticians and states, "the only important thing to me in this is to get it dialectically clarified. As for the rest, I have the deepest respect for Luther—but was he a Socrates? No, no, far from that" (JP, v. 3, p. 80/SKS 23, pp. 152-3). I will have more to say on this issue shortly.

shared mitigation, whether intentional or not, of the struggle of dying to the world that really binds Luther and Pascal together as targets for Kierkegaardian criticism. Still, there is probably more agreement between Pascal and Kierkegaard on the use of the thought of death for the sake of Christian dying to the world than there is between Luther and Kierkegaard. Besides the obvious similarities in the language that Pascal and Kierkegaard use to describe death and dying, they both differ from Luther in that they do not offer explicit comfort about impending demise. On the other hand, Luther is probably closer to Kierkegaard when it comes to dying to reason.¹⁹¹

Pascal advocates a mere suspension or humbling of reason when dealing with the faith-based *acceptance* of Christian matters (*Pensées*, p. 31), but Kierkegaard recommends a more extreme approach.¹⁹² As explained in *For Self-Examination* (e.g. pp. 82-3/SKS 13, pp. 103-4) he does not believe, as Pascal seems to, that faith coexists and works with reason to guide an individual toward Christianity. Because faith is opposed to reason for Kierkegaard, he is more apt than Pascal to embrace Christianity as essentially

¹⁹¹ One possible explanation of this key difference is that while Pascal is still reacting to a largely Catholic world, Kierkegaard is at least a theological generation and hundreds of miles removed from such a world. At the risk of oversimplifying the situation (and ignoring other relevant historical developments), Luther's legacy of opposition to reason, or at least scholasticism, has already done much of the heavy lifting when it comes to cleansing Kierkegaard's religious understanding of the sort of rationality that was present in the Catholic church, via the scholastics and Jesuits, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Of course, Pascal was aware of Lutheranism, but it is unlikely that its particular brand of extreme mistrust of reason in a religious context could have been as well ingrained in Pascal in seventeenth century France as it was in Kierkegaard, despite their Augustinian connections and other similarities between their situations.

¹⁹² Although Kierkegaard never suggests this connection, it is interesting to wonder if his criticism of Augustine—that he makes faith into a kind of intellectual position that precedes knowledge—is applicable to Pascal as well, given his discussion of faith as a capacity that has its own sorts of experiences and reasons. Against such a connection, consider Kierkegaard's approval of Pascal's claims about knowing God in an 1850 journal entry: "Pascal means that knowledge of the divine is essentially a transformation of the person; one must become a different person in order to know the divine" (JP, v. 3, p. 420/SKS 24, p. 99). Even if Pascal is guilty, however, of the error that Kierkegaard sees at the foundation of medieval Christianity, there is no doubt that he, like Augustine, avoids the extreme rationalism of the scholastics. While Pascal uses reason (or at least reasons) to support the faithful by showing that their attitude is not ridiculous, Anselm and Aquinas carve out a more substantial place for reason—designating a specific role in some cases for reason in establishing Christian doctrine. Despite the fact that Pascal does not take reason this far, he does share to some degree the scholastics' interest in showing how reasonable Christianity can be, and thus, he is more their theological heir than Kierkegaard.

absurd and offensive. Thus, Kierkegaard is not nearly as interested as Pascal in finding reasons, such as miracles, for help in becoming and remaining a Christian (*Pensées*, pp. 49-50; FSE, p. 68/SKS 13, p. 90).¹⁹³ The key difference between Pascal and Kierkegaard is, therefore, that while the former has a notion of Christian dying to the world that involves setting reason aside only at the proper moments, the latter's notion of Christian dying to the world involves a total renunciation of reason, at least so far as one's Christianity is concerned.

This difference between Pascal and Kierkegaard on the subject of dying to reason is manifested most clearly in their respective goals as authors. Pascal's ultimate goal is to produce *An Apology for the Christian Religion*, which was the original title for the ideas that are now known as Pascal's *Pensées* (p. xi). An apology of this sort, as evidenced by some of Pascal's own claims, is meant to demonstrate how "reasonable and happy" one can be in Christianity, and how "foolish and unhappy" one can be without it (p. 51).¹⁹⁴ Kierkegaard, on the other hand, never portrays the Christian and the unbeliever in such a way. Rather, his ultimate goal is to describe what a life in Christ is really like—it is

¹⁹³ While Pascal might rule "Reason" out of Christian faithfulness temporarily, but allow it back in later in the form of reasons, Kierkegaard seems to rule out both Reason (*Forstand*) and reasons (*Grunde*) in the service of Christianity. Perhaps some will suggest both that Kierkegaard makes a distinction between *forstand*, which is commonly translated as "understanding" (although "reason," the dictionary tells us, or "common sense," as we see in the Hong translation above, would not be inappropriate), and *fornuft*, which is translated as "reason" or "rationality" more strictly, and that he opposes only the former but not the latter to faith. After all, *fornuft* never shows up in *For Self-Examination*, at least not in noun form, while *forstand* is ever-present throughout Kierkegaard's works. In response to such suggestions, it must be pointed out that Kierkegaard seems to use these words almost interchangeably in places just as they can be used in English. See for example, Kierkegaard's statement that "no glance is so sharp-sighted as the faith's, and yet the faith is, humanly speaking, blind; for reason (*Fornuft*), understanding (*Forstand*), is, humanly speaking, that seeing, but faith is against understanding" (WA, p. 123/SKS 11, p. 268, translation modified). For much more detailed accounts (which align fairly well with the one I offer here) of Kierkegaard's use of these terms and the difficulties of translating them, see JP, v. 3, pp. 903-8; and Andrew J. Burgess, "Forstand in the Swenson-Lowrie Correspondence and in the 'Metaphysical Caprice'," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vol. 7, edited by Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1994), pp. 109-128.

¹⁹⁴ Kierkegaard is explicitly critical of this sentiment in Pascal in an 1850 journal entry, and he even goes so far as to liken Pascal to the Danish Bishop Mynster (1775-1854), whose world-accommodating theology is so disturbing to Kierkegaard (JP, v. 3, pp. 423-4/SKS 24, p. 119).

absurd, offensive, painful, difficult, and dangerous. As if the dying to one's former self is not miserable enough, unlike physical death, which ends things, dying to self is just the beginning of one's physical sufferings (FSE, p. 79/SKS 13, pp. 100-1). These sufferings of a Christian, dead to the world in a sense, but still physically living in it, might include ridicule, persecution, or even martyrdom (FSE, pp. 84-5/SKS 13, pp. 104-5).¹⁹⁵ This sort of life hardly sounds reasonable or happy.¹⁹⁶ In fact, it seems infinitely more reasonable to choose any life but this one.

A prime example of Pascal's attempt to make Christianity more reasonable and attractive to believers and unbelievers alike that Kierkegaard would find particularly problematic is Pascal's famous wager. I have pointed out elsewhere (Buben, forthcoming 2011) that Kierkegaard did not have much opportunity to encounter the wager, but this does not preclude imagining what Kierkegaard's response would be. Even though the wager is not intended to produce faith (Pascal realizes that being faithful is not a decision that one can make), it is meant to demonstrate why someone would, or maybe should, want to be faithful. Since Kierkegaard is uninterested in convincing people of the benefits of Christianity (after all, he is writing for an audience that he believes has taken these benefits for granted), he would probably be quite critical of Pascal's strategy in this case. In fact, in his dissertation, Kierkegaard expresses a concern about Socrates' approach to the afterlife that may be just as applicable to Pascal:

¹⁹⁵ In a journal entry from 1854, Kierkegaard actually questions whether Pascal is attempting to "coddle" himself instead of facing up to the fact that proper Christian dying to the world might lead to "martyrdom, a bloody martyrdom" (JP, v. 2, pp. 367-8/SKS 25, p. 482).

¹⁹⁶ Of course, Climacus, like Luther, points out that it is precisely this kind of worldly suffering that is indicative of one's eternal happiness or salvation (*evige Salighed*), but beyond this experience of suffering, an individual existing in the world does not necessarily have any experience of such happiness (CUP, v. 1, p. 452/SKS 7, p. 411). Given that Pascal and Kierkegaard (in *For Self-Examination*, at least) both seem to be describing the life of a Christian in the world, it seems appropriate to focus on the absurdity and misery when talking about Kierkegaard's position. I thank Pat Stokes for helping me to clarify this issue.

if one also bears in mind that he still does not really know what the shape of the next life will be or whether there will be a next life, if amid this poetry we hear the prosaic calculating that it can never do any harm to assume another life ... then one sees that the persuasive power of this argument is considerably limited (CI, p. 68/SKS 1, p. 126).

Although in later writings Kierkegaard no longer wonders about Socrates' motives, the calculation described in this passage seems to be at the very heart of Pascal's wager.

Pascal's reasoning is something like this: since you have to adopt a position either for or against the existence of God and the afterlife (to abstain is, practically speaking, to be against), given that you already exist and will soon find out the truth of the matter the hard way, it makes sense to want to believe as this option offers the greatest possible reward for the same risk (*Pensées*, pp. 212-3). Even if Pascal agrees with Kierkegaard that what matters most about the afterlife is not whether or not it is, but how one lives in relation to it, and that living this relationship is a difficult, anxiety-laden, life-long struggle (and not a simple matter of giving assent), the wager is an un-Kierkegaardian affirmation of the attractiveness of Christianity.

Having made it through an account of Kierkegaard's reception of the major thinkers in the Platonic strain of the history of the philosophy of death, it is clear that he is less concerned about how Pascal and his predecessors personally embody Christianity, than he is with the historical ramifications of their views. Kierkegaard actually has a great deal of respect for most of these figures, and he even acknowledges the need for their various polemical strategies given the particular historical situations they were each up against. But despite what his account of dying to the world derives from these high water marks of pre- and post-Christian thought, he also believes that their views, when misapplied, misunderstood, or just taken to an unwarranted extreme, have contributed to

what passes itself off as Christianity in the nineteenth century. One way to describe this problematic historical development is to suggest that there is a dialectic between the world and dying to, and the Platonic strain is a repeated corrective assertion of dying to against a series of worldly loopholes in various historical contexts.

As Kierkegaard seems to understand things, Socrates (i.e. Plato), “the hero and martyr of intellectuality” (JP, v. 3, p. 80/SKS 23, p. 153), dies to a world of superficial Greek materialism by retreating to the purely intellectual. But through the centuries, the Socratic view, which is initially characterized by uncertainty and irony, is degraded and philosophy in its worldly conceit comes to represent the attainment of knowledge. Into this situation, Christianity emerges from the Hebrew tradition and reasserts the Platonic notion of the world’s corruption, but this time with the important correction that all human striving is insufficient. This insufficiency is at least partially due to the fact that the human rational capacity is also corrupt. Whereas, on the Platonic view, one could work out one’s own place in the afterlife through proper philosophical rigor, on the Christian view, divine assistance becomes necessary if one is to shed one’s worldliness and have eternal life. In the course of trying to affirm the need for divine grace against the heterodox Pelagians, centuries later, Augustine uses what Kierkegaard believes is Platonic rationalism to support faith. That is, in trying to prevent the full-blown establishment of rational effort in the world as the sufficient condition for salvation, he establishes the limited use of such effort as an ally in salvation. This turns out to be a dangerous tactic (although perhaps somewhat understandable given the situation) because, removed from the context of separating orthodoxy from heresy, it starts Christianity down a long road of attempting to make itself compatible with worldly

reason. After a millennium of using this reason to justify all variety of strange and grotesque practices, by which one can contribute to one's own salvation, Luther and Pascal look back to Paul and Augustine in order to correct the medieval mistake. But as Luther over-emphasizes the idea that there is nothing people can do themselves to earn salvation, and Pascal does not entirely distance himself from scholastic rationalism, they both make the mistake of simply diminishing the rigor of Christian dying to the world (interestingly, rigorousness, although in the form of a worldly perversion, was the one good thing about certain medieval developments for Kierkegaard). Luther inadvertently inaugurates a world-embracing tradition of making no effort whatsoever, and Pascal simply seems to restore reason in Christianity to the still problematic Augustinian level that makes it easier to come to terms with than it really should be.

Kierkegaard apparently understands himself as one more corrective in this history. In a journal entry from 1850, he states, "Luther's true successor will come to resemble the exact opposite of Luther, because Luther came after the preposterous overstatement of asceticism; whereas he will come after the horrible fraud to which Luther's view gave birth" (JP, v. 3, p. 82/SKS 23, p. 323). Against the easy-going protestant secularism that follows in Luther's wake, Kierkegaard relentlessly portrays the martyrdom of early Christians and the necessary suffering of anyone who takes up the cross. But Kierkegaard is more than just the latest swing of the pendulum of dying to the world; he also has the appropriate perspective from which to take in the whole dialectic. Without the ability to see the overall dialectic for what it is—humans finding ever new and creative ways to understand their worldly endeavors as meaningful while the divine tries to explain (through scripture) that looking for meaning in worldliness is a mistake—

each Platonic thinker in the history simply patches a particular hole in the hull of dying to the world with wood that was already preventing another potential leak. Since Kierkegaard is conscious of this dialectical historical development, he is able to take on the role of corrective for the entire history. Rather than simply focusing on “a condition in Christendom at a particular time and place,” he claims that “to reform Christianity requires first and foremost a comprehensive view of the whole of Christianity” (JP, v. 3, p. 101/SKS 25, pp. 400-1). With this comprehensive view Kierkegaard believes that he is able to help modern Christendom see what it lacks without overstating the solution.

Kierkegaard Contra Epicurus. In keeping Christianity off of the road to worldliness, having the Epicurean strain in the history of the philosophy of death close at hand may be quite beneficial. The Epicurean strain, which is certainly more diverse in its interests and points of departure than the Platonic, is unified by its doubts about a personal afterlife and its relative lack of concern about individuals’ deaths. Kierkegaard realizes that many of the objective metaphysical, historical, and ethical claims of Christianity simply seem to melt away under the intense glare of this often more naturalistic or scientific worldview. And he can also tell that the Epicurean strain grows increasingly aggressive in its opposition to any traditional metaphysical understanding of Christianity that views itself as a viable option in the modern world. But even though the Epicurean strain is apparently in direct opposition to the Platonic, Kierkegaard sees an opportunity to use the former to focus the latter.

He believes that the essence of Christianity is the subjective relationship-existence before Christ (a relationship partially characterized by dying to worldliness)—the emphasis here is on the *how* of existence, e.g. how one relates. What the Epicurean strain

often argues about are certain objective issues and the rationality of behaving in accordance with its objective findings—the emphasis here is on the *what* of existence, e.g. what happens after death. If people despair about Christianity in the light of what the Epicurean strain says about death and the afterlife, then they are obviously not focused on the essence of Christianity. It has never been the goal of the true Christian, according to Kierkegaard, to reach for as much objective worldly security as possible, but rather to die to such security (however painful and difficult that may be), place trust in the divine, and live as one knows one should to the best of one's ability. Interacting with the Epicurean strain seems to serve as a way for Kierkegaard to test for proper Christian dying to the world, because if one is dead to the world then there is no concern about what the world has to say about death. The task at hand, then, is to see how Kierkegaard reacts to the unique challenges posed by the various representatives of this strain.

Toward the beginning of his “At a Graveside” Kierkegaard quotes Epicurus’ famous mantra against the fear of death: “when it is, I am not, and when I am, it is not.” This passage is at the top of Kierkegaard’s long list of problematic understandings of death, both philosophical and everyday. He believes that Epicurus’ explanation of the irrationality of the fear of death trades on its exclusion of any individual’s particular experience of life. That is, Epicurus’ statement only has force if one ignores the fact that it is “I,” with all that this entails, who will die. Kierkegaard states, “this is the jest by which the cunning contemplator places himself on the outside” (TDIO, p. 73/SKS 5, p. 444). Although there will be no “me” to feel the loss of anything once I am dead; while still alive, it feels like I have a lot to lose. Kierkegaard is surely not alone in his dismissal

of Epicurus' claim, but I would briefly like to take up the unpopular task of defending Epicurus against Kierkegaard's attack.

To be clear, it is not as though I really disagree with Kierkegaard's assessment of the particular claim in question. In fact, I do think that Epicurus is guilty of the sort of mistake that Kierkegaard is accusing him of. However, it seems a bit uncharitable to simply take this claim out of context, as so many commentators do, and pass judgment on it. I believe that if this claim is reinserted into something like its original context, then perhaps one might find something more meaningful to attribute to Epicurus than a witty, albeit misguided, cliché. It is not the actual text of Epicurus' "Letter to Menoeceus" that has been betrayed by the isolation of the passage about death, since there is not much in the document itself that could spare Epicurus from Kierkegaard's accusation. Rather, it is the removal of this passage from its historical situation that is so troubling. Perhaps the most significant aspect of this situation is the religious climate of the day. George K. Strodach points out that "it was ... one of the chief social aims of Epicureanism to combat popular religion in all its forms and to substitute for it a theology that was ethically emancipating and elevating" (Epicurus, p. 186).¹⁹⁷ Given the discussion of the religious and atomistic metaphysical beliefs of Epicureans in the previous chapter, it should only be necessary to mention here that among the Hellenistic religious beliefs that Epicurus takes issue with is the notion that there may be a great deal of suffering after death. It is in an effort to combat what Strodach calls "mass phobia" about "the bizarre

¹⁹⁷ It is interesting to notice the similarity between this formulation and Luther's project, especially considering Kierkegaard's criticism of Luther despite obvious appreciation for the difficulties of Luther's particular historical situation. Given that Kierkegaard also faces a problematic religious milieu, he could no doubt sympathize on some level with the circumstances facing Epicurus. Kierkegaard also feels the need to discuss death, not in order to combat wide-spread fear, of course, but rather to shock a culture riddled with frivolity. Nonetheless, just as Kierkegaard criticizes Luther, and especially what happens in Luther's name, he could take Epicurus to task for his dialectical ineptitude in his excessive battle against the fear of death (cf. JP, v. 3, p. 70/SKS 21, pp. 297, 323).

torments of the classical hell” (Epicurus, p. 187), that Epicurus offers his argument that since there will be no experience after death whatsoever, there will be no misery to fear.

Even though I think that Epicurus’ beliefs about death are much better justified when considering what he was up against, I do not believe that Kierkegaard’s criticism is ultimately mitigated by such considerations. Just after criticizing Epicurus, Kierkegaard goes on to criticize what seems to be the position of those against whom Epicurus fought.¹⁹⁸ Kierkegaard states, “even if the contemplation of death uses pictures of horror to describe death and terrifies a sick imagination, it is still only a jest if he merely contemplates death and not himself in death, if he thinks of it as the human condition but not as his own” (TDIO, p. 73/SKS 5, p. 444). It seems that Kierkegaard is not really critical, at least not early on in “At a Graveside,” of the content of the claims of either Epicurus or his opponents; it is not what one thinks about death but how one thinks about it that matters. Both sides of the Epicurean argument make the mistake of failing to emphasize the significance of death for each particular individual it touches and each life it ends. Given that the subjective appropriation of death is significant, according to Kierkegaard, in that it helps an individual die to the world, one can see in his criticism of this ancient debate a warning to the aspiring Christian about how to use thoughts of death.

Since it is the issue of appropriation and not the issue of the fear of death at stake here, it seems possible that Kierkegaard could side with either Epicurus or his opponents if only one or the other had approached death from the proper perspective. By the end of “At a Graveside,” however, Kierkegaard would have to reject Epicurus’ position for

¹⁹⁸ It is unclear whether responding to this position is Kierkegaard’s intention, but it may be the case that Kierkegaard is not guilty of the kind of ahistorical assessment of Epicurus that often goes hand in hand with a discussion of the latter’s famous claim about death.

reasons of objective content as well. Kierkegaard actually advocates for fearing death in an appropriate manner, where such fear of death is obviously not the sort of paralyzing fear that Epicurus criticizes in his religious opponents. Kierkegaard is opposed to both this sort of fear, which he would call excessive, and Epicurus' position, which he would see as insufficient, given that it does not allow death any importance at all. What is interesting to note about the use of the fear of death in "At a Graveside" is that this fear is in no way based on a clear statement of belief in an afterlife, hellish or otherwise. Thus, he seems to find Epicurus' claim that death should not bother the living since it has not happened yet unconvincing, without ever explicitly rejecting Epicurean doctrine about death as the final dispersal of the atoms that were formerly mine.¹⁹⁹

Kierkegaard seems to find some of the same virtues and faults in the Stoic view of death that he finds in the Epicurean, with the notable difference that the former may have more in common with the Platonic/Christian. In journal entries from 1850, Kierkegaard expresses appreciation for Seneca's appropriation of the Epicurean willingness to consider death (JP, v. 4, pp. 42-3/SKS 23, pp. 244-5), but also claims that "having suicide in reserve naturally has a certain power to make life intensive. The thought of death condenses and concentrates life" (v. 4, p. 332/23, p. 231). While Kierkegaard sees a similar intention when thinking about death in these two pagan schools, he seems to believe that Stoic emphasis on suicide inadvertently betrays that they fall short of the ideal Epicurean attitude that "death is nothing to us." It is this sort of "falling short," and making life intensive instead, that demands closer attention because "Christianity also makes life intensive with the thought of death, immanent death, perhaps tomorrow,

¹⁹⁹ Stokes seems to share my assessment of "At a Graveside" on Epicurus and the afterlife issue (Stokes 2006, pp. 398-400).

perhaps today” (p. 332/p. 231). In order to avoid confusion and further clarify what is essential in Christian dying to the world, the Stoics offer an excellent contrast.²⁰⁰

There is a sense in which a willingness to commit suicide seems to suggest that one is dead to the world, but Kierkegaard believes that Stoic suicide is really the opposite of a proper Christian dying to the world. In 1853, He states,

this is precisely what Christianity is alert to. When Stoicism would say: Now you have the right to kill yourself—precisely there is the real dying to the world—if one is to endure going on living. Stoicism has an enormous resiliency in being able to endure suffering many things from which a man would ordinarily shrink. But its resiliency can nevertheless fail—here, then, comes suicide—the resiliency of patience breaks—and here comes the essentially Christian act, to die to the world (JP, v. 4, p. 333/SKS 25, p. 176).

Stoic suicide is a reaction to the world, rather than a dying to it; Stoicism is not really characterized by an indifference to death, however it understands itself, but by sensitivity to the quality of life. Christian dying to the world, according to Kierkegaard, is much more strenuous in that a Christian may come to the point at which a Stoic would check out and yet still continue to endure the struggles of being alive. The key issue for the Christian is never whether or not one suffers, but being prepared and willing to suffer whether or not that should happen. Martyrdom may well come, but to seek it out as an avenue of escape from worldly suffering is, ironically, to remain attached to the world. But this is not necessarily to say that the Stoics are somehow cowardly or frivolous given

²⁰⁰ In the published works, there are a couple of instances of a Kierkegaard pseudonym using Stoicism “as an antagonist for him to define himself polemically against” (Rick Anthony Furtak, “The Stoics: Kierkegaard on the Passion for Apathy,” in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 2, tome 2, edited by Jon Stewart and Katalin Nun (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2010), p. 204). In the first volume of *Either/Or* Marcus Aurelius seems to be an inspiration for the aesthete, who represents the lowest sphere of existence (Rick Anthony Furtak, “Marcus Aurelius: Kierkegaard’s Use and Abuse of the Stoic Emperor,” in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 3, edited by Jon Stewart (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 72-3). And in *Sickness Anti-Climacus* identifies the defiant form of despair with Stoicism, although he seems to have a broader pagan view in mind (SUD, pp. 68-9/SKS 11, pp. 182-3).

that they only kill themselves when the world and those in it can no longer be benefitted by their presence (Strem, pp. 153-4). Even so, this analysis of benefits is a worldly mathematics and the true Christian martyr would never calculate in this way.

In addition to his negative use of Stoicism to sharpen his understanding of proper Christian dying to the world, Kierkegaard also seems to see some positive value in contrasting Stoic views on the afterlife with the view often found in Christendom. In an 1851 journal entry he states,

Cicero says ... that the gods have no advantage over man, except immortality, *but this is not necessary for living a happy life*. Surely the way in which immortality is shoved upon people in Christendom is very confusing, making them think that they feel a deep need for immortality. On the whole, immortality first appeared with Christianity, and why? Because it requires that a person shall die to the world. In order to be able and willing to die to the world—the eternal and immortality must remain fixed. Immortality and dying away correspond to each other. The hope of immortality is nourished by the suffering of dying away. But in Christendom we want to cheat our way into everything, and thus also into immortality (JP, v. 2, pp. 380-1/SKS 24, pp. 448-9).

Immortality for the Christian must go hand in hand with suffering in the world rather than happiness, while the Stoic view is, quite correctly, that happiness in the world can be had without immortality. If worldly happiness is what one wants, then the Stoic or (more generally) pagan life is best. But the so-called “Christians” of Christendom, missing both the Christian point about immortality and the Stoic, mistakenly believe that immortality is a necessary component of having a happy, secure life in the world; they want immortality without acknowledging its miserable companion. Kierkegaard seems to believe that by entertaining the Stoic indifference to immortality, he can help clear up the confusion in Christendom’s understanding: if happiness in the world is what you are after, then immortality is not what you need and a true Christian is not what you are.

Kierkegaard apparently has less use for the views on death of the neo-pagan thinkers of so-called “modern” philosophy. Although he gives a fair amount of attention to the study of Spinoza and Leibniz (if it is at all appropriate to say he is a neo-pagan) up to 1846, and Montaigne in the few years after that,²⁰¹ he has practically nothing to say about their respective death-related discussions. While Kierkegaard’s references to Montaigne are a bit less detailed and frequent, a recurring concern in Kierkegaard’s more thorough reflections on Spinoza and Leibniz is that their views on the objective nature of things tend toward the exclusion of the subjective individual (e.g. JP, v. 1, pp. 17-8/SKS 19, p. 392). This concern, which contributes to Kierkegaard’s association of Hegel with Spinozism, would certainly apply to their views on death (e.g. Carlisle, p. 180; JP, v. 4, pp. 686-7). In fact, in one of the few places where Kierkegaard mentions one of their views on a death-related issue (an 1849-1850 journal entry), he states, “the very way in which modern philosophy speaks of existence shows that it does not believe in the immortality of the individual; it does not believe at all; it comprehends only the eternity of ‘concepts’” (JP, v. 1, p. 460/SKS 22, p. 433). While one could surely speculate about how Kierkegaard might use his understanding of the modern view of immortality, or any of Montaigne’s ideas about death,²⁰² to help keep Christians focused, the close bonds between these views and ideas and those of the Epicureans and Stoics might render such

²⁰¹ Claire Carlisle suggests a fairly thorough understanding of Spinoza on Kierkegaard’s part, although Spinoza rarely comes up after 1846, in her “Baruch de Spinoza: Questioning Transcendence, Teleology, and Truth,” in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 5, tome 1, edited by Jon Stewart (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 173-84. Håvard Løkke and Arild Waaler claim that Kierkegaard’s study of Leibniz was almost exclusively confined to a thorough reading of the *Theodicy* in 1842-1843 (“Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: Traces of Kierkegaard’s Reading of the *Theodicy*,” in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 5, tome 1, edited by Jon Stewart (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 51-4). Søren Landkildehus points out that as far as anyone can tell Kierkegaard’s encounter with Montaigne’s work was mostly casual and confined to 1847 and 1850 (“Michel de Montaigne: The Vulnerability of Sources in Estimating Kierkegaard’s study of *Essais*,” in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 5, tome 1, edited by Jon Stewart (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 114-6).

²⁰² As previously pointed out, many of these ideas are already well preserved in Pascal.

speculation excessively repetitive. Additionally, it is perhaps best to save such speculation for the consideration of how Kierkegaard might have responded to views he could have had no opportunity of encountering during his lifetime.

But before moving on to Kierkegaard's response to Hegelian dealings with death, there is still one later modern thinker to consider who is perhaps more obviously enlisted, than the early moderns, in the fight to keep Christian dying to the world on the right track. Ironically, it is a thinker with whom Kierkegaard had probably no direct literary acquaintance: Hume. Thomas Miles states,

Hume seems eager to push religious believers into a position of fideism, the belief that religious beliefs are founded purely on faith and not reason, in order to extricate religious beliefs from the domain of philosophical and scientific enquiry. Kierkegaard, concerned about a passionless and spiritually deadening rationalism in religion, welcomes this push toward fideism.²⁰³

Although Kierkegaard apparently had only a second-hand knowledge of Hume, and likely no knowledge of his views on explicit death-related issues, what he sees in Hume is the very objective doubt about religious matters that he believes should have no bearing on proper subjective Christian faith (Miles 2009, pp. 23-6). However, because Hume does such a thorough job of using this doubt to rule out all rational attempts to ground faith, he becomes an excellent ally for Kierkegaard in showing would-be Christians that faith is only to be had by dying to reason.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Thomas Miles, "David Hume: Kierkegaard and Hume on Reason, Faith, and the Ethics of Philosophy," in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 5, tome 1, edited by Jon Stewart (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2009), p. 27.

²⁰⁴ Løkke and Waaler focus on Kierkegaard's early (1842-1843) reception of Leibniz's discussion about whether faith is "above reason" or "against reason," and argue that Kierkegaard means only the former when he speaks about dying to reason for the sake of the Christian paradox (pp. 55-7). It is unclear whether or not they believe that their conclusion applies only to this early period in Kierkegaard's thought, but I have argued elsewhere that this conclusion cannot apply to Kierkegaard's later views (see Buben, forthcoming 2011). Not only does Miles seem to share my understanding, but so does Carlisle in comparing Kierkegaard to Spinoza (p. 184), and the Hongs in discussing Leibniz (JP, v. 3, p. 796).

And Kierkegaard clearly has some serious concerns about reason being allowed to run rampant in nineteenth century Christendom. He is famously critical of both Hegel's speculative method²⁰⁵ in general and, more specifically, the application of this method to Christianity. Kierkegaard was keenly aware of the growing influence of Hegelianism in the Danish Lutheran church of his day. While much of his criticism is, therefore, actually aimed at particular Danish Hegelians such as Hans Lassen Martensen (1808-1884) and Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1791-1860),²⁰⁶ there is at the very least a core complaint that Kierkegaard consistently aims at Hegel himself. But before discussing this complaint, it is necessary to reiterate that Hegel holds a special place in my account of the philosophy of death, particularly in connection with Kierkegaard. There can be little doubt that Hegel understands the role that passing through death, in one sense or another, plays for the Christian, and yet his seemingly unorthodox views, which are reminiscent of modern and pagan notions, with respect to the possibility of personal afterlife render him something of a precursor to the existential philosophy of death proposed by Kierkegaard and Heidegger. While Kierkegaard most certainly recognizes Hegel's bizarre blend of Christian and pagan views on such death-related issues,²⁰⁷ he does not welcome it and he does not see it as exactly the sort of concession to worldly rationality and doubt about the

²⁰⁵ Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 2.

²⁰⁶ Kierkegaard often only mentions Hegel, even when he really has these Danish Hegelians in mind (Stewart, pp. 33-4, 452). Out of politeness or respect, Kierkegaard seems to have had a lifelong aversion to explicit public criticism of the living. For example, he wrote but did not publish *The Book on Adler*, which criticizes a small parish minister who claimed to have had a revelation, in order to spare Adler from excessive public humiliation (JP, v. 5, pp. 401, 405, 419; v. 6, p. 117/SKS 20, pp. 196, 201, 264; 21, pp. 275-6). Stewart actually attributes Kierkegaard's pseudonymity, at least partially, to a desire "to avoid embarrassment or unnecessary offense" of others in the relatively close-knit intellectual community of Copenhagen (Stewart, p. 42).

²⁰⁷ On a related note, it would be interesting to consider how well Kierkegaard's critical comments about Epictetus' slavery (JP, v. 4, pp. 332-3/SKS 24, p. 120; 25, p. 35) would mesh with Hegel's master/slave dialectic.

afterlife that he advocates.²⁰⁸ To Kierkegaard, Hegel is a wolf in sheep's clothing, and thus too dangerous to be beneficial for actual striving Christians (e.g. JP, v. 2, pp. 222-227/SKS 20, pp. 44, 207; 23, pp. 63, 68-9; 24, pp. 442-3; 25, pp. 271-2; 27, forthcoming).

The major complaint about Hegel is that he, in some ways like the early moderns, is too busy speculating about the development of humanity in the abstract to be really concerned about the actual existing individual (Stewart, p. 451; Watkin, pp. 67-8). But as explained earlier in this chapter, particularly when discussing Climacus' anti-Hegelian views on the afterlife²⁰⁹ and Kierkegaard's understanding of the church in the *New Testament*, Kierkegaard believes that it is necessary to emphasize one's individuality in order to be properly Christian. For example, Climacus states, "the single individual's salvation indeed depends on his being brought into relation to that historical event [the crucifixion]" (CUP, v. 1, p. 584/SKS 7, p. 531). Each and every individual is responsible for his or her own relationship to Christ, and the human community of Christians only exists in so far as each individual separately works on this relationship. In a certain sense, then, isolation from the rest of humankind is a necessary part of being a Christian—there is no becoming Christian as a crowd, and really no such thing as a Christian special interest group (pp. 584-7/pp. 531-4).²¹⁰ But Hegel denigrates both the self-denial of the early Christians and the imitation of Christ, which Kierkegaard identifies as essential components of an individual's relationship with the savior. And according to

²⁰⁸ Just to be clear, any discussion of Kierkegaard's making a concession or compromise simply means that he recognizes that in the world, worldliness reigns. He is not going to argue that Christianity makes sense on worldly grounds, or according to a worldly interpretation as Hegel seems to. He surrenders the use of worldly weapons, but struggles on against the world with personal faith.

²⁰⁹ It is in Climacus' writings that one can find Kierkegaard's most anti-Hegelian expressions (Stewart, p. 451).

²¹⁰ Compare the discussion in *Postscript* with Anti-Climacus' claims about Christianity's essential relation to "the single individual" given sin (SUD, pp. 120-1/SKS 11, pp. 231-3). Anti-Climacus even connects this idea with the necessary isolation of death in "At a Graveside."

Kierkegaard, Hegel's disdain for these indispensable aspects of the individual task of Christianity is in the service of his speculative description of the development of a certain kind of allegedly "Christian" this-worldly community, which is at best only Christianity in the most superficial sense.

Solomon claims that Hegel actually has no real interest in Christianity. So far as his writings might make it seem otherwise, consider the fact that he lived and worked in a time and a place in which explicit anti-Christian sentiments could have cost Hegel his livelihood (Solomon, p. 582). Obscure as Hegel's claims may often be, Solomon believes that Hegel's real goal is to undermine Christianity by presenting something resembling humanistic atheism in the language of Christianity (p. 583). Recognizing this, Kierkegaard is not so much offering a criticism of Hegel, as he is screaming out a warning in order to prevent his fellow Copenhageners from letting this sneaky scoundrel make his way into the church (Solomon, p. 584). On this reading, Kierkegaard and Hegel simply represent two opposing irreconcilable points of view—the former wants to preserve primitive Christianity in the face of growing doubt and the latter wants to overcome it. Solomon is surely right to point out that Kierkegaard's take on Christianity seems to exemplify the unhappy consciousness that Hegel is so critical of. And the achievement of Hegel's community of divine human beings would probably be guilty of "entirely quash[ing] Christianity"²¹¹ as it was originally meant to be.

Jon Stewart suggests a more nuanced interpretation of Kierkegaard's apparent criticisms of Hegel. Because Kierkegaard probably has specific Danish Hegelians in

²¹¹ Solomon incorrectly cites this phrase (p. 586), attributing it to: Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, translated by Walter Lowrie (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 326. While its tone is certainly representative of this portion of *Postscript*, this phrase does not appear on page 326 of this text.

mind even when he uses Hegel's name, it may be that his actual opposition to Hegel himself is overstated. I agree that this opposition is not quite as stark and complete as other scholars²¹² have claimed. However, by simply comparing what Hegel and Kierkegaard seem to be saying about Christianity in some of their most significant work, I think it is clear that there is indeed a meaningful difference between them. While Stewart is right to be concerned about approaches that "abstract both Hegel and Kierkegaard from their respective historical contexts and analyze their positions directly vis-à-vis one another without taking into consideration other possible influences" (Stewart, p. 3), there is simply no denying that Kierkegaard's core complaint is at least applicable to Hegel.

Kierkegaard's more subdued 1854 reaction to Schopenhauer²¹³ is more in line with his discussion of the value he finds in the Stoics, and his qualified appreciation clearly has something to do with their shared anti-Hegelianism (e.g. JP, v. 2, pp. 227-8/SKS 25, pp. 390-1). But the similarity Kierkegaard finds between Schopenhauer and himself does not end there. Given Schopenhauer's apparent interest in something like dying to the world, it certainly makes sense that Kierkegaard would be drawn to his work as a corrective for the modern version of (especially protestant) Christianity that finds itself compatible with, and even encouraging of, secular flourishing (Davini, pp. 278-9,

²¹² e.g. Niels Thulstrup, *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel*, translated by George L. Stengren (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 370, 379-81.

²¹³ Although Kierkegaard was surely aware of Schopenhauer much earlier, given the significant number of journal entries (there are no explicit references in the published works) dedicated to Schopenhauer that are entirely confined to 1854, it seems likely that his reading of the German pessimist was limited to the last year or so of Kierkegaard's life. See Simonella Davini, "Schopenhauer: Kierkegaard's Late Encounter with His Opposite," in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 6, tome 1, edited by Jon Stewart (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 277-8; and Patrick Stokes, "Kierkegaard's Uncanny Encounter with Schopenhauer, 1854," in *Kierkegaard and Great Philosophers (Acta Kierkegaardiana*, vol. 2), edited by Roman Kralik et al. (Mexico: Sociedad Iberoamericana de Estudios Kierkegaardianos, 2007), pp. 68-9. These two excellent essays do a thorough job of discussing all that Kierkegaard has to say about Schopenhauer.

288; Stokes 2007, pp. 74-5). In fact, he states, “theological students who are obliged to live here in Denmark in this nonsensical (Christianly) optimism could be advised to take a daily dose of Schopenhauer’s *Ethics* to guard against being infected by this drivel” (JP, v. 4, p. 30/SKS 25, p. 376). Since Kierkegaard obviously has an appreciation for Schopenhauerian pessimism about life in the world, one must begin to wonder if any such agreement opens Kierkegaard up to the same sort of attack that Nietzsche levels against Schopenhauer.

Despite any corrective value that Kierkegaard might see, most of his comments about Schopenhauer are quite critical as he tries to put some distance between himself and his “inverse” double (v. 4, pp. 26-9/25, pp. 352-6). This criticism often focuses on the same sort of distinction that Kierkegaard makes between the Stoic “eudaimonistic” view, which he seems to associate with Schopenhauer (pp. 32-3/pp. 389-90),²¹⁴ and proper Christian dying to the world (Davini, pp. 286-8; Stokes 2007, pp. 75-6). Schopenhauer’s pessimism about the world indicates a weary and bitter attitude toward life, and although his goal is a tranquil detachment from the superficiality of this existence,²¹⁵ his attitude betrays more sensitivity to the hardships of the world than any actual full-fledged detachment from it. Kierkegaard states,

There is something false ... in his gloomy Indian view that to live ... is to suffer. On the other hand it can be very good for the contemporary age to be confronted with such a melancholy view in order to become attentive to the essential Christian principle ... to be Christian is to suffer—something that the New Testament teaches as well.... it is erected directly upon Jewish optimism, utilizes as foreground the most intensified lust for life ...

²¹⁴ It should also be noted that this view is very much like the one Kierkegaard attributes to Plato, but not necessarily Socrates in his dissertation (although Kierkegaard does make some distinction between the more optimistic “Greek” (in this context, Platonic) notion of overcoming individual existence and the “Oriental” notion that Schopenhauer seems to share (CI, pp. 63-6/SKS 1, pp. 122-5)).

²¹⁵ Kierkegaard recognizes Schopenhauer’s acknowledgment that he is not actually living up to the requirements of this way of life (JP, v. 4, p. 34/SKS 26, p. 142). Both Davini and Stokes address Kierkegaard’s criticism that Schopenhauer does not demand of himself the ethical position he advocates.

in order to introduce Christianity as renunciation ... if someone were to say: Wealth is an evil, show your asceticism by giving away your wealth, there would be a self-contradiction here, for in this case it is not asceticism to give away one's wealth (JP, v. 4, pp. 31-2/SKS 25, pp. 389-90).

While Christian dying to the world is a willingness to sacrifice what is pleasant and reasonable and instead endure great hardships if need be, there is no sense of sacrifice of worldliness to be found when the world is not something one wants anyway, but is just stuck with. Thus, like the Stoics, Schopenhauer's apparent dying to the world is really just a cover for a certain kind of attachment to, or longing for, worldly comfort and peace (or at least freedom from worldly suffering).

It is his overall understanding of Schopenhauer that actually demonstrates Kierkegaard's imperviousness to Nietzsche's criticisms of the pessimism about life in the world found in Plato, Schopenhauer, and many formulations of Christianity. Not only does Kierkegaard anticipate Nietzsche in rejecting views that indicate weariness in pursuit of escape, which they both attribute to Plato (perhaps unfairly) and Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard's notion of Christian dying to the world actually demands a kind of embracing of all that might be unpleasant in life (a characteristic of Nietzsche's Dionysian). Furthermore, in response to Nietzsche's accusation that Christianity relentlessly condemns this world in favor of another more perfect world to come, Kierkegaard could point out that his understanding of Christianity does no such thing. Even though he may hold onto belief in the afterlife, it is always with an orientation towards how one lives in the present life. From a less defensive perspective, Kierkegaard might actually see Nietzsche's attack on Christianity as an asset for his own attack—Nietzsche demands honesty about the motivations that underlie anyone's pursuit of

Christianity. Christianity is not, as Schopenhauer ultimately sees it, a flight from life and its difficulties.

What makes this issue of the relationship between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche even more interesting is that Nietzsche may have understood that Kierkegaard is exempt from his criticisms of Christianity. Miles points out that despite never reading any of Kierkegaard's books, Nietzsche actually had a great deal of access to works that discuss Kierkegaard and even quote him at length. Among the ideas Nietzsche would have encountered in his reading of Georg Brandes (1842-1927), and Kierkegaard's old adversary Martensen, is Kierkegaard's emphasis on the issue of how an individual lives in the here and now while still following Christ in dying to the world.²¹⁶ Not only do facts like this suggest that the standard view—that Nietzsche meant to read Kierkegaard before his breakdown but never got around to it, and therefore knew little of Kierkegaard—is somewhat misleading, but they also call into question other common dogmas about the Kierkegaard-Nietzsche relationship. For example, it seems that Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) is mistaken in his claim that “from Nietzsche's standpoint Kierkegaard is hostile to life.”²¹⁷ Rather than removing meaning from this life, Kierkegaard's Christianity means to reinvigorate it, and Nietzsche is likely aware of this. In fact, Miles goes so far as to claim that Nietzsche's positive portrayal of the original “life-affirming” views of Jesus over against the traditional doctrines of the Christian church in late writings such as *Twilight* and *The Anti-Christ* is actually influenced by his reading about Kierkegaard's

²¹⁶ Thomas Miles, “Nietzsche: Rival Visions of the Best Way of Life,” in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 9, edited by Jon Stewart (Surrey, England: Ashgate, forthcoming 2011). I am grateful to both Miles and Stewart for allowing me to see an early draft of this paper.

²¹⁷ Karl Jaspers, *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Verlag Von Julius Springer, 1922), p. 256. (*Vom Standpunkt NIETZSCHES ist KIERKEGAARD lebensfeindlich*). Jaspers says this just before his discussion of limit situations, which relies so heavily on Kierkegaard and has such a major impact on Heidegger.

focus on primitive Christianity (Miles, forthcoming 2011). Despite the respect that Nietzsche has for Jesus, and perhaps indirectly, for Kierkegaard, there is no denying that he is critical of even the less-decadent Christianity that they represent.²¹⁸ Miles capably describes these further criticisms, but they need not be addressed here since the goal of this discussion has simply been to establish that Kierkegaard provides an account of Christian emphasis on death that is tempered by something like the Nietzschean embrace of existence.

Continuing the trend of speculation about how Kierkegaard would measure up to more recent views on death, it seems that he could find some very unlikely allies in the twentieth century appropriation of pagan ideas, both ancient and modern. At first glance, the sort of response to Epicurus offered by certain analytic thinkers in which death and life are brought into a kind of retroactive “copresence” might seem similar to the Kierkegaardian (and as one will see, Heideggerian) response to Epicurus. With a closer look, however, it will become apparent that the similarity only goes so far. Stokes is sympathetic with the anti-Epicurean efforts of thinkers such as Nagel and Pitcher, but he ultimately rejects them for much the same reason that Kierkegaard dismisses Epicurus. Stokes states,

Kierkegaard’s approach to the question of death serves as a compelling response to Epicurean indifference and, at the same time, provides a diagnosis of the failure of contemporary analytic philosophers to ground our fear of death. Nagel, Pitcher and company locate the evil of death in frustratable interests and narratives of harm ... but never adequately

²¹⁸ Miles suggests that Nietzsche might view Kierkegaard as he views Pascal, another rare figure who earns Nietzsche’s respect. Specifically, Nietzsche’s lamentation that Pascal had been led into dying to reason by Christianity might also apply to Kierkegaard (Miles, forthcoming 2011). Of course, Kierkegaard would have no problem with being portrayed in this way and compared to Pascal. If anything, he would say that Pascal did not go far enough in the direction that Nietzsche resents. Ultimately, there will be a point at which it must be admitted that there is an irreconcilable opposition between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche given their respective religious views and despite their similarities.

connect these harms to how we *feel* about our *own* mortality (2006, p. 417).

Even if these analytic thinkers do manage to combat Epicurus and achieve an account of how one's passing away, which has not yet occurred, might still be an important factor in understanding life, they do it in such an impersonal way that, in a certain sense, they are no better than Epicurus. Kierkegaard, on the other hand, makes death copresent in a way that provides *me* an opportunity to understand the role that *my* death will play in *my* life.

One issue that Stokes does not really address in his Kierkegaardian rebuttal of various analytic philosophers is the small camp of thinkers, exemplified by Rosenbaum and Jeffrie G. Murphy, who offer a defense of the Epicurean position. While Rosenbaum clearly provides the more explicit defense of Epicurus, I would like to focus briefly on Murphy's work since it resonates interestingly with Kierkegaard's attack on Epicurus. Murphy is actually interested in developing the "pagan way of thinking about death" that is found in philosophers such as the Stoics, the Epicureans, and Spinoza (Murphy, p. 44). This is of course the way of thinking about death that is primarily interested in denying the rationality of fearing death, and in "extinguishing that fear" (Murphy, p. 45). Because Kierkegaard points out that extinguishing the fear of death is not necessarily desirable, it might seem as though Kierkegaard and Murphy are headed for conflict. What is interesting, however, about Murphy's development of the pagan view of death is that he takes what he finds valuable in the Epicurean intuition and tempers it with what he seems to understand as Spinozist pragmatism. Murphy states, "the fear of death is irrational when it redounds, not to our profit, but to our loss" (pp. 56-7).²¹⁹ The fear of death is not to be discarded when it does something useful for an individual, but only when it ceases

²¹⁹ Cf. the quoted passage from the previous chapter in which Spinoza speaks of "seeking his own true advantage."

to be useful. I believe that this is roughly the same insight that is at the core of the Kierkegaardian idea of the appropriate fear of death. Thus, it does not seem to be the case that Kierkegaard is in complete conflict with every analytic account of death.

However, while Murphy's interpretation of the Epicurean position is both consistent with Epicurus' apparent interest in overcoming debilitating fear of death due to superstitious beliefs, and perhaps a handy warning to aspiring Christians who fear inappropriately, it is not without its problems from a Kierkegaardian perspective. It is necessary to remember that the benefit of having a proper fear of death in "At a Graveside" is that such fear allows the thought of death to nudge an individual towards dying to the world. What Murphy seems to have in common with those other analytic thinkers—the ones who worry about frustratable interests—is the focus on worldly advantages and harms. Because Kierkegaard explicitly dismisses these sorts of issues as "incidental" or "accidental" what-concerns, he is unlikely to be overly impressed by any accounts of the rationality/irrationality of the fear of death in such worldly terms.

Having considered what Kierkegaard might think of this most recent appropriation of the Epicurean strain in the history of the philosophy of death, it is worth noting in conclusion that by the twentieth century this strain simply takes for granted that there is no possibility of post-mortem subjective experience. And yet Kierkegaard has a penchant for finding ideas from thinkers in this very present-world oriented strain useful in his attempt to set Christianity back on the right course. Although his reactions to these thinkers are more diverse given that they are not as closely bound as the thinkers in the Platonic strain, there is a consistent message about dying to the world in these reactions: such dying does not depend upon any reasonable expectation of a personal afterlife. The

key concern throughout his discussion of any thinkers who philosophize about death is how an individual makes use of the moment of his or her life. It is this interest in allowing death to play an active role in attributing meaning to life—without relying on an afterlife—that both distinguishes Kierkegaard from most Epicurean and Platonic thinkers, and identifies him as a precursor to Heidegger.

Chapter 4: Heidegger and the Existential Philosophy of Death

Heidegger's account of death in *Being and Time* is one of the most controversial and difficult in the history of philosophy's dealings with death. In the preface to Carol White's *Time and Death*, she states, "the discussion of this issue in *Being and Time* is far from clear; its intentional false starts and dead ends easily mislead the reader."²²⁰ Even though I tend to see more cohesion in Heidegger's account where White sees false starts and dead ends, I agree with her general assessment of its misleading nature. Since I am yet to find an explication of Heidegger's death chapter that makes all of its contents clear to me, I intend to provide such a detailed explication here. Of course, this chapter cannot be taken in isolation, and so, I will attempt in what follows to explain its connections to what comes before and after, both within his magnum opus and in the history of the philosophy of death.²²¹ In particular, it will be most productive to note both the many

²²⁰ Carol White, *Time and Death*, edited by Mark Ralkowski with a foreword by Hubert L. Dreyfus (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), p. 1.

²²¹ One issue that I will not consider in great detail is the nature of Heidegger's occasional comments related to death after *Being and Time*, e.g. his inclusion of "mortals" in his discussion of "the fourfold" (Martin Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," in *Basic Writings*, 2nd ed., edited by David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), pp. 352-6), and his explication of Rilke's views on death and negation (Martin Heidegger, "What Are Poets For?" in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 124-6. See also his "The Thing" in this same volume, pp. 178-9, for more discussion of mortals). Both because Heidegger seems far less interested in focusing on death as a theme in itself in his later work and because the connection of Heidegger to other thinkers on the topic of death relies almost entirely on his work prior to 1930, it seems appropriate to set aside any of his later considerations that touch on death for the time being.

On the issue of Heidegger's pre-*Being and Time* discussions of death, it is probably fair to suggest that the account at the beginning of "Division Two" is simply the final refined version of what he had been saying about death in texts such as the introduction to his proposed Aristotle book and *History of the Concept of Time*.

debts that Heidegger owes to Kierkegaard's account of death and his key departures from this account.

Death in *Being and Time*

Heidegger first takes up the subject of death in detail at the beginning of "Division Two." It is here that, in an attempt to grasp the primordial being of *Dasein* ("being-there," Heidegger's word for the sort of being that humans have), he claims that it must be grasped in its wholeness. Such a complete and fundamental understanding of itself is necessary if *Dasein* is to grasp the meaning of *Being* (the inquiry into these matters is what Heidegger calls "fundamental ontology"—his overall project in *Being and Time*). Because *Dasein* is "that entity which understands what it is to be,"²²² Heidegger is interested first and foremost in the Being of *Dasein*.²²³ And since a partial or derivative account of *Dasein* will not provide a clear and thorough picture of how Being shows up for *Dasein*, he must work out a complete and foundational account.²²⁴ Heidegger states, "if the interpretation of *Dasein*'s Being is to become primordial, as a foundation for working out the basic question of ontology, then it must first have brought to light existentially the Being of *Dasein* in its possibilities of *authenticity* and *totality*" (BT, p. 276). Unfortunately, it seems that *Dasein* can never be grasped in its wholeness because "there is in every case something still outstanding" about it—its death (p. 276). Death is

²²² Charles Guignon, *Heidegger and the Problem of Knowledge* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), p. 68.

²²³ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (BT), translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 24-8, 35.

²²⁴ By questioning what one really ("authentically") is apart from the views handed down by the metaphysical tradition (e.g. a rational animal, a created being, a thinking thing, etc.), one becomes free to see how whatever is shows up without looking through the lenses that these views require one to use (Huntington, pp. 46-7).

notoriously difficult to get a handle on since once it happens there is no longer Dasein. If one is to grasp the wholeness of Dasein, one will have to find a way to deal with this troublesome death issue.²²⁵ Thus, Heidegger seems to embark upon a quest for an understanding of death in which, contra Epicurus, death and I coexist (BT, pp. 279-80). *The Death Chapter*. Throughout Heidegger's famous death chapter, he considers common approaches to death in order to expose its proper characteristics. In ¶47, Heidegger considers the possibility of grasping the wholeness of Dasein by witnessing the death of the other. But Heidegger believes that the other's death is not something that I, as this particular Dasein, can encounter in the relevant sense. He points out that, "we have no way of access to the loss-of-Being as such which the dying man 'suffers'" (p. 282). Thus, he concludes that only Dasein's own death is of interest for the sake of grasping its wholeness. He states,

dying is something that every Dasein itself must take upon itself at the time. By its very essence, death is in every case mine ... death signifies a peculiar possibility-of-Being in which the very Being of one's own Dasein is an issue. In dying, it is shown that mineness and existence are ontologically constitutive for death ... if 'ending', as dying, is constitutive for Dasein's totality, then the Being of this wholeness itself must be conceived as an existential phenomenon of a Dasein which is in each case one's own (p. 284).

²²⁵ Inversely, given its constant inclusion in the death chapter, it would seem that incorporating the notion of wholeness is absolutely crucial to understanding Heidegger's inquiry into death. As is clear from Dreyfus' very helpful foreword, however, few significant interpreters of Heidegger on death emphasize the centrality of wholeness, with Guignon as the notable exception. Of course, Dreyfus raises some concerns about Guignon's early account (White, pp. xviii-xxxi). Fortunately, Guignon has recently updated his views on Heideggerian death while still maintaining the centrality of wholeness. See his "Heidegger and Kierkegaard on Death: The Existentiell and the Existential," in *Kierkegaard and Death*, edited by Patrick Stokes and Adam Buben (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, forthcoming 2011).

In addition to getting at the first formal characteristic of death, “mineness” (*Jemeinigkeit*) or “ownmostness,”²²⁶ this passage also suggests for the first time in the chapter that death is not to be understood in the usual way as an event that comes at the end of life. Since it is rather to be conceived as an “existential phenomenon,” Heidegger begins to explain this conception of dying (*sterben*) by making it distinct from the “perishing” (*Verenden*) of living things (pp. 284-5). However, as this is only the first of a few such distinctions, his explanation of this importantly odd use of otherwise common language will require more than one section of the death chapter to complete.

Because death is often said to be the end of Dasein, ¶48 considers the different common ways of understanding the ending of things in order to determine which might apply to death. Among the possible ways of understanding ending is the fulfillment of ripening fruit. Even though Heidegger ultimately rejects ripening as the appropriate sort of ending for a description of Dasein’s death (ripening is a sort of realizing of a purpose, while death initially seems to be what makes this sort of achievement impossible in that it often leaves projects unfinished), there is an aspect of his discussion of ripening that he retains in his understanding of death as an ending (p. 288). This aspect is the fact that, like the fruit which carries its “not-yet” ripe with it as it ripens, Dasein carries its not yet at an end with it while it exists. That is, it carries its death with it as that which it is not yet. He states,

just as Dasein *is* already its ‘not-yet’, and is its ‘not-yet’ constantly as long as it is, it *is* already its end too. The ‘ending’ which we have in view when we speak of death, does not signify Dasein’s Being-at-an-end, but a *Being-towards-the-end* of this entity. Death is a way to be, which Dasein takes over as soon as it is (p. 289).

²²⁶ See BT p. 297 for an association of these two terms: many things might be accidentally mine, but what is “essentially mine” (death) seems to be part of my “ownmost self.” See pp. 67-71 for a more general discussion of the essential “mineness” of my existence.

Not only does this passage begin to explain Heidegger's notion of death as "a way to be" instead of as an event, it also gives the reader the first glimpse of how death makes possible a proper grasp of the whole of Dasein (p. 290). Since I am always my death, in the sense of being towards it, Heidegger may have found a way of showing how death and I can coexist.

Given Heidegger's new equation of Dasein's dying with Being-towards-death, in ¶49 he is able to supplement the explanation of his peculiar use of otherwise common terminology that he began when he distinguished death from the perishing of living things. He does so by adding a further term, "demise" (*Ableben*), and claiming that it basically signifies the specific sort of perishing that only happens to Dasein. In other words, demise is to Dasein what perishing is to something alive.²²⁷ Heidegger states,

the ending of that which lives we have called 'perishing'. Dasein too 'has' its death, of the kind appropriate to anything that lives ... as codetermined by its primordial kind of Being.... Dasein too can end without authentically dying, though on the other hand, *qua* Dasein, it does not simply perish. We designate this intermediate phenomenon as its 'demise' (BT, p. 291).

Once he defines demise, he seems to suggest that it is the actual object of study when any ontic science (as opposed to ontological inquiry) picks up on the topic of human death. For example, psychology merely concerns itself with how people feel about their lives given that these lives will end in demise, and theology deals both with what will happen after demise as life's final event and how the realization of demise helps organize one's

²²⁷ Dreyfus seems to feel that Heidegger's straightforward explanation of the difference between perishing and demise is insufficient, so he surmises that demise is really Heidegger's word for Dasein's culturally interpreted event of what for mere living things would be simple perishing (Dreyfus, p. 309). I do not see any reason to take Dreyfus' extra step.

life (he seems to dismiss the Christian account of death aimed at “edification” here, but it is unclear if he has Kierkegaard in mind) (pp. 291-2).

According to Heidegger, underlying these ontical investigations into the significance of demise is the ontological, or existential, understanding of death as being-towards-death. He states, “methodologically, the existential analysis is superordinate to the questions of a biology, psychology, theodicy, or theology of death” (p. 292). But what is the nature of this superordination? Heidegger (apparently in line with something like the Epicurean claim) points out that demise cannot actually be experienced, and yet the ontic sciences seek to characterize this event, or at least the human relationship to this event, in their own particular ways. Because they have no experience of demise to rely upon, the ontic sciences must instead rely upon some (not necessarily reflective or critical) understanding of the only way that one really can experience death in some sense—by being towards it (p. 291)—if their respective characterizations are to have any legitimacy at all. That is, since by definition no one ever lives to tell about demise, any scientific view on the matter depends upon the various ways we experience approaching it. In order to further demonstrate the significance of his understanding of Being-towards-death and show that it is not some arbitrary construction, Heidegger concludes this section by claiming that it must be connected with his earlier analysis of Dasein’s Being-in-the-world (p. 293).

In the last chapter of “Division One,” Heidegger designates the being of Dasein as care (p. 237), which he defines as “ahead-of-itself-Being-already-in (the world) as Being-alongside entities which we encounter (within-the-world).” That is, Dasein is essentially oriented towards its future, while already thrown into a past that includes not

only its own past actions but also its capabilities and cultural background, and engaged with the things and others it encounters and the projects it is concerned about. To each of these three components of care, Heidegger gives a name of sorts—the “ahead-of-itself” he calls “existence,” the “Being-already-in” he calls “facticity,” and the “Being-alongside” he calls “falling” (p. 293). The purpose of ¶150 is to explain how each of these components of care are manifested in Being-towards-death.

Heidegger begins this explanation by discussing Dasein’s ahead-of-itself/existence as manifested in the impending nature of death. Having given up on the idea of death as something still outstanding, because this idea understands death as an event that has not yet taken place, he must offer an account of death’s impending nature that does not make this same mistake. Thus, he provides his first list of the formal characteristics of death as an impending possibility—characteristics indicative of important features of Dasein’s being.²²⁸ He begins with the ownmostness already mentioned and adds that death is “that *possibility ... which is non-relational, and which is not to be outstripped [unüberholbare]*.” As Being-towards-death, Heidegger points out that Dasein is its own possibility of no more Dasein, and he believes that this means two things. First, in honestly accepting itself as the possible disconnection from all that it has been, including its purely accidental relations to others, Dasein comes to understand its individuality in such a way that it can no longer rely on these relations to explain itself. It

²²⁸ Theodore Kisiel and Iain Thomson both offer helpful statements of the Heideggerian concept of “formal indication” in connection with death. See Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger’s “Being & Time”* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 339-440; and Thomson, “Heidegger’s Perfectionist Philosophy of Education in *Being and Time*,” in *Continental Philosophy Review*, vol. 37, no. 4, 2004, p. 465. See also Heidegger’s “Comments on Karl Jaspers’s *Psychology of Worldviews*,” in *Pathmarks*, translated by John van Buren, and edited by William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 9, where he seems to connect the formal indication of existence with Jaspers’ limit-situations. Briefly, formal indication with respect to death is the process that I describe throughout this chapter of taking the specific things one can properly say about death as suggestive of the form or nature of existence in general.

must rather take full responsibility for itself and its choices. Second, as its own constant possibility of no more Dasein, Dasein's Being-towards-death always stands before it and cannot be gotten beyond. In other words, so long as one is, one can never finish with death or actualize this unique possibility. It is in this sense of something always standing before it, i.e. ahead-of-itself, that Heidegger sees death as impending. In fact, because nothing else seems to stand before Dasein in such a distinctive way, he states, in reference to the ahead-of-itself, "this item in the structure of care has its most primordial concretion in Being-towards-death" (p. 294).²²⁹

Since Dasein is essentially ahead-of-itself-Being-towards-death, it must have found itself "*thrown* into this possibility." That is, in existing, Dasein has from its beginning, as a fact of its existence, its possibility of its no longer being. Whether or not a particular Dasein is explicitly aware of it, this facticity is in some sense revealed by the presence of anxiety. Heidegger states,

anxiety in the face of death is anxiety 'in the face of' that potentiality-for-Being which is one's ownmost, non-relational, and not to be outstripped.... This anxiety is not an accidental or random mood of 'weakness' ... but, as a basic state-of-mind of Dasein, it amounts to the disclosedness of the fact that Dasein exists as thrown Being *towards* its end.

This passage refers back to both the definition of anxiety in the last chapter of "Division One" and the discussion of state-of-mind (*Befindlichkeit*) in the penultimate chapter.

Although it would surely be worthwhile to explore these ideas in connection with Kierkegaard's extensive discussions of mood and anxiety,²³⁰ it is most important, for my

²²⁹ As will become clear in the following pages, this association of death and the ahead-of-itself aspect of the care structure is perhaps the most important point made in the death chapter.

²³⁰ In addition to some similar usage by Kierkegaard and Heidegger, it ought to be pointed out that the German *Stimmung* (a key topic in Heidegger's account of "state-of-mind") and the Danish *Stemning*, both

present purposes, simply to note that despite Dasein's ever-present state of anxiety, Heidegger believes that most of the time Dasein remains ignorant of the fact that it is essentially Being-towards-death (in fact, Dasein often remains unaware of its anxiety as well). Rather, Dasein "falls" into "the 'world' of its concern" (p. 295). In other words, instead of owning oneself as the possibility of no more possibility, one is often guilty of ignoring this fact by losing oneself in everyday activities and thereby "fleeing in the face of one's ownmost Being-towards-death" (p. 296).

Having explained how all three components of care—existence, facticity, and falling—are manifested in Being-towards-death, Heidegger's account of death does indeed seem less arbitrary. At the very least it now seems to fit in with the rest of *Being and Time* so far. However, Heidegger claims that this connection of care and death (where care contributes the basic structure of Dasein's Being and death contributes the appropriate "ahead-of-itself" approach to Dasein's end), for the sake of grasping the wholeness of Dasein, requires some "phenomenal confirmation" in the way Dasein relates to its end in everyday dealings with the world (p. 296). Although his account is purely formal in the sense that it intentionally offers only the skeletal description of Dasein without recommending any particular material ways of life to fill it out (which Heidegger is careful not to do in order to avoid contaminating his inquiry with the ontic assumptions and baggage that come along with or make up such material), it is still helpful, both for understanding and corroborating his account, to see how death is dealt with on the ontic/existentiell level, particularly in common everyday parlance.

often translated as "mood," are practically the same word. Heidegger also shows a particular affinity for Kierkegaard's "treatise on the concept of anxiety" (BT, p. 494).

In ¶51, Heidegger turns to everydayness in search of his phenomenal confirmation, and he reminds those who have read chapters four and five of “Division One” that everydayness is characterized by the “idle talk” of the public “they” (p. 296). The “they,” taking death as something like mere demise, and relying on worn out clichés and the old standard statistics of the ontic sciences, “tempts” Dasein both to forget that death is its own and to treat the event of death as something that need not be worried about just yet. In a passage that could easily be used to describe Epicurean views, Heidegger states,

in such a way of talking, death is understood as an indefinite something ... which is proximally *not yet present-at-hand* for oneself, and is therefore no threat.... ‘Dying’ is leveled off to an occurrence which reaches Dasein, to be sure, but belongs to nobody in particular.

This objective view of death is not only an inaccurate account of demise, but it also hides the fact that death, understood as Being-towards-death, is no mere eventual actuality; it is one’s constant possibility (p. 297). This hiding of Dasein’s essential Being-towards-death by the “they” can often be seen in its “tranquilizing” of death, which involves focusing on the everyday world of concerns. To those who are clearly near the end of life, this tranquilization manifests itself in the consolation that assures the dying that they will soon be back on their feet engaged with their everyday concerns. To the rest, tranquilization shows up in the attitude that treats the dying of others as an inconvenience that should be dealt with quickly so as not to disturb the everyday concerns of the living (pp. 297-8).

In addition to temptation and tranquilization, the “they” also “alienates” Dasein from itself. This alienation is the result of a sort of double concealment of Dasein’s essential Being-towards-death. As already pointed out, anxiety is the primordial state-of-

mind of Dasein as thrown into its own Being-towards-death. Focusing on death in Heidegger's sense of demise, the "they," however, transforms "this anxiety into fear in the face of an oncoming event." But this initial concealment of Being-towards-death is not enough for the "they," which then goes on to treat the fear of the event of demise as something weak and cowardly. In depicting such fear in this way, and recommending instead a sort of indifference to death, the "they" (perhaps standing in for Stoics and Epicureans at this point) buries the anxiety that is a necessary part of Dasein as Being-towards-death under an extra layer of deception (p. 298). Already removed from anxiety by one layer due to the substitution of fear in the face of demise, Dasein is then further encouraged to avoid an intimate encounter with this fear.

After concluding this explanation of alienation, Heidegger states that, "temptation, tranquilization, and alienation, are distinguishing marks of the kind of Being called 'falling'" (p. 298). Since the everydayness of the "they" approaches death in these three ways, this everydayness shows itself to be falling or fleeing in the face of death. But as suggested in the previous section, such falling or fleeing is still Being-towards-death even if the one falling or fleeing is unaware. To sum up, Being-towards-death is displayed in everydayness in its falling, which is one of the three components of care. Therefore, it seems that Heidegger has found the sought-after everyday confirmation of his connection of care and Being-towards-death (pp. 298-9). In looking at everydayness and its various death-related mistakes, however, it has become clear that his list of the formal characteristics of death is in need of expansion. Thus, the next step for Heidegger is "to try to secure a full existential conception of Being-towards-the-end" (p. 299).

As one might guess based on the preceding consideration of everydayness (see, for example, the passage above from page 297), ¶52 will add certainty and the indefiniteness of this certainty to Heidegger's list of the formal characteristics of death. In everydayness, the "they" admits the fact that death, as the event of demise, is certain in the sense of "not doubted" (p. 299, 301). But Heidegger believes that this claim of certainty merely convinces the "they" that since it has already grasped death's certainty, it need not look into this matter any further. Thus, the proper sort of certainty that belongs to death as Being-towards-death remains hidden from the "they" (p. 301). Heidegger is distinguishing here between certainty as way to be (perhaps like an attitude in the sense of self-assurance), as in "Being-certain," and the sort of certainty that he claims is derived from Being-certain and applied to the things one is certain about (p. 300). For example, I can be so assured that I must be prepared for rain that I manifest my attitude in the way I structure my day, e.g. the way I dress, the route I take to work, the activities I choose; and this Being-certain of myself as "prepared for rain" has nothing to do with whether or not it actually rains.²³¹ This latter issue comes up when considering whether or not my attitude is appropriate given the likelihood of precipitation. It is this secondary concern with "actual" events, rather than ways of being, that leads to (often indifferent) statements like "it will certainly rain today."

Because death is not to be understood as the event of demise for Heidegger, but rather as a way to be, it is clear that he must not be interested in the derivative sort of certainty that the "they" applies to the thing it calls death (demise). If Dasein is to grasp the original certainty of death, Dasein must *Be* certain of itself as Being-towards-death, but this is precisely what is made difficult, if not impossible, by viewing death's

²³¹ Cf. BT, p. 355, where the key component of "Being-certain" is appropriation.

(demise's) certainty as the "they" does. Heidegger states, "the 'they' overlooks the fact that in order to be able to be certain of death, Dasein itself must in every case be certain of its ownmost non-relational potentiality-for-being" (p. 301). Not only does the "they" conceal the only certainty that belongs to Being-towards-death according to Heidegger, but also, because of its focus on demise, the "they" can at best have only an empirical certainty, which is, *a la* Hume, really no certainty at all. No amount of witnessing the demise of others can suggest anything more than a high probability of demise (p. 301).

Despite the hiding of Being-certain of Being-towards-death behind the illusion of the empirical certainty of demise, Heidegger claims that even in everydayness there is still some vague hint of this Being-certain. The very persistence of Dasein's, perhaps not obvious, state of anxiety in the face of itself as Being-towards-death, which is even found in Dasein's falling—falling that allows death to be seen mostly as empirically certain—betrays some, albeit disowned, sense of Being-certain of Being-towards-death. Heidegger states, "the falling everydayness of Dasein is acquainted with death's certainty, and yet evades *Being-certain*." Just as Being-towards-death is attested in falling everydayness, so is Being-certain of Being-towards-death. As odd as it may sound, everydayness is Being-certain by evading Being-certain (p. 302); the mere fact that such evasion is possible shows that there is something to be evaded.

With the certainty of death comes its indefiniteness, but the "they" in its everyday way, once again demonstrates its concealing of death's certainty by failing to acknowledge such indefiniteness. Heidegger states, "death is deferred to 'sometime later' ... the 'they' covers up what is peculiar in death's certainty—*that it is possible at any moment*. Along with the certainty of death goes the *indefiniteness* of its 'when.'" As

pointed out in the preceding section, the “they” often treats demise as an event that is not due to take place anytime soon, and thus the “they” is clearly guilty of failure to acknowledge the indefiniteness as to when demise will take place. Rather than facing up to this mistake, Heidegger claims that the “they” retreats into a false definiteness associated with the activities of the everyday world of concern. That is, the “they” finds itself primarily, if not entirely, engaged in actualizing possibilities, accomplishing goals, and producing definite results in everyday matters before it passes away. The problem with this sort of definiteness is that, given the fact that demise can happen at any time, it is purely an accident if any particular possibilities reach “definition” or actualization. Here one can see in the everyday evasion of the indefiniteness as to when demise will take place an indication of the essential *Being*-indefinite that goes along with the Being-certain of Being-towards-death. The fact that all definiteness or actualization is accidental for Dasein suggests that Dasein is essentially possibility or unfinished indefiniteness. Viewed in this way, the “they” does not merely have a mistaken approach to demise, but the “they” also uses this mistaken approach to conceal the true indefinite nature of Dasein’s Being-towards-death (p. 302).

Having concluded his discussion of the indefinite certainty of death, Heidegger finally has a “full existential-ontological conception of death.” Before moving on to the last section of the death chapter, however, he offers something in the way of a review. Given that he has now made explicit all of the formal characteristics of Dasein as it is “towards” its “not-yet,” Heidegger reminds the reader that, “in Dasein, as being towards its death, its own uttermost ‘not-yet’ has already been included—that ‘not-yet’ which all others lie ahead of.” As mentioned earlier, it is this inclusion of its own death, in the

sense of Being ahead-of-itself towards-death when explained in terms of Dasein's essential care structure, that makes grasping the wholeness of Dasein possible without its encountering demise. Heidegger's understanding of death allows the ahead-of-itself aspect of Dasein to be seen in unity with the other aspects of the care structure, as opposed to seeking the ever-elusive characterization of the event that concludes or completes life. Even though Heidegger is approaching his stated goal of grasping the wholeness of Dasein, he still has a great deal of work left to do. To begin with, while he has made "*inauthentic Being-towards-death*" sufficiently clear as "everyday falling evasion *in the face of death*," such inauthenticity presupposes of the possibility of an authentic (*eigentlich*)²³² Being-towards-death (p. 303). Heidegger himself asks, "can Dasein maintain itself in an authentic Being-toward-its-end?" Until such a question is answered, his account of death will not be complete (p. 304). After all, how can a falling evasion lead to a genuine grasping of wholeness?

¶53, the final section of the death chapter, begins by suggesting that there may have been no point in providing the full existential-ontological conception of death, since there seems to be no existentiell instance (appearance in the world) of authentic Being-towards-death. All one sees in the world is inauthentic Being-towards-death (p. 304). However, given this evasive Being-towards-death as a kind of example of what not to do, it should at least be feasible to describe what the Being towards this possibility, or taking on of one's death, in a non-evasive, or authentic, way would be like (pp. 304-5).

²³² *Eigentlich* literally means something like "enownable." Thus, becoming authentic means becoming one's own, or owning up to what one is; and authentic Being-towards-death is an owning up to oneself as this sort of Being. Even though Heidegger seems uncomfortable speaking, as Kierkegaard does, in terms of subjectivity as opposed to objectivity (Heidegger often puts these terms in scare quotes because this dichotomy displays a common misunderstanding of the nature of what is); there is surely ample material here for an enlightening comparison with the idea of becoming subjective as found in *Postscript*, where becoming subjective also means something like becoming one's own.

Heidegger begins this description by ruling out the various ways in which one might relate oneself to death understood as the event of demise. These ways of relating, “actualization” (in the sense of suicide), “brooding,” and “expecting,” are alike in that they all seek in some way or another to diminish death’s possibility by looking for its actuality (pp. 305-6).

But as the discussion of indefiniteness suggests, Dasein’s Being-towards-death has nothing to do with actualization; rather, death understood in this sense shows that Dasein “at the most basic level is a reaching forward into possibilities,” as Charles Guignon explains (“Death,” forthcoming). Heidegger eventually comes to the conclusion that the proper way to maintain Being-towards-death in its pure possibility is by what he calls “anticipating,” or “running forward toward”²³³ (*vorlaufen*), death (BT, p. 306).²³⁴ What is revealed in anticipation is that Dasein is pure projection into possibility, and thus, there is nothing essential to be made actual so long as one exists (and obviously there is no actualization once one no longer exists). Heidegger states,

death, as possibility, gives Dasein nothing to be ‘actualized,’ nothing which Dasein, as actual, could itself *be*. It is the possibility of the impossibility of every way of comporting oneself towards anything ... In the anticipation of this possibility it ... signifies the possibility of the measureless impossibility of existence. In accordance with its essence, this possibility offers no support for becoming intent on something, ‘picturing’ to oneself the actuality which is possible, and so forgetting its possibility. Being-towards-death, as anticipation of possibility, is what first *makes* this possibility *possible*, and sets it free as possibility (p. 307).

This passage and others like it on page 307 are perhaps the most obscure in the entire chapter, but what Heidegger seems to be suggesting here is that in anticipating death, viz.

²³³ I am grateful to Guignon for suggesting this formulation to me. He makes a similar statement in “Heidegger and Kierkegaard on Death: The Existentiell and the Existential,” (forthcoming).

²³⁴ Although Heidegger apparently does not make such a connection explicit, Thomson and others claim that the term *vorlaufen* implicitly refers to the *Blitzkrieg*—blindly running out into the field of battle towards almost certain death (e.g. Thomson, p. 464).

authentically Being-towards-death, Dasein finds a certain freedom in being somewhat undefined as to the specific content of its existence. Hubert Dreyfus (in an apparent gloss on the sort of impossibility Heidegger is getting at) sees the anticipation of death as illustrating “that Dasein can have neither a nature nor an identity, that it is the constant impossibility of *being* anything specific” (Dreyfus, p. 312). This is not to say that one is absolutely free in the superficial sense of “anything is available to me” since, after all, the purely formal structure of Dasein as this projecting into possibilities up to a point sets certain limitations on the shape and scope of these specifics.²³⁵ Nonetheless, no concrete way of life can ever be essential to Dasein in the way that pure possibility is. In order to see clearly how Heidegger reaches these conclusions about authentic Being-towards-death, he must re-view his formal characteristics of death through the lens of anticipation.

He goes through each of these characteristics in turn, repeating much of what he has already said about them, but now emphasizing the lessons that each characteristic provides when one anticipates death. Since Dasein has its ownmost possibility in death (no one else can take on my Being-towards-death), there is at least one possibility in which Dasein is distinct from the “they.” While this is always true, it is through authentic Being-towards-death that one can become aware of oneself in this distinction from the nebulous anonymity (BT, p. 307). Because it is one’s own self that becomes an issue in this way of encountering death, there is a sense in which one must stand alone in anticipation, independent of relationships with other Dasein and things in the world. An authentic grasp of one’s Being-towards-death is non-relational in that it individualizes Dasein and demonstrates that while such an individual is always connected to these

²³⁵ As will become clear in the coming pages, there are other limitations on Dasein’s freedom.

others, this connection cannot be wholly determinative of what one is. The anticipation of death, therefore, leads Dasein to take responsibility for itself (p. 308).

That death is not to be outstripped means that Dasein will inevitably lose its possibilities, including all of the thoughtless accidental possibilities of the “they” that it has accrued like barnacles throughout its existence. Once Dasein realizes this in anticipation, it becomes clear that no particular possibility, other than Being-towards-death, is essential to Dasein, despite the attitudes of the “they” that say otherwise, and so it recognizes its freedom before all of the possibilities that are factually available to it so long as it is.²³⁶ Heidegger states, “one is liberated from one’s lostness in those possibilities which may accidentally thrust themselves upon one ... Anticipation ... shatters all one’s tenaciousness to whatever existence one has reached” (p. 308). Because the anticipation of death opens Dasein up to its essential projection into the possibilities that lie before the one that is not to be outstripped, Dasein is able to realize its constant ahead-of-itself orientation, which is a necessary part of grasping its wholeness (p. 308-9).

The anticipation of the certainty of death, or authentically Being-certain of Being-towards-death, means being assured “of what is revealed by being-toward-death” (Guignon, “Death,” forthcoming). What is revealed, in connection with the notion that death is not to be outstripped, is of course that Dasein is pure projection into possibilities. Heidegger states, “the certain possibility of death ... discloses Dasein as possibility” (BT, p. 309). But being certain of itself as essentially possibility cannot be like the ordinary objective “taking something as true,” which may dictate behavior in the sense of “given

²³⁶ The idea here seems to be something like this: if I were to consider my life backwards from when it ceases, I can see that I could have done without pursuing the various things I pursued. These possibilities could have been “out-run” if I had chosen to pursue others instead, but what could not have been avoided or “out-run” is the fact that I was able to pursue things up until I *was* no longer.

fact x, I must proceed with behavior y.” Although no doubt helpful in particular cases, this sort of indifferent truth seems inappropriate given that it is Dasein’s very Being that is up for discussion here. Rather, Heidegger is suggesting a comprehensive and personal way of being true that compels and colors all of one’s behavior. He states, “holding death for true does not demand just *one* definite kind of behaviour in Dasein, but demands Dasein itself in the full authenticity of its existence” (pp. 309-10). But an important part of this “holding death for true” in anticipation involves cultivating indefiniteness. The fact that it is always possible for Dasein to no longer be there suggests that Being-certain of Being-towards-death means proceeding into possibilities with no guarantee of making any of them actual, which might allow one to thereby define oneself as a particular sort of being. In the anticipation of death, one learns not only of the insecurity or anxiety of being such an essentially indefinite being, but also how to embrace this anxiety as a necessary part of existence (in contrast to how the “they” deal with fear) (pp. 310-11).

Taking all of this together, Heidegger offers a summary “characterization of authentic Being-towards-death” when he states,

*anticipation reveals to Dasein its lostness in the they-self, and brings it face to face with the possibility of being itself, primarily unsupported by concerned solicitude, but of being itself, rather, in an impassioned **freedom towards death**—a freedom which has been released from the Illusions of the ‘they’, and which is factual, certain of itself, and anxious* (p. 311).

The freedom towards death that results from the anticipation of the various aspects of death is, as suggested before, the freedom from ever being essentially determined by any particular possibilities or ways of understanding. In authentic Being-towards-death, Dasein is liberated not only from everyday ways of understanding death, but also from everyday ways of understanding anything, including itself. Rather than being defined by

the goals and projects that the “they” expects one to complete in life, Dasein becomes free to be what it really is—ahead-of-itself for the sake of itself. Although Heidegger will have more to say on this topic in later chapters, perhaps such freedom is best described simply as Dasein’s being pure possibility—being open to the totality of available possibilities standing before it, with less concern about which particular possibilities may or may not be actualized.²³⁷

It should come as no surprise by this point that even at the end of his death chapter, with an account of the possibility of grasping the wholeness of Dasein in hand, Heidegger still sees more work to be done: “the question of Dasein’s authentic Being-a-whole and of its existential constitution still hangs in mid-air.” He has provided what he meant to in this final section of the chapter—a description of the form that an authentic existentiell Being-towards-death would have to take. In his own words, Heidegger “has made visible the *ontological* possibility of an existentiell Being-towards-death which is authentic ... without holding up to Dasein an ideal of existence with any special ‘content.’” But he claims that this is a hollow victory, “a fantastical exaction,” unless he can also demonstrate that Dasein actually does “demand” such authenticity of itself. Thus, Heidegger seeks a phenomenal attestation of the anticipation of death in connection with Dasein’s complete structure in order to confirm that authenticity happens (BT, p. 311).

Death and the Rest of “Division Two.” Having provided a detailed account of the death chapter, it should now be possible to pick up the pace in explaining how the anticipation of death relates to the rest of *Being and Time*. Since the anticipation of death accounts for

²³⁷ See Charles Guignon, “Heidegger’s Concept of Freedom, 1927-1930,” in *Interpreting Heidegger*, edited by Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 93-5; Guignon, “Death,” forthcoming.

the “final” third—the ahead-of-itself, or “futuraity”—of Dasein’s care structure in its authenticity, what must still be explained are the other two thirds in their authenticity.²³⁸ Heidegger begins to take up the issue of Dasein’s thrownness or “pastness” in the second chapter of “Division Two,” when he introduces the “call of conscience” and “guilt.” The idea here is that while Dasein is pure projection into possibilities, it does not determine these possibilities for itself; rather it finds itself thrown into a situation in which certain possibilities are available and others are not. Heidegger states, “every Dasein always exists factually. It is not a free-floating self-projection; but its character is determined by thrownness as a Fact of the entity which it is” (BT, p. 321). Even though Dasein has freedom from the “they” as to certain specifics, Dasein is not absolutely free in that it does owe a debt of gratitude “to the culture for an understanding of itself” (Dreyfus, p. 308) within a certain horizon of what is available to it. This debt is Heidegger’s notion of guilt (*Schuld*), which he has cleansed of any moral or theological connotations. As an expression of Dasein’s thrown Being-already-in, such guilt is an essential part of Dasein as care; thus, if Dasein is to reach its authenticity, its guilt or pastness (like its death or futurity) must be related to properly (BT, pp. 329-30).

One must not ignore one’s debt and behave as though all things are possible, or what is just as likely, use one’s thrownness to deny any freedom or “say” in one’s existence at all. Instead, Heidegger believes that Dasein, as the Being that has an interest

²³⁸ Of course, none of these three essential structures happens before the others according to some sequential or chronological understanding of time. Rather, they are the three equiprimordial aspects of Dasein’s being as care (although “*the primary phenomenon of primordial and authentic temporality is the future*” (BT, p. 378)) that make any ordinary understanding of sequential temporality possible (Guignon, “Death,” forthcoming). See BT pp. 370-80 for Heidegger’s initial connection of care and temporality. These key ideas are the indispensable lens for viewing the rest of “Division Two.”

in what it is, must appropriate and take responsibility for its guilt even though it did not choose to be or to be in its particular situation. He states,

existent Dasein does not encounter itself as something present-at-hand within-the-world. But neither does thrownness adhere to Dasein as an inaccessible characteristic which is of no importance for its existence.... Dasein has been thrown *into existence*. It exists as an entity which has to be as it is and as it can be (p. 321).

Although Dasein is in a sense constrained by its thrownness, just as no particular possibility to be actualized is as essentially determinative of Dasein's Being as pure projecting into possibilities, there is no particular possibility or set of possibilities that Dasein is thrown into that can absolutely account for Dasein's choices.²³⁹ While Dasein has to choose to act on certain possibilities that are available to it, Dasein does so to the exclusion of other available options, and its choosing some rather than others cannot be simply blamed on its thrown situation. Dasein chooses, or projects itself into possibilities, with nothing in its pastness or futurity to justify its choices. Heidegger states,

freedom ... *is* only in the choice of one possibility—that is, in tolerating one's not having chosen the others and one's not being able to choose them ... thus 'care'—Dasein's Being—means, as thrown projection, Being-the-basis of a nullity (and this Being-the-basis is itself null). This means that *Dasein as such is guilty* (BT, p. 331).

This passage suggests that, in making unsupported choices based on its foundation of available options, Dasein freely takes on the debt or guilt (whether one knows it or not) of having such options.²⁴⁰ But perhaps the question remains why it matters whether or not one acknowledges, or attempts to "lucidly understand" (Dreyfus, p. 307), one's

²³⁹ It is in the choosing rather than in what can be chosen that Dasein essentially defines itself.

²⁴⁰ Cf. Jeff Malpas' interesting account of this constrained sense of freedom and responsibility in which he intentionally avoids relying on Heideggerian terminology ("Death and the Unity of a Life," in *Death and Philosophy*, edited by Jeff Malpas and Robert C. Solomon (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 122-3, 194).

responsibility for having chosen amongst the possibilities that one's thrownness makes available.²⁴¹

It will be helpful at this point to explain the notion of the call of conscience: "the call of conscience has the character of an *appeal* to Dasein by calling it to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being-its-Self; and this is done by way of *summoning* it to its ownmost Being-guilty" (BT, p. 314). Again stripped of any moral or theological connotations, this call is something like Dasein's innate awareness that it owes it to itself to take on its thrownness as indispensable to what it is. That is, once it realizes its essential structure as care, Dasein must acknowledge that it has an intimate connection to both its inherited pastness and its indeterminate futurity built right into its very Being (p. 354). Conscience calls out to Dasein to be what it authentically is, and what it authentically is, is the inherited possibilities it is ahead-of-itself towards (pp. 322-3, 330-1).

The responsible acknowledging or understanding of one's essential guilt, which Dasein demands of itself in the call of conscience and is necessary for authentic wholeness, is what Heidegger calls "resoluteness" (*Entschlossenheit*), or "unclosedness." He states, "wanting-to-have-a-conscience resolves upon this Being-guilty. To project oneself upon this Being-guilty, which Dasein is *as long as it is*, belongs to the very meaning of resoluteness" (p. 353). Resoluteness is the authentic way of relating to one's "pastness" in that in it Dasein seeks to maintain its essential lack of determination by any particular possibilities that it is thrown into or given by the "they." While Dasein

²⁴¹ Kisiel asks a related, but more general question: "How does the ontological can-be turn into an ontic have-to-be? How does existential possibility become existentiell compulsion?" (Kisiel, p. 432). Basically, the issue is why one should care about being authentic or about taking responsibility just because Heidegger points out that one can be authentic or acknowledge responsibility. As I will suggest, the answer to such questions is that one simply is "care," and so, not to pursue authenticity or responsibility is to ignore what one is. I take it that Heidegger feels that the repulsiveness (or at least the peculiarity) of the reduction to the contradiction of not being what one is offers compulsion enough.

acknowledges that its possibilities are not its own, it remains open to “own”-ing up to them by making its own unsupported decisions based upon its “current factual Situation” (p. 355).²⁴² Given that Heidegger has provided an account of Dasein’s authentic grasp of both its “pastness” (resoluteness) and its “futuraity” (anticipation of death), it seems that Dasein can finally be understood in its authentic totality. Heidegger states, “*temporality gets experienced in a phenomenally primordial way in Dasein’s authentic Being-a-whole, in the phenomenon of anticipatory resoluteness*” (p. 351). In order to complete an account of this “phenomenally primordial temporality,” all that remains to be explained is the resolute “making present” (p. 374)²⁴³ of the thrown possibilities that Dasein runs forward towards.

In other words, one might say that this remaining issue concerning anticipatory resoluteness is the question of the sense of authentic “presentness” that binds Dasein’s “pastness” to its “futuraity,” or its “birth” to its “death.” This “presentness” is what Heidegger calls the “moment of vision” (*Augenblick*, literally “blink of an eye”).²⁴⁴ He states,

to the anticipation which goes with resoluteness, there belongs a Present in accordance with which a resolution discloses the Situation. In resoluteness, the Present is not only brought back from distraction with the objects of one’s closest concern, but it gets held in the future and in having been. That *Present* which is held in authentic temporality and which thus is *authentic* itself, we call the ‘*moment of vision*’ (BT, p. 387).

This moment, which is certainly not the “now-moment” of everyday temporality (p. 388) but rather the “between” that “stretches along” (p. 426) from authentic Dasein’s birth to

²⁴² Heidegger makes it quite clear that the “Situation” discussed here is not simply the “present-at-hand mixture of circumstances and accidents which we encounter” (p. 346), but rather the very “there” that Dasein puts itself in, in resolutely taking responsibility for itself (p. 347).

²⁴³ He will distinguish this from the irresolute “making present” that corresponds to the everyday temporality of “within-time-ness” (BT, p. 388).

²⁴⁴ The Danish cognate *øjeblik* has the same connotation.

its death, is something like responsibly choosing and projecting towards a possibility that it has knowingly taken over from its thrownness. Heidegger provides his clearest statement of the connection of these difficult ideas in his discussion of Dasein's historicity. Here he states that in the moment of vision one hands one's thrown possibilities, or cultural "heritage" (*Erbe*) down to its projecting or "fate" (*Schicksal*) in an act of "repetition"²⁴⁵ of these "past" possibilities (pp. 435-8).²⁴⁶

It is in such repetition, "which is futurally in the process-of-having-been" (p. 443), that one can find the glue that finally makes grasping the wholeness of Dasein possible. Perhaps a brief summary will help to make this unity apparent. In the anticipation of death, one comes to understand that one is essentially free towards possibilities so long as one is. This freedom means that the incessant preoccupation with actualized "output," which is not essential to Dasein but is characteristic of the "they," is undermined (pp. 435, 440). But resolute acceptance of one's birth or inherited guilt makes it clear that Dasein's freedom towards death is limited in its range of possibilities by its factual situation. In an often quoted passage about Dasein's anticipatory resoluteness, Heidegger speaks of "the power of its finite freedom" in which "it can take over the *powerlessness* of abandonment" to thrown Being-towards-death "and can thus come to have a clear vision for the accidents of the Situation that has been disclosed" (p.

²⁴⁵ Although it will be worthwhile to pursue the obvious connections with Kierkegaard on this concept, there seems to be no obvious etymological connection between the German *Wiederholung* and the Danish *Gjentagelsen*. However, both terms literally mean something like, "taking again." Caputo emphasizes this literal understanding in discussing Job as a helpful indication of repetition, but does not explicitly connect the German and the Danish in this way ("Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and the Foundering of Metaphysics," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vol. 6, edited by Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993), pp. 214-6).

²⁴⁶ Perhaps the following schema will be helpful for understanding the relationships between Heidegger's various technical terms:

existence	ahead-of-itself	death	anticipation	future	fate
falling	Being-with/alongside	life	moment	present	repetition
facticity	thrownness/already in	birth	resoluteness	past	heritage (guilt)

436). This clear moment of vision allows Dasein to choose from its horizon of possibilities, while preserving its essence as freedom or pure possibility, i.e. without treating either this horizon or these particular choices as entirely determinative of what Dasein is (Guignon, "Freedom," pp. 96-8; Kisiel, p. 340).²⁴⁷ Heidegger puts all of this together when he states,

when its heritage is thus handed down to itself, its 'birth' is *caught up into its existence* in coming back from the possibility of death (the possibility which is not to be outstripped), if only so that this existence may accept the thrownness of its own 'there' in a way which is more free from Illusion (BT, p. 443).

So Dasein in its authentic and unified structure is a running forward towards possibilities that it allows itself (as opposed to taking them over accidentally or uncritically from the everyday practices of the "they") based upon what was available to it.

Heidegger's Appropriation and Criticism of the Tradition

The complicated role of death in *Being and Time*, much like Kierkegaard's treatment of the topic, could hardly have been developed without relying upon the vast assortment of philosophical dealings with death that came before it. In this particular case, it is precisely Kierkegaard's account that seems to have been the foundation for much of what Heidegger has to say. By considering the points of convergence between these two descriptions of allowing death to penetrate one's existence, it will be possible, despite their differences, to understand Heidegger as engaged in roughly the same sort of blending of the two strains in the philosophy of death that Kierkegaard is interested in. In

²⁴⁷ Thus, authentic Dasein is not susceptible to a foolish rigidity, but instead always remains open to abandoning a particular "repeated" course of action "in accordance with the demands of some possible Situation or other" (BT, p. 443).

focusing on his relationship to Kierkegaard, I do not mean to diminish the significance of death-related connections with other thinkers that are unique to Heidegger's account (in certain cases necessarily so given Heidegger's access to post-Kierkegaardian thought).²⁴⁸ Fortunately, it will often be possible to make note of instances in which Heidegger borrows from other thinkers, with or without his acknowledgment, to supplement what he takes from Kierkegaard.²⁴⁹ Ultimately, whatever his debt to Kierkegaard may be, it will be necessary to explain why Heidegger believes that his account goes beyond what Kierkegaard is able to accomplish in the Christian context.

What Heidegger Was Reading. Although Heidegger never explicitly discusses Kierkegaard in any great detail (as he does so many other thinkers that have a profound impact on his thought), there is no doubt that he was well versed in the Dane's writings. Consider, briefly, what was available to him. Besides the numerous translations of Kierkegaard's works that appeared in German prior to the twentieth century,²⁵⁰ a twelve

²⁴⁸ In addition to Jaspers, who will prove integral in Heidegger's appropriation of Kierkegaard, there is at least one other thinker especially deserving of a brief mention. Just a few pages before concluding his death chapter, Heidegger somewhat mysteriously incorporates a passage about becoming too old for one's victories that he parenthetically attributes to Nietzsche (BT, p. 308). Given the discussion surrounding this passage, Heidegger is likely referring to "On Free Death" from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, where Nietzsche states, "some become too old even for their truths and victories; a toothless mouth no longer has the right to every truth" (*Zarathustra*, p. 54). Besides the actual content of Heidegger's quotation, what is most interesting about its inclusion is that it signals Heidegger's reliance on Nietzsche at the very moment that he is laying out one of the key aspects of his understanding of death—the freedom it brings. Specifically, it seems that Heidegger might have found inspiration for his ideas in Nietzsche's claims about both the appropriation of one's own death, without developing either a morbid longing for escape or a cowardly clinging to life, and the celebration (and liberation) of life that such appropriation engenders (*Zarathustra*, pp. 53-5). For more on what Heidegger borrows from Nietzsche on the topic of death (in particular, on issues such as the certainty of death and 'the moment'), see Parkes' fascinating account, in "Death and Detachment," which compares these two with several Japanese thinkers (pp. 83-97).

²⁴⁹ Heidegger himself makes note of the influence on his views on death of thinkers such as Paul, Calvin, Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), and Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910), just to name a few (BT, pp. 494-5)

²⁵⁰ Jens Himmelstrup, *Søren Kierkegaard International Bibliografi* (Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag, 1962), pp. 25-8.

volume collected works, edited by the notorious Christoph Schrempf,²⁵¹ appeared between 1909 and 1922; and all but two of these volumes were published by 1914.²⁵² This date is significant given that Heidegger himself admits that between 1910 and 1914 he enthusiastically read Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, and Kierkegaard among others.²⁵³ In his courses leading up to *Being and Time* Heidegger even quotes *Either/Or, Practice in Christianity*, and the *Attack* from the Schrempf edition (he also refers to *The Concept of Anxiety* from this edition in the first of his well-known *Being and Time* Kierkegaard notes).²⁵⁴ But it is not just Schrempf's work that makes 1914 a significant year for Heidegger's reception of Kierkegaard. For it was also in this year that Theodor Haecker's translations of Kierkegaard's more "upbuilding" works (with accompanying commentary)²⁵⁵ began to appear in the Austrian journal of cultural and literary criticism

²⁵¹ Schrempf is notorious for his inaccurate translations and interpretation of Kierkegaard's work. See Habib C. Malik, *Receiving Søren Kierkegaard* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997), pp. 336-9, 377.

²⁵² Søren Kierkegaard, *Gesammelte Werke*, vols. 1-12, edited by Christoph Schrempf (Jena: Diederichs, 1909-1922). This edition is translated mostly by Schrempf but there are additional translators involved as well.

²⁵³ Both Guignon and Vincent McCarthy refer to the "Foreword" to Heidegger's *Frühe Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Klosterman, 1972), p. x, where he makes this claim. See Guignon, "Death," forthcoming; and Vincent McCarthy, "Martin Heidegger: His Use of Kierkegaard Hidden or In Full View?," in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 9, edited by Jon Stewart (Surrey, England: Ashgate, forthcoming 2011). I am grateful to both McCarthy and Stewart for allowing me to see an early draft of this paper.

²⁵⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle*, translated by Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), p. 137; Martin Heidegger, *Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity* (OHF), translated by John van Buren (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 83; BT, p. 492. To be precise, the passage he quotes from the *Attack* in *Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, is from an 1896 translation of Kierkegaard's *Point of View* by Dorner and Schrempf. Heidegger's "Foreword" to this lecture also acknowledges that for the ideas it contains, "impulses were given by Kierkegaard" (OHF, p. 4). Also see Kisiel (p. 452) for Heidegger's similar statement more than a year after *Being and Time*.

²⁵⁵ Schrempf's edition had mostly ignored these works due to their explicitly Christian content, but he did attempt to address this lacuna with a partially completed series of new translations in the 1920s.

known as *Der Brenner*; and Heidegger was a subscriber to this periodical from 1911 until it ceased publication in 1954.²⁵⁶

On the topic of death, which is of course the focus here, Heidegger was exposed to the complete range of Kierkegaard's thoughts well before writing *Being and Time* and there can be little doubt that these thoughts had a most significant impact upon his notion of Being-towards-death.²⁵⁷ In 1915, Haecker's translation of "At a Graveside," curiously missing most of the introductory reflection at a funeral, appeared in *Der Brenner*,²⁵⁸ and as Theunissen has argued, it did not escape Heidegger's attention. In fact, Theunissen believes that the reference to Kierkegaard's "'edifying' writings" (BT, p. 494),²⁵⁹ in a note (*Being and Time*'s second reference to Kierkegaard) just before the death chapter, refers primarily to this, Kierkegaard's most concentrated discussion of death.²⁶⁰ But there is plenty of reason to believe that Heidegger was also well acquainted with many of Kierkegaard's other significant treatments of death-related matters. For example, within the death chapter itself, Heidegger includes a note of appreciation for Jaspers' discussion

²⁵⁶ Allan Janik, "Haecker, Kierkegaard, and the Early Brenner: A Contribution to the History of the Reception of *Two Ages* in the German-Speaking World," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vol. 14, edited by Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984), p. 220; Malik, pp. 371-7; van Buren, p. 150.

²⁵⁷ In the appendix to *Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity* (a course from the summer of 1923) Heidegger already acknowledges Kierkegaard's significance for his understanding of death with the cryptic statement, "the *death* of Christ—the problem! Experience of death in any sense, death—life—Dasein (Kierkegaard)" (OHF, p. 86).

²⁵⁸ Søren Kierkegaard, "Vom Tode," in *Brenner-Jahrbuch* 1915, pp. 15-55 (Austrian Academy Corpus und Brenner-Archiv: Brenner Online. Online Version: *Der Brenner*. Herausgeber: Ludwig Ficker, Innsbruck 1910-1954, AAC Digital Edition No 2. <http://www.aac.ac.at/brenner>). With its translation of Kierkegaard's death discourse, this volume of the journal was dedicated to a favorite poet of Heidegger's, Georg Trakl, who died (by suicide it turned out) early during the war. This was the last volume of *Der Brenner* until 1919 (Malik, pp. 381, 391).

²⁵⁹ The Danish *opbyggelig* is more commonly and literally translated as "upbuilding."

²⁶⁰ Theunissen, p. 328; McCarthy, forthcoming; George Pattison, "*Tre Taler ved taenkte Leiligheder*," in *Den Udødelige* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 2007), pp. 181-2; Heiko Schulz, "A Modest Head Start: The German Reception of Kierkegaard," in *Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 8, tome 1, edited by Jon Stewart (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 331, 357. Schulz mentions "At a Graveside" along with "'Lilies in the field' from 1847." Van Buren points out that Heidegger must have read the latter by 1924 at the latest (Van Buren, p. 171).

of death as a limit-situation in *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* (BT, p. 495).

Interestingly, it is in this very section of Jaspers' magnum opus that one can find a massive quotation from *Postscript*'s brief but focused discussion of thinking death as an example of how to become subjective.²⁶¹ Thus, even if Heidegger was not thinking of "At a Graveside" specifically in writing about death in *Being and Time*, it seems certain that some of its major themes (which *Postscript* rehashes, as I have mentioned) were on his mind.

Among the other texts that I mention in the previous chapter as having important contributions to make towards an overall understanding of Kierkegaard's views on death, Heidegger also seems quite familiar with *Anxiety*, which he explicitly acknowledges, and *Sickness*, which he does not. At the very least, he must have had a thorough second-hand knowledge of these detailed discussions of the fallen, sinful situation of humans and its connection to various senses of death via Jaspers' "review of Kierkegaard" (which Heidegger mentions in his third and final Kierkegaard note in *Being and Time* (p. 497)) that focuses on the kaiology of *Anxiety*²⁶² and *Sickness* (Jaspers, pp. 419-432).²⁶³

²⁶¹ Jaspers, pp. 269-70 (Jaspers' references are to the Schrempf edition). Van Buren also notes Heidegger's indirect reliance on *Postscript* on death via Jaspers (Van Buren, pp. 175-6). In his comments on Jaspers' discussion of limit-situations from the early 1920s, Heidegger even acknowledges Kierkegaard's influence on Jaspers on this topic (Heidegger, "Comments on Jaspers," pp. 9-10, 22-3). Despite Jaspers' admitted reliance on Kierkegaard, I certainly do not mean to suggest that Jaspers is in no way distinct from Kierkegaard when it comes to death-related issues. For example, he rejects Kierkegaard's rigorous sense of the imitation of Christ and the dying to reason it calls for (Schulz, p. 354). I also do not mean to suggest that Heidegger gets nothing of value from Jaspers' discussion of limit situations outside of a better understanding of Kierkegaard's view of death. For more on what he takes from Jaspers himself, see William D. Blattner, "Heidegger's Debt to Jasper's Concept of the Limit-Situation," in *Heidegger and Jaspers*, edited by Alan M. Olson (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), pp. 153-165.

²⁶² In the same note, Heidegger also mentions Jaspers' discussion of "the moment," which refers to *Anxiety* several times (Jaspers, pp. 108-17).

²⁶³ Although van Buren acknowledges Heidegger's independent reading of Kierkegaard from as early as 1911, he claims that it was not until his encounter with Jaspers' book that he engaged in "his first intensive reading of Kierkegaard's works" (van Buren, p. 150). I am not entirely sure that this is true given Heidegger's own claims and all of the Kierkegaard that was available to Heidegger between 1910 and 1915. Van Buren is certainly right, however, if he simply means to point out that Heidegger's "Comments

Moving onto somewhat more speculative claims about his reading activities, Heidegger never explicitly acknowledges Kierkegaard's consideration of the radical Christian sense of dying to the world in late writings such as *For Self-Examination* or *The Moment*, although they are both found in the Schrempf edition.²⁶⁴ And given his fascination with the Kierkegaardian concept of "the moment," and his apparent familiarity with the attack literature, it is hard to believe that Heidegger overlooked Kierkegaard's series of pamphlets by the same name. Additionally, various collections of discourses, including *Works of Love* and *Christian Discourses*, appeared in German both before and after the turn of the century. In fact, it seems that every work (at least in part) of real significance to Kierkegaard's philosophy of death, including several collections of journal entries, was available in German well before Heidegger began working on *Being and Time*, with the exception of *The Concept of Irony*,²⁶⁵ which was not translated until 1929 (Malik, pp. 381-2; Schulz, pp. 388-91).

Clearly Heidegger had access to Kierkegaard's work, read it, and found value in it, especially those texts that deal most explicitly with death. Why then does Heidegger only occasionally acknowledge Kierkegaard in *Being and Time*, with none of those occasions in the death chapter, and why are these acknowledgments so seemingly

on Jaspers" were his first attempt at commenting on explicitly Kierkegaardian themes. See also, van Buren, p. 170.

²⁶⁴ Actually, as the Hongs point out in their historical introduction to *For Self-Examination*, these two simple and direct works were the first to be translated into German just a few years after Kierkegaard's death (FSE, p. xiii).

²⁶⁵ As difficult as it may be to believe, given certain apparent resonances with Heidegger (John J. Davenport briefly hints at such resonances in his "Wholeheartedness, Volitional Purity, and Mortality: A Partial Defense of the Narrative Approach," in *Kierkegaard and Death*, edited by Patrick Stokes and Adam Buben (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, forthcoming 2011)), I have also found no mention of a pre-*Being and Time* translation of the "Purity of Heart" discourse, while the "Lilies and Birds" discourse from *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* was available in German before the twentieth century (Himmelstrup, p. 27).

dismissive of someone he obviously relies upon?²⁶⁶ Some have suggested simple egotism and even gone so far as to accuse him of approaching blatant academic dishonesty.²⁶⁷ I am not sure, however, that these sorts of suggestions and accusations are entirely fair given Heidegger's apparent willingness over an extended period of time to point out Kierkegaard's influence on a number of topics, even if only briefly. While the reasons for the seemingly dismissive nature of his statements about Kierkegaard in *Being and Time* will take a bit longer to decipher, I would like to suggest two mitigating factors in the meantime that ought to be considered when evaluating the thoroughness of Heidegger's citations.²⁶⁸ To begin with, he expresses concern in several places about the rampant "Kierkegaardism" in German academic circles in the early 1920s (Kisiel, pp. 275, 316, 397, 541).²⁶⁹ Heidegger seems to feel that this new fad misunderstands the proper lessons of Kierkegaard in its superficiality.²⁷⁰ In order to avoid being associated with such a trend, it may be the case that Heidegger is not overly eager to make reference to Kierkegaard by the mid-1920s even if Kierkegaard remains an important influence on his thinking.²⁷¹

But even if this potential explanation of Heidegger's reticence is unconvincing, there is another, perhaps more substantial, reason as to why Heidegger might be less interested in drawing a great deal of attention to his debt to Kierkegaard. In *Ontology*—

²⁶⁶ Heidegger's somewhat complimentary notes about Kierkegaard (and others) typically take the following form: "Kierkegaard is better than most at what he does from his narrow perspective, but he does not see things from the deeper point of view that I am after."

²⁶⁷ E.g. Caputo 1993, pp. 203-4; McCarthy, forthcoming.

²⁶⁸ To be clear, my goal is not to completely exonerate Heidegger and excuse his oversights, but rather to provide a more nuanced understanding of his possible motivations.

²⁶⁹ A simple perusal of the more and more influential *Der Brenner* between 1919 and 1923 suggests just how much Kierkegaard must have been "in the air" at this time among educated German-speakers (see also Malik, pp. 371ff).

²⁷⁰ Both Kisiel and McCarthy point to a course from 1929-1930, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, where Heidegger makes such a claim (Kisiel, p. 550; McCarthy, forthcoming).

²⁷¹ Guignon makes a similar point ("Death," forthcoming). See also McCarthy, forthcoming.

The Hermeneutics of Facticity, just after acknowledging the “impulses” he has received from Kierkegaard and others, Heidegger makes an interesting claim about the irrelevance of listing his historical influences in this way. He states,

This is for those who ‘understand’ something only when they reckon it up in terms of historical influences, the pseudo-understanding of an industrious curiosity, i.e., diversion from what is solely at issue in this course and what it all comes to. One should make their ‘tendency of understanding’ as easy as possible for them so that they will perish of themselves. Nothing is to be expected of them. They care only about the pseudo (OHF, p. 4).

Basically, Heidegger seems to believe that these sorts of trivial historical concerns can only distract from the meaningful task at hand. While he demonstrates that he is more than willing to name names, he claims that such lists will fascinate only the most superficial of minds when there is real philosophical work to be done. With this admonishment in mind, it would be best at this point to turn away from questions about what Heidegger was reading and when, in order to consider more substantial issues of influence with the goal of attaining a more thorough grasp of the development of the existential philosophy of death.²⁷²

What Heidegger “Borrowed” from Kierkegaard. Although many connections between Kierkegaard and Heidegger on death-related issues have already been made in the surrounding literature, especially concerning anxiety and “the moment,” much less has been said when it comes to things like dying to the world and the ideas about mortality and the afterlife presented in “At a Graveside” and the more explicitly Christian discourses. While it is surely worth making note of the many fruitful points of

²⁷² My point is not that Heidegger is in any way opposed to the historical tracing, or “destruction,” of an idea’s development (in fact, this is often what occupies Heidegger, particularly in the various courses surrounding the publication of *Being and Time*), but that he believes it is a mere trivial pursuit to read a text with the goal of naming each thinker that seems to be responsible for the original expression of every passing thought.

convergence that have already been suggested, the main focus here must be on those connections that have received too little attention and remain in need of further development. In particular, it will be of most interest to consider how Heidegger joins Kierkegaard in blending lessons from the two key strains in the history of the philosophy of death.

Perhaps the best way to start in looking at the relationship between these two thinkers on the topic of death is in terms of “At a Graveside,” even though Heidegger never cites it. There are both obvious connections concerning issues such as the uncertainty, or indefiniteness,²⁷³ of the “when” of death, and other less frequently discussed clues that also suggest Heidegger’s debt to this discourse.²⁷⁴ One of these clues is the way Heidegger dismisses the experience of the death of the other in his quest for the proper approach to death.²⁷⁵ As already mentioned, in ¶47, he claims that the other’s death is not something that a particular Dasein can experience in the relevant sense, and so, he concludes that only one’s own death is of interest for the sake of his inquiry. Of course, limiting himself to a consideration of one’s own death makes more sense once he comes to explain death as a way to be. If the issue at hand were simple passing away, or “demise,” one could argue that no one has any better access to their own death than to the death of another, but there is something uniquely accessible about one’s own particular Being-towards-death. Later in the chapter, when Heidegger goes on to describe the

²⁷³ Heidegger speaks of *Unbestimmtheit* in *Sein und Zeit*, while death as indefinable in “At a Graveside” comes from the Danish word *ubestemmelig*, which is translated *unbestimbar* in *Der Brenner’s “Vom Tode.”*

²⁷⁴ The best discussions of any such connections are Theunissen’s (esp. pp. 338-47) and Guignon’s papers on “At a Graveside” and Heidegger. Theunissen, for example, briefly touches on the clearly similar treatment of the “when” of death (pp. 331-2).

²⁷⁵ For a helpful discussion of the death of the other in the light of the Kierkegaardian/Heideggerian view, see Laura Llevadot, “Kierkegaard, Levinas, Derrida: The Death of the Other,” in *Kierkegaard and Death*, edited by Patrick Stokes and Adam Buben (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, forthcoming 2011).

authentic self provided by the anticipation of death, he states, “understanding does not primarily mean just gazing at a meaning, but rather understanding oneself in that potentiality-for-Being” (BT, p. 307). To try to understand Being-towards-death by focusing on the other would amount to nothing more than this gazing, while true understanding comes only through appropriation.

It is precisely this sort of appropriation that Kierkegaard is after in “At a Graveside,” when he speaks of the “jest” of thinking about death in general without also thinking of oneself in connection with it. Although this discourse takes the imagined funeral of a loved one as its point of departure, Kierkegaard’s purpose in depicting this imagined occasion is to show the difference between the effect of the other’s death on the living and the effect that a relation to one’s own death can have on the living. He states, “to think of oneself as dead is earnestness; to be a witness to the death of another is mood” (TDIO, p. 75/SKS 5, p. 446). Some 80 years later, it seems that Heidegger comes to share Kierkegaard’s interest in the benefits of a proper relationship with one’s own death.²⁷⁶

Another clue to Heidegger’s debt can be found in his closely related discussion of Being-certain of death.²⁷⁷ Although the certainty²⁷⁸ of death is an often-discussed link between Kierkegaard and Heidegger, the surprising difficulty of making this connection in the right way renders it an issue worth revisiting. Heidegger points out, as mentioned

²⁷⁶ Theunissen provides a similar account of the connection between Kierkegaard and Heidegger on the death of the other (pp. 335-6).

²⁷⁷ Dan Magurshak makes a similar connection while focusing on the discussion of certainty in *Anxiety*. See his, “The Concept of Anxiety: The Keystone of the Kierkegaard-Heidegger Relationship,” in *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vol. 8, edited by Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), pp. 185-6.

²⁷⁸ In *Der Brenner*’s “*Vom Tode*,” Kierkegaard’s *Vished* and *Visse* become *Gewissheit* and *Gewisse* (the opposite being *Uvished* etc. in Danish and *Ungewissheit* etc. in German), which are not surprisingly the terms used in *Sein und Zeit*.

above, that while everydayness is empirically certain of death (as mere demise) in the sense of not doubting some coming event, everydayness is not certain in the sense of Being-certain of Being-towards-death. Again, this difference is between a derivative, disinterested assent to some objective fact and an involved making something one's own and behaving accordingly. Heidegger states, "the explicit appropriating of what has been disclosed or discovered is *Being-certain*" (BT, p. 355). Because death is not to be understood as the objective event of demise for Heidegger, but rather as a personal way to be, it is clear that he is less interested in the derivative sort of certainty that everydayness applies to the thing it calls death (demise).

Although Kierkegaard does not draw such a sharp death/demise distinction,²⁷⁹ and therefore, might initially seem guilty of only dealing with what Heidegger describes as the empirical certainty of demise, there is a way of seeing Kierkegaard's discussion of certainty as a precursor to Heidegger's notion of Being-certain. Kierkegaard does not even concede that everydayness is certain of, in the sense of not doubting, its demise. In everyday conversation people may say that they are certain, but their actions speak louder than their words. If they really do not doubt death, why then do they behave in ways that treat life as though it is without limits?²⁸⁰ As examples of this behavior (and its underlying attitude), Kierkegaard mentions an excessive "soul-destroying" sorrow and paralyzing shock at the 'unexpected' deaths of loved ones (as though certain death can

²⁷⁹ As suggested in the previous chapter, however, Haufniensis' brief discussion of the more complicated impact of death on humans in comparison with the impact of death on simpler organisms seems like it could have influenced Heidegger's technical differentiation of death-terminology, especially given Heidegger's footnote mentioning *Anxiety* just before his death chapter begins. It might also be that Heidegger's distinction has roots that go back to the two notions of dying to live that I have suggested one might find in the *New Testament* (or even to any earlier views that posit an essential difference between humans and animals). Cf. also Theunissen's brief discussion of the various senses of death found in Christianity, which includes the bodily, the spiritual (what *Sickness* focuses on), and the mystical (dying to) (pp. 343-4).

²⁸⁰ For a similar sentiment in his journals, see JP, v. 1, p. 335/SKS 27, forthcoming.

ever be entirely unexpected), and the taking on of projects without consideration for the fact that death can come at any time (TDIO, pp. 75, 95-6/SKS 5, pp. 446, 463-4). Like Heidegger, Kierkegaard seems to be distinguishing between an empty objective acknowledgement of certainty and a sort of genuinely appropriated Being-certain that is manifested in the way one behaves in the world.

The final “At a Graveside” clue to be considered here concerns the anti-Epicurean nature of Kierkegaard’s and Heidegger’s respective projects.²⁸¹ Specifically, it seems that Heidegger, like Kierkegaard before him, is attempting to provide an account in which “you are and death also is” (TDIO, p. 75/SKS 5, p. 446). Heidegger attempts to get at Dasein’s coexistence with death by showing how it is possible, through Being-towards-death, to grasp Dasein’s wholeness and realize how it is essentially structured, while acknowledging that it will no longer be when it one day meets its demise. Because death understood as Being-towards-death is something that, as previously mentioned, one carries along with one (or simply *is*) in existing, and does so authentically in anticipating death, Heidegger seems to have in some sense avoided problems that have traditionally been associated with the inability to experience death (demise). But it appears that in developing his strategy for avoiding these problems Heidegger may have had the benefit of a prototype.

In discussing Kierkegaard’s “retroactive power” (*tilbagevirkende Kraft*) of death, George Connell claims that it “is very like Heidegger’s notion of authenticity and

²⁸¹ Kisiel (p. 339) briefly notes the implicit anti-Epicureanism in Heidegger that Kierkegaard openly expresses. Theunissen discusses the influence of the German Hegelian Ludwig Feuerbach’s (1804-1872) work on death and immortality upon Kierkegaard and Heidegger; he suggests that Feuerbach’s unwitting “variation upon” the Epicurean mantra he means to reject might be seen as a precursor to Heidegger’s views (Theunissen, pp. 335, 340-1).

resoluteness in the face of death” (Connell 2006, p. 436).²⁸² What Connell seems to have in mind about Kierkegaard’s account is the way in which an individual’s death, rather than simply annihilating this individual’s life, meaningfully impacts this life while it is still being lived (pp. 434-5). Kierkegaard states,

what is decisive about the explanation, what prevents the nothingness of death from annihilating the explanation, is that it acquires retroactive power and actuality in the life of the living person; then death becomes a teacher to him and does not traitorously assist him to a confession that denounces the explainer as a fool (TDIO, p. 97/SKS 5, p. 465).

It appears that in this retroactivity, Kierkegaard has, like Heidegger, found a way of showing death as somehow coexistent with the life of an individual. Although Kierkegaard obviously does not put this coexistence in terms of Being-towards-death, it does not seem too far-fetched to see in the idea of death as a teacher, death as a way to be.

But Heidegger’s apparent connections with the graveside discourse are only part of the story of the overall similarity between the role of death in *Being and Time* and Kierkegaard’s death project. Not only does Heidegger share particular concepts with Kierkegaard; they also seem to have a similar purpose in overcoming the Epicurean view and encouraging an existence so intertwined with death. In Kierkegaardian terms, the goal here is dying to the world as described in the *New Testament*, and passed down,

²⁸² Heidegger also speaks about the power that comes from approaching death in a certain way (BT, p. 436), but while both Kierkegaard’s Danish expression and its translation as “*rudwirkende Kraft*” in *Der Brenner’s “Vom Tode”* use the word *Kraft*, Heidegger’s expressions involve the word *Macht* (e.g. *Übermacht* and *Ohnmacht*) instead (there is a common Danish equivalent: *Magt*). If there is any significance to this difference between them, perhaps it is that Heidegger means to exploit *Macht*’s connotation of political power that is not present in *Kraft*. Given Heidegger’s interest in authenticity, or “owning oneself,” it may be that he means to suggest that the anticipation of death leads to a sort of ruling over oneself (cf. BT, p. 357).

Incidentally, when Climacus considers “whether death can be anticipated” (CUP, v. 1, p. 168/SKS 7, p. 155), the Danish is *anticiperes* (translated in the Schrempf edition as *antizipiert*). Despite the possible connection suggested by the common English translation of Heidegger’s *vorlaufen*, it seems that there is no etymological reason to think that he gets his formulation from Kierkegaard’s pseudonym.

more or (occasionally) less authentically, by a series of Christian thinkers I have already discussed. Despite the fact that Kierkegaard remains firmly engaged in this Christian conversation, he expresses a great deal of disdain for the objective metaphysical speculation that some of these thinkers engage in when it comes to issues such as the afterlife. This combination of the maintenance of dying to the world and the refusal to speculate about the afterlife is a key aspect of what distinguishes the existential philosophy of death from its Platonic/Christian and Epicurean predecessors. Thus, it is absolutely crucial, for understanding Heidegger as engaged in something like Kierkegaard's project, to point out that Heidegger is also opposed to speculation about the afterlife (BT, p. 292). But is there a conflict between their views given that Kierkegaard manages to retain faith in personal immortality in the face of his concession to the doubt found in the Epicurean strain?²⁸³ While there is little reason to believe that there is a similar retention in Heidegger, one need not see insurmountable opposition since Heidegger's bracketing of this issue does not include an explicit rejection of the afterlife.²⁸⁴

²⁸³ Just to be clear, I take it that Kierkegaard recognizes the difficulties concerning the possibility of a personal afterlife posed by the thinkers in the Epicurean strain, and rejects the attempts to demonstrate that there will be such an afterlife by the thinkers in the Platonic strain. However, despite insurmountable odds, he treats both these difficulties and these demonstrations as irrelevant and faithfully appropriates the afterlife, behaving as though it will be so.

²⁸⁴ Theunissen makes a similar connection on their eschewal of matters of the afterlife in focusing on "At a Graveside" (Theunissen, pp. 341-3, 347). Theunissen's very helpful discussion surely includes an accurate description of the discourse's willful refusal to give the afterlife a prominent role in determining the appropriate way to relate to death, but on this topic, as on others, there are significant limitations to the approach of Theunissen's paper. While the main point that Kierkegaard refrains from abstract speculation about the afterlife holds throughout Kierkegaard's works, Kierkegaard's overall treatment of the afterlife is significantly more complicated than it is in "At a Graveside" (another point which Theunissen certainly acknowledges). The problem is that Heidegger seems to rely on more than just this discourse in appropriating Kierkegaard's views on death and the afterlife, as I have already suggested. Thus, Theunissen can hardly provide a complete assessment of what Heidegger borrows and leaves behind from the thought of Kierkegaard on the afterlife. Given that such a complete assessment is not the goal of Theunissen's essay, the purpose of making these comments is not so much to criticize Theunissen as it is to suggest the importance of further work that considers the range of Kierkegaard's dealings with the afterlife (and death-related issues in general) when comparing him with Heidegger on this topic.

On the other side of Kierkegaard's existential combination, it is just as crucial to realize that Heidegger is involved with something like a secularized version of the Christian sense of dying to the world.²⁸⁵ Dreyfus is surely onto something when, in discussing *Postscript's* notion of dying to immediacy, he states, "for Heidegger being-unto-death, then, is dying to *all* immediacy" (Dreyfus, p. 312).²⁸⁶ Just as Kierkegaard is

²⁸⁵ During his brief discussion of death as a way of life in his chapter on what Heidegger inherits from "primal Christianity," van Buren describes Heidegger's debt to Paul's letters, Luther's "Heidelberg Disputation" and commentaries on *Genesis* (which Heidegger actually quotes just after quoting Kierkegaard in *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle* (p. 137)), Pascal's reflections, and Kierkegaard's *Postscript* (via Jaspers) (van Buren, pp. 174-6). Van Buren also describes Heidegger's reliance upon the sense of dying to the world and its wisdom found in the "*theologia crucis*" of Paul, Augustine (when not corrupted by a Greek "*theologia gloriae*" that comes to dominate the medieval tradition), Luther (but not necessarily Lutherans), and Kierkegaard (van Buren, pp. 158-67, 186-9). This description reads much like Kierkegaard's account of the problematic back and forth of dying to the world in Christian history (a dialectic often seen in terms of reason and faith, or rigor and mercy, or suffering and glory), which was discussed in the previous chapter.

Theunissen briefly notes the debts that both Kierkegaard and Heidegger owe to Tertullian, Ambrose (fourth century CE), Augustine, and Luther on the topic of death (Theunissen, pp. 338-9, 343-6). See also BT, p. 494.

²⁸⁶ While Dreyfus is right to notice the similar interest in a sort of "dying to" in Heidegger, he overemphasizes the idea that on Climacus' view (Dreyfus seems to rely almost entirely on the sense of "dying to" found in *Postscript*, which is certainly not Kierkegaard's final and most considered view) one more or less trades a lower immediacy (way of understanding oneself and one's place in the world) for a higher one in "Religiousness B." Since Heidegger abandons the lower and also avoids the faithful acceptance of the higher, Dreyfus sees him as dying to "all" immediacy. It seems to me that Dreyfus sells his insightful connection of Kierkegaard and Heidegger a bit short. Rather than making the immediate jump to arguing for a key difference between Kierkegaard's theological account and Heidegger's non-theological account (which I will discuss shortly), he could have made more out of the fact that for both Kierkegaard and Heidegger the purpose of dying to the world (perhaps Kierkegaard's later, less rigid formulation would allow Dreyfus to focus more on the overall similarity with Heidegger's account) is to find a "new life" or new way of viewing existence. The key issue for both is the altered view of *this very* existence, free from determination by the everyday "they" or public way of understanding it—this is what existential dying to the world is all about.

Without discussing Heidegger's debt to Kierkegaard, Thomson describes death in *Being and Time*, emphasizing Heidegger's "movement in which we turn away from the world, recover ourselves, and then turn back to the world, a world we now see anew, with eyes that have been opened" (Thomson, p. 456). This "conversion" that involves passing through death sounds very much like a secularized version of the authentic Christian experience. The one problem I have with Thomson's otherwise excellent account is his insistence upon describing the anticipation of death in terms of an "actual experience of complete world-collapse" (p. 453). The trouble is that Heidegger never seems to suggest such a particular experience that one returns from better for having gone through it. While grasping the essential structure of authentic Dasein does indeed bear a striking resemblance to the Christian notion of dying to live (van Buren, p. 186), it is not necessary to overly-dramatize what Heidegger is saying by portraying death as some kind of emotional breakdown (e.g. while praying, confessing, or travelling to Damascus). It is important to keep in mind that for both Kierkegaard and Heidegger the moment of vision is not some particular chronological moment, but a constant struggle, from birth to death, to own oneself in the case of Heidegger, or to enact one's relationship with the divine for Kierkegaard. Although it may not be Thomson's intention, his formulation gives the impression that one might pass through and be finished with death at some point,

critical of all ways of relating to oneself that are dictated by human understanding of the world, since they forego or prevent a genuinely faithful relationship with Christ, Heidegger is interested in severing the connections to one's existence that have been unquestioningly received from "the they" in everydayness, because these connections prevent grasping what one "authentically" is. In other words, one must die to the distracting ways of existing that one just happens to have "fallen" into in order to focus upon what is most properly one's own (McCarthy, forthcoming; van Buren, pp. 177-82).²⁸⁷ Both Kierkegaard and Heidegger describe the distractions handed down by the everyday world as "accidental" or "incidental" (*tilfældige* in "*Ved en Grav*," *zufällige* in both *Der Brenner's "Vom Tode"* and *Sein und Zeit*) in the sense that there is nothing that one can receive from this everydayness that is absolutely essential to one's existence.²⁸⁸

Whereas the world tends to focus on *what* can be accomplished or actualized in a given period of chronological time (which of course can never be guaranteed, rendering all actualization merely accidental), Kierkegaard and Heidegger emphasize the

whereas both Kierkegaard and Heidegger believe that death is a task for a lifetime, a possibility to exist in but not to be actualized (see my previous discussions of *Postscript* and ¶50 in *Being and Time*, and also Possen, forthcoming).

²⁸⁷ Although Heidegger makes it clear that everyday falling into an inauthentic grasp of one's place in the world (like sin on Kierkegaard's view) is a common and unavoidable aspect of *Dasein*, many commentators argue that Heidegger is offering more than a merely neutral description. The struggle for authenticity (like Kierkegaard's faithful striving) is somehow a "better" way of existence than inauthentic complacency. At the very least, if beginning with fundamental ontology is in some sense preferable to the status quo of traditional metaphysics, then authenticity (which makes the former possible) must be preferable to inauthenticity (see e.g. Daniel Berthold-Bond, "A Kierkegaardian Critique of Heidegger's Concept of Authenticity," in *Man and World*, vol. 24, 1991, pp. 119, 125; John M. Hoberman, "Kierkegaard's *Two Ages* and Heidegger's Critique of Modernity," in *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vol. 14, edited by Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984), p. 228; Quist, p. 91).

²⁸⁸ Heidegger speaks of becoming "free from the entertaining 'incidentals' [*Zufälligkeiten*] with which busy curiosity keeps providing itself" (BT, p. 358). Cf. BT, pp. 435, 440, where Heidegger continues to rely on the same Kierkegaardian language of the accidental and "trivial" "what"-concerns about "output." Once again, Magurshak makes a similar connection while focusing on Heidegger's debt to *Anxiety* (Magurshak, p. 177), as does McCarthy (forthcoming).

kairological moment²⁸⁹ in which *how* one relates (regardless of the chronological time available) to the possible is what really matters (Magurshak, p. 180).²⁹⁰ In both his own name and under pseudonym, Kierkegaard describes the new sense of time that Christianity introduces as the intersection of eternity with worldly temporality in a “present” moment that reconciles the fallen condition one comes from with the salvation one runs toward. For example, Haufniensis states, “the fullness of time is the moment as the eternal, and yet this eternal is also the future and the past” (CA, p. 90/SKS 4, p. 393). To put it another way: in a movement that transcends any common sense of temporality one comes to participate in the past, yet timeless, act of cleansing sacrifice (the crucifixion) and thereby receives another chance for the future (van Buren, pp. 192-3). With ever-present anxiety and vigilance one renews or repeats one’s commitment to the divine in repentance of sins and longing for mercy. The moment of life comes to take on an eternal significance by constantly shaking loose from lostness in a highly contingent temporal worldliness.

Despite Heidegger’s famously dismissive claim that Kierkegaard could not see the “more primordial temporality” (BT, p. 497) that underlies the theological view of the

²⁸⁹ Besides touching on Heidegger’s obvious connections to Kierkegaard’s consideration of *Øjeblikket*, both Dreyfus and Kisiel offer brief, but helpful connections to the Greek and Christian roots of this kairological sense of time (Dreyfus, p. 321-2; Kisiel, p. 437-8). The best source for these sorts of connections is van Buren’s discussion of what Heidegger borrows from Paul, Augustine, Luther, and Kierkegaard. Just as he does with the closely related issue of the Pauline theology of the cross, which I mentioned in a previous note, van Buren describes Heidegger’s “destruction” of the Christian understanding of time in his lecture courses from the early 1920s. It is in these courses that Heidegger explains how the Pauline innovation with respect to time (a lived synthesis of past, present, and future) was initially grasped and later botched by Augustine, paving the way for the medieval scholastic mistake of treating time as the Greeks had (as an infinite series of now-moments). The account goes on to explain how Luther and then Kierkegaard (who Heidegger will later say “has seen the *existentiell* phenomenon of the moment of vision with the most penetration” (BT, p. 497)) contribute to the recovery of the primal Christian kairological sense of time (van Buren, pp. 190-202).

²⁹⁰ Of course, as I have already pointed out, this relationship will take on a different shape for Kierkegaard than for Heidegger, given that “future” possibility for the former is the eternal significance of the divine, while for the latter it is one’s own projection into whatever is available to it. In other words, for Kierkegaard there is one foundational *what* issue, but for Heidegger this is not so.

moment in terms of the eternal, the de-theologized account that Heidegger provides shows many signs of benefiting from Kierkegaard's work on this topic.²⁹¹ Heidegger is also interested in something like a lived synthesis of Dasein's past and future—Dasein is projecting ahead of itself based on limitations it has fallen (or been thrown) into. In owning up to the possibilities that are available to it given the situation, and responsibly choosing from among them which to pursue (the resolute repeating of inherited or past possibilities into the future); Dasein pulls itself out of its standard (in the sense of a default-setting) fallenness and takes possession of itself (van Buren, pp. 192-5).²⁹² Like Kierkegaard, Heidegger is looking for a way out (albeit not necessarily one that is easily maintained) of an unreflective and deficient state that prioritizes contingent worldly accomplishment and the quantifiable temporality that such accomplishment requires. According to their view, anything that is qualified purely by this everyday chronological sense of time is necessarily a distraction aimed at aiding one in trying to flee one's essential responsibility to be oneself (whether before God or not) (van Buren, p. 191, 194-5).²⁹³

It is their shared concern about the chronologically accidental and interest in avoiding it that leads both Kierkegaard and Heidegger to describe this process (of avoiding it) in terms of death. Physical death, while not ultimately what they are focused

²⁹¹ Kisiel points out that Heidegger is not always so dismissive of Kierkegaard on what is perhaps the issue Heidegger values most in the Dane's writings (Kisiel, pp. 492, 550).

²⁹² Van Buren also offers a helpful account of what Heidegger derives from Kierkegaard and other Christian thinkers on the issues of care, conscience, and guilt (with the now familiar trope about the medieval misunderstanding that is instigated by Augustine's infusion of Greek thought). In reading Kierkegaard's discussion of the lilies and birds, among other texts, Heidegger develops the notion of conscience as "the call and 'renewal' of anxious care" from one's "'authentic self'" to one's inauthentic or fallen self—a call of essential guilt, which must be "chosen and taken up into one's futural possibility" (van Buren, p. 185). See also BT, p. 492, where Heidegger himself acknowledges his debt to the *New Testament* and the Augustinian tradition on the topic of care.

²⁹³ Cf. Haufniensis' claim that "the moment sin is posited, temporality is sinfulness.... he sins who lives only in the moment as abstracted from the eternal" (CA, pp. 92-3/SKS 4, pp. 395-6).

upon, is an important “formal indication” of essential features of human existence and a deeper sense of dying. Is there any other occasion that better demonstrates the contingency of all attachments to and ways of understanding one’s place in the world? It would appear that for both Kierkegaard and Heidegger the answer to this question is “no;” the image of death is employed because there is in fact no better way to awaken someone from the complacent slumber of a thoughtless existence (e.g. as a merely cultural Christian, or a “they”-self)²⁹⁴ that is not essentially and necessarily theirs.²⁹⁵ That one will die signifies that existence has to be given up one way or another, and realizing this already has a way of weakening the bonds of meaning that are passed down to us merely by existing in the world. But what is more, the uncertainty with regard to the when of physical demise suggests a general indefiniteness in existence, particularly in connection with worldly endeavors and understanding. Given this structural indefiniteness one need not feel constrained to interpret existence strictly as a function of the specific projects, relationships, and goals that the world recommends. Without such constraints, both Kierkegaard and Heidegger believe that it is possible to appropriate meaning for oneself in the light of one’s contingent, and admittedly culturally-textured, situation.

²⁹⁴ Hoberman provides an interesting explanation of the similarities and differences between the cultural criticism (and anti-Hegelianism) found in the respective accounts of Kierkegaard and Heidegger, largely by focusing on Kierkegaard’s *Two Ages* and Heidegger’s more explicitly Greek, post-*Being and Time*, writings (Hoberman, esp. pp. 233-40, 244-7).

²⁹⁵ This is the sense of wakefulness engendered by the thought of death in *Works of Love* and “At a Graveside.” In his early lectures, Heidegger traces this sort of wakefulness from the *New Testament* notion that one must always be prepared (even in the metaphorical darkness of worldly night, when it would just be easier to “fall asleep” and get lost in distraction) to offer an account of oneself because there is no telling when Christ will return (cf. *Matthew* 25:13, 26:40-5). Thus, wakefulness is closely bound not only with the uncertainty of death, but also with the kairological moment of ever-present vigilance (van Buren, pp. 175, 178, 188-191, 193, 195, 202). I am grateful to Guignon for suggesting this connection to me.

Although Kierkegaard and Heidegger are like the thinkers from the Epicurean strain in that they make a point of avoiding the various metaphysical conundrums surrounding a personal afterlife, the problem they have with these thinkers that encourage ignoring or at least “defanging” death is that such thinkers seek to withhold what seems like the best way to get an indication of what one really is.²⁹⁶ Through this withholding, the Epicurean view enables getting lost in life as it is ordinarily understood by one’s culture. But perhaps it will be objected that because the existential conception of death is not entirely focused on death as the event of physical passing away, there might be a sense in which Kierkegaard and Heidegger are no longer directly engaging with the Epicurean problem. If offering up the sort of coexistence with death that Kierkegaard and Heidegger suggest seems like an underhanded way of dodging a straightforward Epicurean claim,²⁹⁷ perhaps some discussion of a further aspect of the existential account will demonstrate that there is something more substantial to the existential critique of this strain.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁶ Of course, Heidegger does not explicitly criticize the views on death or the afterlife of any of these thinkers in *Being and Time*. Like Kierkegaard, he would no doubt also have objections to their metaphysical arguments in support of less personal notions of posthumous existence, but what really binds Heidegger to Kierkegaard at this point is how readily applicable the former’s criticisms of everyday views on death are to Epicureans, Stoics, moderns, and certain nineteenth century thinkers, even if he does not mention them by name in this regard.

²⁹⁷ Thomson (p. 466) claims that some might accuse Heidegger of using his discussion of anxiety and Being-towards-death to avoid or repress his fear of demise (Cf. Marius G. Mjaaland, “The Autopsy of One Still Living. On Death: Kierkegaard vs. Heidegger, Levinas, and Derrida,” in *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vols. 9 and 10, edited by Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2006), p. 372). He also points out that Heidegger briefly seems to anticipate and respond to such a charge (BT, p. 357). Given the important lessons that both Kierkegaard and Heidegger learn from physical death, I see no reason to think that either of them are guilty of such repression. Emphasizing what demise suggests (or “indicates”) about the structure (or form) of human existence, which is Heidegger’s primary focus when discussing death in *Being and Time*, does not necessarily diminish the significance of demise or its fearful character.

²⁹⁸ As I have already suggested, it might also be said that Kierkegaard and Heidegger are simply conceding part of Epicurus’ argument: death (in the sense of demise or physical passing away) cannot be experienced. However, the further claim that death need not be feared, which is often somehow grounded on the fact that it cannot be experienced, remains a source of concern about Epicurus’ view and any of its more recent incarnations.

Heidegger claims that anxiety is the necessary, even if not always obvious, state-of-mind of Dasein, given its essential Being-towards-death (BT, p. 295).²⁹⁹ Like he says about the “they,” treating death as Epicurean thinkers do seems to transform “this anxiety into fear in the face of an oncoming event.” Such thinkers then often disparage fear of this event as foolish and cowardly, thus adding another layer of deceit to the already disingenuous swap of anxiety for fear by discouraging any intimate encounter with this fear (BT, p. 298). If Heidegger is right in holding that some anxious grasp of Being-towards-death underlies any notion or fear of death understood as passing away, then it is possible to view the famous Epicurean claim about death (and its Stoic and modern counterparts) as nothing more than an evasion of the only way one can really (primordially) know death at all.

But the Epicurean strain is not alone in facing this criticism related to the overcoming of fear. Although the Platonic strain is, on the surface, more encouraging of an encounter with death, the mitigation of the fear of death with the hope for a personal afterlife that one often (but perhaps not always) finds in this strain is no less evasive of the anxious relationship with one’s own indefiniteness that is essential to existence, according to Kierkegaard and Heidegger. Besides facing the same problems that plague the Epicurean attempt to overcome fear, Kierkegaard’s *Christian Discourses* suggests a further criticism of Platonic mitigation. Faith in the afterlife is not supposed to provide comfort and diminish worries about death, but instead intensify the anxiety surrounding

²⁹⁹ This is another point at which Heidegger might borrow something from *Anxiety*. Haufniensis also connects some kind of death-awareness with a fundamental anxiety about existence (CA, p. 45/SKS 4, p. 350). See van Buren, pp. 172-5, where he traces this connection from *Genesis* 2:17 (which Haufniensis quotes) through Paul, Augustine, Luther, Pascal and Kierkegaard to Heidegger. Van Buren (p. 174), McCarthy (forthcoming), and numerous others, also point out that Kierkegaard (especially Haufniensis) and Heidegger share the distinction between fear, which is always about something specific, and anxiety, which is directed towards nothing—i.e. the essential indefiniteness of existence (see, e.g. CA, p. 42/SKS 4, p. 348; and BT, pp. 230-1, 310).

the uncertainty of one's soteriological standing. The upshot of all this is that while it is possible to identify particular aspects of each strain's views on death that are appropriated (or at least appreciated) by the existential philosophy of death, it is also the rejection of the one major aspect that the Platonic and the Epicurean have in common—the desire to make death less frightful—that helps unify Kierkegaard and Heidegger in their existential account.

Heidegger's "Atheism" and the Theology of Kierkegaard. Although it is likely that Heidegger does in fact “borrow” a great deal from Kierkegaard on death-related issues, and thereby joins him in the existential blending/rejection of the Platonic and Epicurean strains, there is one important difference between them that must serve to distinguish their respective considerations of death. Simply put, despite this blending/rejection, Kierkegaard does not go far enough, according to Heidegger, in purging Christian theological doctrine from his account of dying to the world. At least during the period leading up through the writing of *Being and Time*, Heidegger holds that there is a “fundamental atheism indigenous to philosophy” (Kisiel, p. 80).³⁰⁰ This atheism is necessary in order to distinguish philosophy from the ontic science of theology, which was discussed briefly with respect to death in my treatment of ¶49 above. In broader terms, philosophy does ontology, which is an inquiry into Being in general, while theology as an ontic science, posits some basic regional idea about the nature (or being) of God or, in the case of Kierkegaard and Heidegger, the nature of the Christian connection to God,³⁰¹ and inquires into matters pertaining to what it posits (BT, pp. 29-

³⁰⁰ Heidegger first makes this claim in his 1922 introduction to a proposed book on Aristotle (Kisiel, p. 270).

³⁰¹ In his “Phenomenology and Theology” (which was written just after *Being and Time* in 1927) Heidegger states that, “etymologically regarded, theo-logy means: the science of God,” but actually, “*what is given for*

31, 58-9). In order for philosophy to retain its status as the more primordial, general, and pure form of inquiry, it cannot allow itself to be contaminated by theological concerns. Because Heidegger is engaged with fundamental ontology in *Being and Time*, he must maintain a ‘methodological atheism’ throughout his consideration of death and related issues (pp. 291-3).

For Heidegger, Kierkegaard is a theologian because he simply posits humans as derived from the Christian God, and then proceeds to consider the particulars of relating to this God (cf. SUD, pp. 13-7/SKS 11, pp. 129-133).³⁰² He is a great theologian because, unlike so many others, he joins Luther in emphasizing faith as the difficult, but proper way of appropriating and existing in this relationship, to the exclusion of a diluted theology that relies on reason to explain away and soften any difficulty.³⁰³ It would be

theology (its positum) is Christianness ... theology is the science of faith” (Martin Heidegger, “Phenomenology and Theology” (PT), in *Pathmarks*, translated by James G. Hart and John C. Maraldo, and edited by William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 43, 45, 48). On the issue of faith, Heidegger states, “Luther said, ‘Faith is permitting ourselves to be seized by the things we do not see’ ... faith is an appropriation of revelation that co-constitutes the Christian occurrence ... *Faith is the believing-understanding mode of existing in the history revealed, i.e., occurring, with the Crucified*” (PT, pp. 44-5).

³⁰² See also Magurshak, p. 193. After mentioning Heidegger’s statement that “Kierkegaard is not a thinker but a religious author” (Martin Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, translated and edited by Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 186), James G. Hart and John C. Maraldo point out that Heidegger finds in Kierkegaard “a paradigm for theology” (Martin Heidegger, *The Piety of Thinking*, translated by James G. Hart and John C. Maraldo (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1976), pp. 195-6; cf. BT, p. 492). Despite the appearances of these sorts of claims when taken out of context, it is important to note that Heidegger is not being completely critical of Kierkegaard’s work when he describes it as religious or theological. Besides the semi-complimentary tone with which he often addresses Kierkegaard, it might also be worth mentioning that as late as 1921, Heidegger actually refers to himself as a “Christian theologian” (Martin Heidegger, “Letter to Karl Löwith on His Philosophical Identity” in *Becoming Heidegger*, edited by Theodore Kisiel and Thomas Sheehan (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), p. 100). It is unlikely that Heidegger would have described himself in this way by the time he writes *Being and Time*, but if there were to be some continuity in self-description, it might depend on the significance of his italicizing “logian” (on this topic, see Kisiel, p. 78; van Buren, p. 154). Caputo claims that Heidegger actually becomes hostile towards Christianity after 1928, but that he softens his position somewhat, and maybe even returns to Christianity in some form later in life (Caputo 2006, pp. 332-41).

³⁰³ In yet another similarity with Kierkegaard, the diluted theology Heidegger most likely has in mind when finding support in Luther is that of the medieval apologetic tradition, which eschews faith as a foundation in favor of elaborate philosophical systems (like that of Thomas Aquinas) based on reason. Heidegger claims that, “this ‘foundation’ not only is inadequate for the problematic of theology, but conceals and

hard to deny the accuracy of Heidegger's assessment of Kierkegaard's theological tendencies given that Kierkegaard himself states, "I have never broken with Christianity ... from the time it was possible to speak of the application of my powers, I had firmly resolved to employ everything to defend it, or in any case to present it in its true form."³⁰⁴ But since he is indeed a theologian of some sort, it seems that Kierkegaard's theological treatments of human guilt, anxiety, conscience, and even death, cannot provide the primordial ontological understanding of these matters that Heidegger seeks in *Being and Time*. Thus, according to Heidegger, Kierkegaard's works are, at best, interesting ontical analyses that might provide helpful starting points for a more penetrating investigation into what underlies the derivative phenomena of religious experience (e.g. BT, p. 497). While Heidegger seems to rely on these starting points quite heavily (and certainly does not dismiss them), particularly on the topic of death, he does apparently remove specific ideas in several of Kierkegaard's works from their theological trappings, and push them further until these ideas become more broadly relevant (i.e. to the non-religious).³⁰⁵

But what, one might argue, would Heidegger make of the fact that in "At a Graveside," at least, Kierkegaard considers the importance of thinking about death without explicitly attempting to secure this importance by appealing to much in the way of theology? Of course, given that it is not as though God never comes up in this

distorts it" (BT, p. 30). At best, this theology that posits the wrong understanding of the Being of its subject matter limits its own effectiveness, and, at worst, transforms itself into a rationalistic enterprise it is not meant to be. Theology is supposed to be about cultivating the proper existential relationship with God, not a cold and distant thinking about God.

³⁰⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, translated and edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 80/SKS 16, forthcoming.

³⁰⁵ A nice illustration of Heidegger's method concerns his statement that "Dasein, in its Being, has a relationship towards that Being—a relationship which itself is one of Being" (BT, p. 32). If this statement is indeed derived from Anti-Climacus' famous claim that "the self is a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation's relating itself to itself in the relation" (SUD, p. 13/SKS 11, p. 129), as I have often heard it suggested, then it would seem that Heidegger quickly strips away the theological connections that Anti-Climacus introduces almost immediately after making this claim.

discourse (begging the question about the role that the divine is meant to play in this account of death); Heidegger could simply repeat his general complaint that Kierkegaard's work is not sufficiently free of the theological. In this particular case, what might trouble Heidegger most is the likelihood, which Connell suggests, that even Kierkegaard's least religious discussion of death can only be properly motivated by appealing to the "infinite significance" of the divine.³⁰⁶ Unless one shares Kierkegaard's Christian interests, it will remain unclear why his approach to life through death is preferable to other possible attitudes.

In contrast, because Heidegger treats death without such theological commitments, it seems that he needs only appeal to what it is to be Dasein in order to make his account of death compelling. While Heidegger clearly sees the limitations of Kierkegaard's attempt at a religious-existential philosophy of death, the question that remains to be taken up concerns what Kierkegaard might think of Heidegger's more secular version. Some commentators have wondered whether there is not something about offering an account as general as Heidegger's that Kierkegaard would find particularly problematic (e.g. Guignon, "Death," forthcoming). Besides Kierkegaard's well-known aversion to any abstract system building (it is arguable whether or not this is what Heidegger is up to), it could simply be the case that, despite Heidegger's condescension, there is actually something about Kierkegaard's formulation of the existential philosophy of death that points to a shortcoming in Heidegger's. Having seen how Heidegger makes the existential philosophy of death his own, it must now be

³⁰⁶ Theunissen actually suggests that the intentionally limited reliance upon theological matters in "At a Graveside" might have set a precedent for Heidegger's methodological atheism; but ultimately, Theunissen seems to concede something like Connell's point (Theunissen, pp. 344-7).

determined whether he takes it too far when he attempts to incorporate it into his early ontological project.

Chapter 5: The Limits and Legacy of the Existential Philosophy of Death

According to Marius Mjaaland, Kierkegaard's "way of reflecting on death represents a serious objection to Heidegger's understanding of ontology, in particular his attempt to include death in his *existential* ... analysis of *Dasein*" (Mjaaland, p. 370). Although I do not find Mjaaland's arguments particularly compelling,³⁰⁷ he is far from alone in expressing this sort of sentiment about the relationship between Kierkegaard and Heidegger, both on the topic of death and in general. Rather than simply defending Kierkegaard from Heidegger's dismissive remarks about the qualified benefits of studying Kierkegaard, several commentators (both avowed Kierkegaardians, and those just interested in criticizing Heidegger) go on the offensive to explain why the latter would not, or even should not, be interested in a Heideggerian project. Given the profusion of such explanations in recent decades, it will not be possible to describe the nuances of each one in the present chapter. Fortunately, it will only be necessary to discuss a few of the more prominent complaints about Heidegger in order to come to a conclusion regarding the difference between he and Kierkegaard on the appropriate use

³⁰⁷ My primary complaint about Mjaaland's paper is similar to my concern about Theunissen's. Mjaaland claims that Heidegger's ontologization of one's own death closes off other ways of allowing oneself to be affected by death. Basically, Mjaaland is suggesting that "At a Graveside" is more flexible in its consideration of death than *Being and Time* (Mjaaland, pp. 375-7; Cf. Hoberman, p. 225). This may well be the case, but insofar as the former might be understood as one instant in a larger, more explicitly Christian, account of dying to the world, which actually maps on quite nicely to Heidegger's sense of authentic Being-towards-death as I have demonstrated, Mjaaland's argument just seems excessively limited in its focus for a comparison of Kierkegaard and Heidegger on death. Furthermore, Mjaaland actually goes on to describe Kierkegaard's more "open" use of death in making ontology and ethics "mutually relevant" to each other, which is allegedly not something that Heidegger's purely ontological treatment of death is capable of (pp. 376, 383). Although Heidegger might not put the issue in precisely the terms Mjaaland uses, the latter's account of Kierkegaard sounds very much like what I have also attributed to Heidegger in the previous chapter.

of the existential philosophy of death. In the course of this discussion, it will be helpful to divide the chapter into two sections: the first detailing miscellaneous criticisms of Heidegger that either do not seem to apply to Kierkegaard or are actually about Kierkegaard, and the second providing an account of what Kierkegaard might ultimately say about *Being and Time*.

Heidegger's Oversights

There are of course numerous specific complaints which have been registered about Heidegger's treatment of death—including its use of Kierkegaard—that might find a place in a section like this. It is hoped that by focusing on a couple of notable examples of this concern about Heidegger's views one can get a sense of differences and problems, which are certainly interesting and worth considering, but are not in the end definitive of the Kierkegaard-Heidegger relationship when it comes to their thoughts on death.

Pushing beyond these sorts of criticisms will help the next section pin down what is really at stake in embracing the existential philosophy of death as each of them understands it. The first sort of criticism to be considered here must bring the discussion back one last time to Heidegger's reading of Kierkegaard.

Misunderstanding Kierkegaard. The most basic concern about Heidegger's appropriation of, and comments on, Kierkegaard that one might voice is that he simply fails to grasp what Kierkegaard is actually up to. Of course, I have argued in the previous chapter that Heidegger had an extensive knowledge of Kierkegaard based on encounters with both primary and secondary literature. On the specific issue of death, it seems to be

the case that Heidegger absorbed and remained true to many of the lessons of Kierkegaard's work, even while sifting out what is explicitly Christian in it. And although he ultimately distances himself from Kierkegaard, pointing to the latter's theological or religious orientation, there is little doubt that he is at least onto something in his assessment. Nonetheless, there are still hints in Heidegger's comments about Kierkegaard which suggest that his interpretation of the "religious thinker" is not without flaws. While these hints are unlikely to undermine his overall reading of Kierkegaard, might it be possible that some mistake could lead him to dismiss Kierkegaard's philosophy of death as ontically narrow?

One issue worth considering in greater detail than my earlier discussion of death in Kierkegaard's works allows is his complicated use of pseudonyms. After the conclusion of *Postscript*, Kierkegaard, under his own name, appends an explanation of his pseudonymity.³⁰⁸ For the sake of a "psychological consistency, which no factually actual person dares to allow himself" (CUP, v. 1, p. [625]/SKS 7, p. 569), Kierkegaard creates these personalities that provide him the opportunity to consider various issues from perspectives that are more focused than his own. Given that his pseudonyms have their own sort of actuality and perspectives that do not directly correspond to his own, it must be noted that the ideas expressed by the pseudonyms are not necessarily those of Kierkegaard. He even goes so far as to disavow a direct relationship with the thoughts of his creations when he states that, "in the pseudonymous books there is not a single word by me" (p. [626]/p. 570). If the pseudonymous works are not properly representative of Kierkegaard's thought, then one must be careful about what one attributes to him.

³⁰⁸ Of course, his journals and notebooks, as well as other published and unpublished writings provide scholars with further assessments of his pseudonymity.

In fact, as I have already mentioned, Kierkegaard states, “if it should occur to anyone to want to quote a particular passage ... it is my wish, my prayer, that he will do me the kindness of citing the respective pseudonymous author’s name, not mine” (p. [627]/p. 571). Heidegger could very well have been aware of this particular request when discussing Kierkegaard in the 1920s, given that it is present in the seventh volume of the Schrempf edition from 1910, but he obviously does not comply. Although Heidegger must have had some understanding of Kierkegaard’s use of pseudonyms, it does not seem to be the case that Heidegger properly grasps the complexity and significance of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymity. In the second note to *Being and Time* in which Heidegger explicitly discusses Kierkegaard, he makes a distinction between Kierkegaard’s theoretical works and his upbuilding works. He suggests that while the latter might be philosophically useful, the former, with the possible exception of *Anxiety*, are “completely dominated by Hegel” (BT, p. 494). Since the upbuilding works are for the most part non-pseudonymous,³⁰⁹ it seems likely that there is a great deal of overlap between the theoretical works about which Heidegger complains and Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous works.

But this apparent criticism of the pseudonymous works as dominated by Hegel betrays a misunderstanding of what Kierkegaard hopes to achieve in writing books like *Postscript*. Since Heidegger seems likely to treat this work as just another book by Kierkegaard, he misses or ignores the fact that Kierkegaard has explicitly stated that the views expressed in such a book are not necessarily his own. But Heidegger also fails to see that there may be an ulterior motive in presenting something seemingly Hegelian

³⁰⁹ As McCarthy (forthcoming) points out, *Sickness* is a work meant for upbuilding (SUD, p. 1/SKS 11, p. 115).

under a pseudonym. Perhaps Kierkegaard uses Climacus to accomplish something he would not, or could not do properly under his own name—e.g. offer an indirect critique of Hegel by taking up Hegelian themes and allowing the reader to see their shortcomings.³¹⁰ Caputo has argued that it is Heidegger’s very misunderstanding of Kierkegaard’s relationship to Hegel that prevents him from seeing Kierkegaard as already engaged in the deconstruction of metaphysics that he finds so important in the next century (Caputo 1993, p. 214). If Caputo is right, then it seems that Heidegger’s inadequate grasp of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymity may have fairly significant implications for his treatment of Kierkegaard.

While it may be the case that Heidegger’s misunderstanding with respect to pseudonyms and Hegel partially accounts for his, at least somewhat inappropriate, dismissive tone in addressing Kierkegaard, I see no reason to believe that his assessment of Kierkegaard as a religious thinker is so far off base. Even though Heidegger might be wrong to attribute the discussion in *Anxiety* to Kierkegaard rather than Haufniensis, for example, he is right to point out that it is a theological discussion (BT, p. 492). Furthermore, given that such an assessment holds for much of Kierkegaard’s work (signed and pseudonymous), Heidegger would indeed be justified in having some reservations about Kierkegaard’s dealings with death showing signs of an ontic religious contamination that Heidegger’s project simply cannot allow. In other words, however Heidegger’s mistakes in reading Kierkegaard might impact an understanding of their relationship, the key difference (on the issue of theology) between them and their respective views on death, as I have laid it out at the end of the previous chapter, remains

³¹⁰ See, for example, William McDonald, “Retracing the Circular Ruins of Hegel’s *Encyclopedia*,” in *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, vol. 12, edited by Robert L. Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), pp. 244-5.

unaffected. Unfortunately for Heidegger, the next sort of potential oversight on his part may not be so easy to overcome.

French Thought and the Death of the Other. The legacy of the existential philosophy of death is a topic well worth a detailed consideration of its own, perhaps as a kind of sequel to the project I have been engaged with thus far. The diverse appropriations and transfigurations of the ideas of Kierkegaard and Heidegger found in the writings of twentieth century French thinkers, such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Emmanuel Levinas, Paul Ricoeur, and Jacques Derrida,³¹¹ are enough to occupy a sizeable tome without even beginning to consider the reception by thinkers from other backgrounds. In connection with this rich history of influence, such thinkers do not hold back in their criticism of Kierkegaard and especially Heidegger. Sartre, for example, infamously aims a series of explicit criticisms at Heidegger's notion of Being-towards-death that for the most part seem to miss the mark. Even though Sartre joins both Kierkegaard and Heidegger in making finitude central to his understanding of freedom and meaning, he seems to conflate Heideggerian death with physical demise when he rebukes Heidegger for associating finitude and death.³¹² Unfortunately, neither the full range of such criticisms,

³¹¹ Of course, not all of these thinkers are French in origin, but France was the place of their education and much of their professional lives.

³¹² Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, translated by Hazel E. Barnes (NY: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1956), pp. 546-7. Furthermore, Sartre actually seems to confuse Heidegger's *vorlaufen* with waiting for biological death. In criticizing Heidegger, he states, "sudden death is undetermined and by definition can not be waited for at any date; it always, in fact, includes the possibility that we shall die in surprise before the awaited date and consequently that our waiting may be, *qua waiting*, a deception or that we shall survive beyond this date; in the latter case since we were only waiting, we shall outlive ourselves" (Sartre, p. 536). Hoffman suggests that perhaps Sartre "has missed Heidegger's point" given that Heidegger's notion of death is part of a project that attempts to derive meaning from existence despite its indefiniteness without ever claiming that one should wait for an event at an uncertain time (Hoffman, pp. 82, 107-8). What I find fascinating about Sartre's inability to see that Heidegger's discussion is not really about biological demise is that his criticism leads him to revert to something of an Epicurean position. For example, he states, "Thus death haunts me at the very heart of each of my projects as their inevitable reverse side. But precisely because this 'reverse' is to be assumed not as *my* possibility but as the possibility that there are for me no longer any possibilities, it does not penetrate me.... Death is not an

apt or not, nor the more positive instances of French reception of the existential philosophy of death are entirely relevant here. What is of interest to the present discussion is the potential difference that might surface between Kierkegaard and Heidegger on the death of the other when considering this issue as described by Levinas and Derrida.

Levinas is particularly critical of Heidegger's prioritization of death as an isolating force in *Being and Time*, and he offers an alternative account of death in which death demonstrates otherness. He states, "this approach of death indicates that we are in relation with something that is absolutely other ... my solitude is thus not confirmed by death but broken by it. Right away this means that existence is pluralist.... In death the existing of the existent is alienated" (Levinas, pp. 74-5). In conjunction with death understood as an indication of one's essential other-relatedness, Levinas emphasizes the significance of the death of "the Other" over against Heidegger's explicit lack of interest in this issue. The problem with Heidegger's account, on his view, is that by excluding the death of the Other, Heidegger misses the opportunity to make ethics an integral aspect of his early ontological project, thus making possible some, to put it mildly, unfortunate political decisions. But given that Kierkegaard also dismisses the death of the other in texts such as "At a Graveside" and *Postscript*, is his account of death just as problematic and potentially dangerous?

obstacle to my projects ... And this is not because death does not limit my freedom but because freedom never encounters this limit.... Since death escapes my projects because it is unrealizable, I escape death in my very project. Since death is always beyond my subjectivity, there is no place for it in my subjectivity" (Sartre, pp. 547-8). On the issue of the event of physical passing away, both Kierkegaard and Heidegger grant the Epicurean point that Sartre is making. However, Sartre seems blind to the fact that they are onto another sense in which death *can* come to interpenetrate life (Cf. Malpas, p. 130). Unlike Sartre, Levinas explicitly acknowledges the Epicurean mistake when he affirms a similar sort of interpenetration and "relationship with death" (Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, translated by Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1987), p. 71).

In a certain sense, it might seem that Kierkegaard's treatment of the death of the other is even more problematic and dangerous than Heidegger's. As Laura Llevadot points out, Levinas focuses both on the sense of responsibility that arises through one's awareness of oneself as potential murderer and survivor, and also on one's capacity to sacrifice one's life *for* another, while Kierkegaard's pseudonym de Silentio discusses the sacrificing *of* the Other (Llevadot, forthcoming). Because Abraham, de Silentio's paragon of religious faith, sets aside any communal ethical demands in order to follow a voice that speaks to him alone, even when this voice tells him to kill the Other, Levinas sees Kierkegaard as guilty of "introducing a violent and irrational impulse into philosophy, paving the way ... for German national socialism" (Mjaaland, p. 378). Whereas Heidegger's views on death simply left ethics ambiguous or rendered it of secondary importance behind the self-mastery of the individual, Kierkegaard seems to advocate a more pernicious isolation of the individual and a supersession of ethics that even allows for murder (Llevadot, forthcoming).

There is no doubt that Levinas' reading of *Fear and Trembling* is at least uncharitable and probably just inaccurate given that its author goes out of his way to point out that he is not invalidating ethics, but transforming it (FT, p. 70/SKS 4, p. 162; Llevadot, forthcoming; Mjaaland, p. 378). Rather than rushing to identify these shortcomings of Levinas' criticisms, however, Derrida offers an alternate reading of de Silentio's Abraham. Instead of viewing Abraham's silence as a disturbing unethical tendency toward isolation (which Levinas does), Derrida suggests that his refusal to justify himself to others is an indictment of the ordinary ethical realm that demands such justification (Llevadot, forthcoming). Derrida states, "he keeps quiet in order to avoid the

moral temptation which, under the pretext of calling him to responsibility, to self-justification, would make him lose his ultimate responsibility along with his singularity ... This is ethics as ‘irresponsibilization.’”³¹³ In his silent inwardness, Abraham is taking on total responsibility for the death of the Other, while in the ethical at least some of this responsibility is shirked by trying to bring others on board in the form of a rationally compelled consensus.³¹⁴ When I, for example, explain to the officer why I was speeding, it is my hope that he or she will understand and sympathize with my predicament in such a way that, although I admittedly broke the law, they will not hold me accountable to the degree that a ticket will be necessary.

Llevadot will go on to argue that the non-preferential love cultivated in “The Work of Love in Recollecting One Who Is Dead” is Kierkegaard’s extension of this taking on of absolute responsibility for the death of the Other (even the enemy), but one need not follow her in order to ask the question that is of most relevance to the present discussion. If Derrida’s reading is convincing and Kierkegaard escapes Levinas’ criticism by suggesting an even more stringent sense of taking on responsibility for others in the face of death, does Kierkegaard avoid the Heideggerian pitfalls and do a better job of addressing this issue? Of course, such a question assumes that Levinas’ criticisms of Heidegger are in fact legitimate, and this may not be the case. After all, it is not as though Heidegger simply forgets to consider the death of the Other in *Being and Time*; rather, he explicitly sets it aside as an issue that cannot deliver the sorts of essential insights he is looking for.

³¹³ Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, translated by David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 61.

³¹⁴ For an excellent account of Derrida’s reading, see Ian Duckles, “Derrida, Judge William and Death,” in *Kierkegaard and Death*, edited by Patrick Stokes and Adam Buben (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, forthcoming 2011).

The interesting thing about Derrida's portrayal of de Silentio's Abraham is that absolute responsibility comes only through a certain isolation of the individual—an isolation that Derrida believes is realized through a relationship with death (cf. Duckles, forthcoming). Thus, Derrida's defense of Kierkegaard from Levinas' charges demonstrates Kierkegaard's commitment to a higher ethics based on the sort of individuating character of death that Levinas is particularly critical of. Kierkegaard, of course, describes this individuating character (and the sense of urgency and responsibility it brings) in several texts, but what is perhaps more troubling for a Levinasian account is that Heidegger also develops his sense of individual responsibility in the same way. In fact, just before stating that "everyone must assume his own death ... therein resides freedom and responsibility," Derrida acknowledges that he remains "within Heidegger's logic" (Derrida, pp. 43-4).

While it may be true that, compared to Kierkegaard, Heidegger is hardly interested in ethics and the death of the Other, his primary point seems to be that these are matters for consideration after grasping the essence of individual responsibility for oneself. Given that both he and Kierkegaard make individualization or "becoming subjective," as Climacus would say, the foundation for any subsequent genuine ethical behavior, it is not clear to me that Heidegger's account is significantly different from Kierkegaard's. If this is so, then Derrida's take on *Fear and Trembling* might also be seen as a defense of Heidegger, and maybe as a rejection of Levinas' attempt to ground ethics in the death of the Other. Whether or not one is sympathetic to Levinas' account, the upshot of all of this for my present purposes is that the often-discussed criticism that Heidegger should have paid more attention to the death of the Other does not distinguish

him in any definitive way from Kierkegaard.³¹⁵ Having dismissed two prominent, yet inessential, criticisms, I will now turn my attention to the key difference between their views on death, and based on this difference, consider what one might find in Kierkegaard that could constitute a more direct and pressing criticism of Heidegger.

Kierkegaard on Heidegger

Even if the criticisms discussed in the previous section, or others of a similar nature, are grounded in legitimate concerns about Heidegger, they do not ultimately touch the one aspect of Kierkegaard's thoughts on death that Heidegger cannot go along with. What motivates Kierkegaard's dying to the world are his Christian interests, and while I have explained why Heidegger finds this fact problematic, it remains to be seen why Heidegger's attitude towards such interests might be problematic itself. But if it is the case that Kierkegaard could be just as critical of Heidegger's version of dying to the world as Heidegger seems to be of his, then what does this mutual criticism portend about the limits and benefits of subscribing to the existential philosophy of death? Through a consideration of one final, common complaint directed at Being-towards-death, I will

³¹⁵ To return briefly to the roots of Heidegger's Nazism, it is no secret that one might find an inclination towards certain aspects of what would come to characterize National Socialism in his discussion of something like an authentic community in the penultimate chapter of *Being and Time* (cf. Huntington, pp. 57-8). Given that much of the second division follows closely the model of genuine Christian death and rebirth, one might also see his notion of authentic community as based on the early Christian church. Although I am in no position to develop this idea at present, I have begun to wonder if there is not an important difference between how Kierkegaard and Heidegger understand the primordial Christian community. Specifically, if Heidegger (the catholic) makes more out of this community than Kierkegaard (the protestant), who argues for only the loosest of human bonds, then perhaps one could suggest that had Heidegger followed Kierkegaard as closely on this issue as he clearly does elsewhere he might have been somewhat less enthusiastic about the new regime and the community that it advocates based on blood and soil. Thus, the idea that I would tentatively like to put forth is that (in possible opposition to Levinas) Heidegger's political shortcomings may be the result of too much emphasis on community (albeit of a certain kind) rather than the lack of such emphasis.

answer this question and suggest an alternative interpretation of the problem of theology that stands between them.

The Emptiness of Anticipatory Resoluteness. Perhaps the most damning criticism that Kierkegaardians occasionally direct at Heidegger is that he is excessively formal and abstract. For example, he strips away so much content from his consideration of what it is to exist that he cannot even allow himself to speak about humans. The primary point of raising such an objection, though, is to suggest that when one detaches from (or dies to) so many of the “everyday” specifics of the world in which we have to live, as Heidegger seems to in his discussion of authenticity and anticipatory resoluteness, it becomes difficult to reconnect to any specifics at all.³¹⁶ Furthermore, his attempt to describe such reconnection is, according to some, so vague that it remains hard to see by what means one can ever come to determine *what* to do when all that has been laid out is about *how* one should do it. Commentators such as Daniel Berthold-Bond and Patricia J. Huntington claim that Kierkegaard would be unsatisfied by the empty formality that Heidegger provides. On their view, Kierkegaard argues that one needs some sense of *what* one ought to do if there is to be any genuine meaning to one’s existence. Bare authenticity does not provide such meaning and neither does Heideggerian openness.

In making a connection between Heidegger’s emphasis on formality and his questionable politics, both Berthold-Bond and Huntington debate the value of anticipatory resoluteness. For example, Berthold-Bond states, “it seems that we are thrown back onto a criterion for action and authentic existence which is so formal,

³¹⁶ Although acknowledging that Heidegger’s “existential ‘solipsism’” (BT, p. 233) certainly does not pose the same sorts of problems that plague modern philosophy, Berthold-Bond notes the parallel here with the Cartesian project of getting a world back after doubting it (Berthold-Bond, pp. 126-7). While the issue for Heidegger is self-understanding and taking on responsibility for the meaning of one’s own existence, Descartes’ concern was of a more metaphysical-epistemological nature.

abstract, and indefinite that the prospects for non-arbitrary action in the concrete situations we face in the world are quite problematic” (p. 128); and Huntington, relying on Berthold-Bond, claims that “Heidegger’s abstract account of authentic resolve, because empty, provides no material criteria for political action” (p. 56). Because Kierkegaard does not go so far out of his way to sever his notion of authentic existence from the aesthetic realm, according to Berthold-Bond, and the ethical, according to Huntington, he has easier access to the sort of normative criteria that might rule out something like membership in the Nazi party. What Berthold-Bond and Huntington apparently want in an account of human existence are “signposts” (Berthold-Bond, pp. 128-9) that motivate one to behave in certain ways rather than others (Huntington, pp. 47, 59).

On Berthold-Bond’s view, Heidegger’s notion of the curiosity characteristic of inauthenticity is very much like Kierkegaard’s understanding of the aesthetic realm of existence in which one makes no commitment to anything in particular and simply drifts from one amusing diversion to another (Berthold-Bond, pp. 133-7). While both of them treat this frivolous way of existence with a great deal of suspicion and scorn, Berthold-Bond points out that according to several of Kierkegaard’s early pseudonyms, the aesthetic is not to be disregarded in moving to a higher sphere of existence, but transformed and its possibilities understood in a new light. It is from these possibilities which have been taken over from the aesthetic sphere that one is able to choose concrete courses of action in an authentic ethical or religious manner. Because Heidegger never offers a similar redemption of curiosity, but rather perseveres in disparaging it, he seems to lose touch with its vast stores of specific possibilities that could be re-appropriated in

the formal authentic manner he describes. Thus, Berthold-Bond states, “Kierkegaard’s theory of the sublimation of the aesthetic through authentic repetition presents a way to resolve the abstract and formal character of Heidegger’s phenomenology of authentic being” (p. 138).

There seem to be two problems with Berthold-Bond’s account, however. First, in focusing on Kierkegaard’s later, more explicitly Christian writings, as I have (at least implicitly) done in the previous chapter when demonstrating the similarity between Kierkegaard and Heidegger on dying to the world, it is not at all clear that the sympathetic understanding of the aesthetic that Berthold-Bond relies on is maintained. If there is in fact good reason not to rely too heavily on what Judge William, for instance, has to say when comparing Kierkegaard and Heidegger, then Berthold-Bond’s account of what separates the two might be called into question. Second, I believe that Berthold-Bond is less than charitable in his assessment of Heidegger’s abstractness due to “dislocation” from concrete possibilities. While Heidegger is surely critical of the attitude of curiosity (which he associates with the “idle talk” of the “they” (BT, p. 217)), he does not disparage the particular possibilities that are made available in curiosity by one’s thrown situation (even if discussing them is not his priority). If anything, Heidegger might be more open to the possibilities of curiosity, if authentically appropriated, than Kierkegaard would be from a more strictly Christian perspective. Berthold-Bond certainly acknowledges that Heidegger means “to allow for a recovery of the world in a transformed way” (p. 130) based on a “criterion for choice [that] can only be made by concrete reference to the past” (p. 131); but for some reason that continues to elude me, he seems to believe that this description of what Heidegger is up to is more abstract and

ungrounded than what Kierkegaard supposedly takes from the “aesthetic ‘theatre of infinite possibility’” (p. 137).

Without rejecting Berthold-Bond’s account, Huntington tries a slightly different approach. Her argument relies on a purported difference between Kierkegaard’s and Heidegger’s respective treatments of the social realm and its normativity. Kierkegaard’s authentic individual rejects the thoughtless mass known as “the crowd” as a kind of inauthentic community, but does not distance him- or herself from one’s essential sociality in itself, or rule out “the possibility of a true community of ‘individuals’” (Huntington, p. 49). Such a community would “embody a set of norms without absolutizing” them and “without lapsing into a herd-like communitarianism” (p. 51). Heidegger, on the other hand, fails to distinguish “between inauthentic participation in ‘everydayness’ and social life per se,” which makes it possible to see the authentic individual in near complete opposition to “the public world of norms” (p. 50). In other words, Heidegger apparently associates social normativity with the everydayness that is to be overcome (so far as possible), and thereby loses touch with such normativity. In the absence of norms that could direct his actions, he seems to advocate an empty and arbitrary “decisionism” that leaves him open to, among other things, “involvement in National Socialism” (p. 56).

Given that their approaches to offering a Kierkegaardian critique of Heidegger are quite similar, it should come as no surprise that I have roughly the same two problems with Huntington’s account that I had with Berthold-Bond’s. The first is of course the fact that she pays little attention to the specifically Christian ideas in Kierkegaard’s later writings, in which one can find important parallels with Heidegger’s version of dying to

the world. As I mentioned in a note to my earlier discussion of Kierkegaard's reception of *New Testament* Christianity, Huntington's portrayal of Kierkegaard and sociality is at least in tension with some of his later views. Considering that this portrayal is central to her explanation of what Kierkegaard has and Heidegger lacks, such tension renders her entire comparison of the two questionable. But even if this were not the case, I would still suggest that she is less than fair in her description of Heidegger's "antinormative" (pp. 53, 59) and anti-social tendencies. As I argued in the last section along Derridean lines, there is no reason to see Heidegger's emphasis on the formal aspects of individual self-mastery as a rejection of one's communal and ethical relationships.³¹⁷ In fact, he is quite similar to Kierkegaard in arguing that the individualizing capacity of dying to the world is the prerequisite for the authentic "re-taking" of communal relationships and the normativity that comes with community.³¹⁸ Although such relationships are derived from, and in some sense secondary to, Heidegger's "existential 'solipsism,'" this establishment of order does not distinguish him in any profound way from Kierkegaard.³¹⁹

While I disagree with much of what Berthold-Bond and Huntington have to say, their primary point is not one that I would necessarily dispute. It does indeed seem that Kierkegaard would reject the empty formality and abstractness of Heidegger's notion of

³¹⁷ Cf. Julian Young, "Death and Authenticity," in *Death and Philosophy*, edited by Jeff Malpas and Robert C. Solomon (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 192.

³¹⁸ Cf. Merold Westphal's claim that "the need to flee from an inauthentic being-with-others does not deny the possibility of an authentic form of relatedness nor imply that existential loneliness is the highest human achievement. It may be that existential loneliness is but the half-way house required on the path from everyday loneliness to genuine togetherness" (*God, Guilt, and Death* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 98).

Guignon provides an excellent account of how Heidegger maintains the bonds of normativity, even if it is not the neat and absolute sort of normative compulsion that Huntington and Berthold-Bond seem interested in (Guignon, "Freedom," pp. 97-9).

³¹⁹ Huntington states, "to recover an ethical capacity by no means necessitates the rejection of the very norms that the crowd I resist embraces" (p. 51). Although she takes herself to represent Kierkegaard's stance in saying this, such a statement seems just as representative of Heidegger's position. The latter's point is not necessarily to dismiss any particular norms, but to avoid taking them on uncritically as the "they" does.

anticipatory resoluteness, but on religious—and specifically Christian—grounds rather than on aesthetic or ethical grounds. Although Kierkegaard dramatically emphasizes the more formal *how* aspects of Christian existence, which indeed makes him look very similar to Heidegger, it would not be *Christian* existence without some notion of *what* Christianity is and *what* it demands.³²⁰ As I have previously suggested, it is precisely this *what* that provides the sort of content and specific direction to existence that Heidegger's account lacks. Whereas, for Kierkegaard dying to the world has a concrete purpose in leading to Christian rebirth, for Heidegger dying to the world leads to an open-ended self-possession that seems like it could manifest itself in a diverse range of concretions that might include apparently contradictory possibilities such as Nazism and pacifism. In fact, it is conceivable that on Heidegger's view one might even find it necessary to switch from one to the other given oscillations in the situation one encounters. This self-determination of a somewhat tentative content might be the best that one can do in trying to attribute specific meaning to one's existence according to Heidegger, but Kierkegaard would likely see a certain bankruptcy in trying to find meaning in such an arbitrary and potentially transient way. It is only through participation in something eternal—the relationship with the divine—that one can find a more solid sense of meaning and avoid this almost nihilistic bankruptcy.

A Mutual Understanding. With this apparent Kierkegaardian criticism, the discussion has finally reached the heart of the matter—the essential difference between the

³²⁰ McCarthy notes the "structural joke" of *Anxiety* and *Postscript* in which the objective issue (the what) of Christianity (or anxiety in the former case) is given a comically disproportional amount of attention as compared to the subjective issue (the how) (forthcoming). For example, the objective issue in *Postscript* is dealt with in roughly 50 pages while the subjective issue takes up the remaining 550 or so pages. Still, while it might not take much, there must be at least some minimal grasp of *what* subjective Christian existence is based on (cf. PF, p. 104/SKS 4, p. 300). The problem that leads Kierkegaard to downplay the importance of the objective issue is, of course, that he sees a world that focuses almost entirely on the Christian what (whether in support or criticism) and forgets the importance of subjective appropriation.

respective accounts of dying to the world found in Kierkegaard and Heidegger. While Kierkegaard is too ontically narrow for Heidegger, Heidegger is too abstract and arbitrary for Kierkegaard. But is there perhaps another way to understand what seems to be a fundamental disagreement? I believe that the key to such an understanding lies in the peculiar way that Kierkegaard explains the development of the necessary relationship with the divine.

In a short preface to *Anti-Climacus' Practice in Christianity*, Kierkegaard, in his role as editor, states that “the requirement should be heard . . . so that I might learn not only to resort to *grace* but to resort to it in relation to the use of *grace*” (PC, p. 7/SKS 12, p. 15).³²¹ As I have already argued (particularly in my discussion of *For Self-Examination*), he believes that this requirement, which ought to be associated, at least in part, with the stripping away of one’s worldly meaning in dying to the world, is so difficult that no human can meet it on his or her own. It is therefore necessary for something beyond human to step in and offer assistance if one is to die to the ways of the world and fill up one’s cleansed and empty existence with divine meaning. As Caputo puts it, one must quit “the illusion that a man can make himself whole by his own powers, then a healing power from without can intervene” (Caputo 1993, p. 217).

Humans do not come to God, having earned his mercy; God comes to humans—through

³²¹ There are two important points that must be noted with respect to this preface. The first concerns the meaning of the latter part of this quoted passage. Kierkegaard explains in a journal entry from 1855 that what he means is that because grace is “a kind of indulgence from the actual imitation of Christ and the actual strenuousness of being Christian” (NA, p. 69/SKS 14, p. 213), one must also rely on Christ’s merciful redemptive act in order to gain forgiveness for even the fact of having to rely on grace and be indulged in this way in the first place. The second point concerns the nature of my use of this preface. One must certainly be aware that Kierkegaard has a specific target audience for *Practice*—the established church and its leader in Denmark, the bishop Mynster. While he is therefore calling for a very specific confession of inadequacy in attaching his preface to *Anti-Climacus’* discussion of the rigorous requirement, I believe that he also intends his appeal to be applicable to anyone who associates with Christianity. It is this broader sense of the need for grace that I focus on here.

his son—out of compassion for such impotent beings, and offers them the eternal religious meaning, which Kierkegaard sees in participating in Christ’s death, purely by grace. Not only was the sacrifice of God’s son an act of divine mercy, but even the fact that we are on some level able to imitate Christ’s own dying to the world is the result of the divine gift of faith—a receptivity that would not be possible without the “Spirit working within us.”

The problem with reliance on divine assistance for the sake of attributing meaning to one’s existence is that one is left with no possibility of meaning if one finds faith to be a nonviable or unappetizing way of life. This view of faith seems to be especially compelling in modernity when the various articles of Christian dogma begin to look more and more foolish under the light of scientific and technological advances. I have pointed out that Kierkegaard understands the trends of modernity (he even uses its Epicurean manifestations as a test and corrective for Christian dying to the world), and argues that increasing doubt with respect to the objective “facts” of Christianity should have little impact on a true Christian who cultivates a subjective relationship with Christ. But Heidegger chooses another approach to the search for meaning in the modern situation.³²² Rather than refocusing one’s religious endeavors in dying to the world, he suggests a version of dying to that sets aside the problematic religious issue. Heidegger describes the process of redeeming oneself by stripping away all of the ordinary meaning that comes from simply having fallen into the world, and rebuilding a new meaning by critically taking over what is available in one’s thrown state. Thus, as McCarthy points out,

³²² I certainly do not mean to suggest that Heidegger sees his *Being and Time* project in precisely this way, but I do find this description to be both accurate and helpful for understanding his relationship with Kierkegaard.

Heidegger comes to play a sort of Pelagius to Kierkegaard's Augustine (McCarthy, forthcoming).

In a world in which Christian absolutes no longer seem tenable, however, the meaning that Heidegger gives to himself is not meaning "in the positive Kierkegaardian sense that ... gives Dasein a self-definition in terms of something specific" (Dreyfus, p. 313). It may be that without these kinds of absolutes, there is necessarily going to be the sort of indeterminacy, albeit within a determined range of specifics, which Heidegger's account suggests. Against thinkers such as Berthold-Bond and Huntington, there may be no definitive signposts hammered in, but only a series of well-worn paths that one can somewhat arbitrarily choose between. While this choice is necessarily conditioned by the world and its norms, it is the choice itself that gives certain norms priority over others and allows them to give a specific meaning to existence that remains open to revision (Guignon, "Freedom," pp. 97-9). And this might just be the best that a modern irreligious world can do once the power of grace to render some particular choice enduringly significant is off the table.

This understanding of the existential philosophy of death in which the goal is to gain a certain mastery over the meaning of one's existence (as opposed to being mastered by the meaning of the world one happens to be thrown into), either through option A (with God's help—redeemed sinfulness) or option B (without such help—anticipatory resoluteness), suggests a sense of "agreeing to disagree." Both Kierkegaard and Heidegger seem aware of the difficulties that individuals are up against in their search for significance in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Interestingly, the disagreement between their respective responses to these difficulties as I have laid them out finds a

close parallel in Miles' paper on Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.³²³ Over the last few pages of this paper, Miles describes a Kierkegaard that seems to hold out hope for a more substantial and incontrovertible meaning than Nietzsche seems to think is possible (forthcoming 2011). Nietzsche argues against a descent into nihilism, but like Heidegger, refuses to resort to religious faith in divine assistance in order to avoid such a descent. While Kierkegaard would not be happy with the result of Nietzsche's efforts, Miles seems to conclude that in the end they must each concede that the other's point of view cannot be easily ruled out (forthcoming 2011). Although Christian faith may be an extreme and, in a certain sense, unjustifiable option, its renunciation of such justification means that it need not defend itself from Nietzsche's criticisms. And although Nietzschean self-mastery (like its Heideggerian counterpart) has its limitations, one can certainly appreciate its value if it is the alternative to a risky and desperate leap of faith. I would suggest that a similar concession must ultimately be made in the case of dying to the world according to Kierkegaard and Heidegger.

In fact, certain developments in the views of both Kierkegaard and Heidegger suggest that they do come around to making such a concession. It is no secret that Kierkegaard realizes how miserable, uncertain, and dangerous a true Christian existence can be. After all, he spends much of his later authorship trying to make these perils clear. Although he has the hopeful recourse of grace and divine mercy to rely upon, he does not

³²³ It is perhaps not so surprising to find such a parallel given my earlier discussions of Nietzsche in connection first with Kierkegaard and then with Heidegger. Furthermore, as Jean Wahl points out, "it has even been suggested that Heidegger frequents the world of Nietzsche with the feelings of Kierkegaard and the world of Kierkegaard with the feelings of Nietzsche" (*Philosophies of Existence*, translated by F. M. Lory (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 103).

Just before making this comment, Wahl seems to hint at an interesting question about Heidegger's *Being and Time* project: why would he want to rely so heavily on the language and structure of Christianity when he is explicitly not engaged in a religious endeavor? The answer to this question seems to be that even though his intended audience may not consist in large part of striving Christians, this is the structure of existence that would surely resonate with his predominantly Western, culturally Christian readers.

want to repeat Luther's mistake³²⁴ and therefore cautions his readers against making too much of this consolation—there is work to be done and it will not be pleasant so long as one exists in the world. It is because grace does not excuse an individual from striving in existence that Kierkegaard even expresses concerns about the preface to *Practice* that I quoted from above. Without a willingness to die to worldly ways, which includes admitting one's failure to do so, "one does not have the right to draw on grace" (NA, p. 70/SKS 14, p. 213).³²⁵

Heidegger, on the other hand, seems to lose his Pelagian spirit throughout his later work. Caputo states that "Heidegger later on conceded . . . that the transition from inauthenticity to authenticity is not something effected *by* man but rather something effected *in* man by a saving grace" (1993, p. 222). Although there is no reason to think that Heidegger has a specifically Christian sense of grace in mind, he does make this telling comment, which supports Caputo's general assessment, in an interview released after his death:

philosophy will not be able to bring about a direct change of the present state of the world. This is true not only of philosophy but of all merely human meditations and endeavors. Only a god can still save us. I think the only possibility of salvation left to us is to prepare readiness, through thinking and poetry, for the appearance of the god or for the absence of the god during the decline; so that we do not, simply put, die meaningless deaths, but that when we decline, we decline in the face of the absent god.³²⁶

This is of course an issue that deserves more attention than it can receive here, but the point of mentioning it briefly is to suggest that while Kierkegaard seems to understand

³²⁴ See my earlier discussion of Kierkegaard's reception of Luther.

³²⁵ Kierkegaard's discussion of removing the preface and its allowance for grace is one instance that is particularly focused on the situation of Mynster. Nonetheless, I once again see a broader application for such statements given the resonance between Kierkegaard's critique of Danish Christianity and his concern about Luther's overemphasis on grace.

³²⁶ Martin Heidegger, "The Spiegel Interview," in *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism: Questions and Answers*, edited by Gunther Neske and Emil Kettering (New York: Paragon House, 1990), pp. 56-7.

the drawbacks of relying on grace to give life meaning, especially when considered from a non-Christian perspective,³²⁷ Heidegger might eventually come to appreciate the drawbacks of trying to find meaning through one's own endeavors. Thus, these two pioneers of the existential philosophy of death could ultimately end up with a greater sense of mutual understanding and respect for each other's approach than initially seems possible.

³²⁷ See, for example, where Anti-Climacus' speaks about relying on grace and states that "from any other perspective Christianity must and will appear as madness or horror" (PC, p. 68/SKS 12, p. 80). Of course, Kierkegaard makes even stronger claims along these lines in *For Self-Examination* and other places, as I have pointed out.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Given that from a certain point of view one might be able to sympathize with both approaches to the existential philosophy of death, there will be no ultimate decision in favor of either Kierkegaard or Heidegger. The alleged tension in Heidegger's "atheistic" appropriation of and abstraction from Kierkegaard's more Christ-oriented ideas about death, which I wondered about in the first chapter, need not lead to the conclusion that Heidegger takes the existential philosophy of death too far. Nor, conversely, must one conclude that Kierkegaard does not take it far enough, as the Heidegger of *Being and Time* would likely suggest. Nonetheless, the essential difference between their accounts of dying to the world cannot be ignored, and (setting aside any possible change of heart on the later Heidegger's part for the time being) their views on death and salvation, therefore, remain in certain respects opposed to each other. As a result of this most fruitful opposition though, there are a couple of interesting observations worth making in closing.

The first such observation concerns proximity to the Platonic and Epicurean strains in the philosophy of death. As I have argued throughout, both Kierkegaard and Heidegger have firm roots in the Platonic/Christian notion of dying to the world; and they both have a healthy respect for the concerns of the Epicurean strain even as they attempt to overcome, or at least side-step, some of its most central insights. However, while Kierkegaard sees the Epicurean strain as more of a corrective for a Christianity that has

lost sight of the nuances of proper dying to the world, Heidegger's approach to death might constitute more of a true compromise between the two strains. Because Kierkegaard's portrayal of death is based on a commitment to at least one piece of Christian metaphysical dogma (the god-man who died but lives), he cannot really entertain, as a possibility for himself, the Epicurean disdain for these sorts of religious beliefs even if he understands, respects, and makes use of such disdain. Since Heidegger, on the other hand, willfully jettisons such metaphysics-laden belief, his relationship to both the Platonic and the Epicurean strains remains somewhat more neutral. Even though his anticipatory resoluteness is largely Christian in its basic structure, he adopts aspects of each strain with no particular investment in seeing either propped up.

The other observation I want to make concerns the destructive and destabilizing nature of an unchained dying to the world, and the closely-related potential dangers of taking one's own death seriously at all. This is of course an issue (with certain parallels in the situation of post-Cartesian epistemology) that Berthold-Bond and Huntington seem to suggest in criticizing Heidegger: is it not the case that dying to the world continuously undermines any attempt to derive significance from one's existence in the world?

Although I have already explained why Heidegger need not concede the futility of such attempts despite encouraging a sort of dying to the world, it is still fair to say that this dying does rule out deriving an absolute and incontrovertible meaning from existing in the world. Kierkegaard is only able to preserve a sense of absolute meaning (in the face of extreme opposition, mind you) by chaining his account of dying to the world to a previously-positing absolute that he can never be certain of. That is, he directs his entire death project toward the goal of an improved relationship with the divine. While I have

said much of this in slightly different terms before, the general point that I am trying to emphasize here with respect to the existential philosophy of death is that whether or not one approaches one's own death in the service of such an assumed (and thus questionable) absolute, the result is likely to be a somewhat destabilized, or at least insecure, existence.

I conclude on this somewhat bleak note, not to suggest that one is better off with the false sense of security that comes from never becoming intimate with thoughts of death (let alone engaging in a full-blown dying to the world), but to highlight the risks that are inherent in striving for a more honest and complete grasp of one's existence. These risks must surely be weighed against the potential benefits of such an awareness of what it is to be—benefits that include a new and possibly more composed perspective on the everyday problems that occupy life in the world. The interesting thing, however, is that regardless of the outcome of this analysis, the precariousness of existence remains the same. Not even the most thorough attempt to ignore it can keep this essential aspect of what one is from lurking in the shadows of one's daily life.

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