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KIERKEGAARD'S VIEW OF DEATH

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Søren Kierkegaard shows in his writings that one's view of death is very much linked to one's total view of existence. In his discussion of various attitudes to, and beliefs about, death, he lets an important distinction emerge between views that presuppose only the world order as we know it, and views that presuppose in addition a transcendent order of existence

Views belonging to the former group are characterised by emphasis on the problem of life in the world with death as the ultimate background factor. For the purpose of this article I propose to call this group immanentalist. Views belonging to the latter group make a distinction between this world and a higher eternal order of existence in which the individual can or does personally participate even after his physical death. This group I will call transcendentalist. Members of the immanentalist group may reject the claims of the transcendentalists about life after death, they may take the line that it is impossible to make any statements on the subject or they may try to handle death and eternal life positively from a totally immanentalist position. The German philosopher Martin Heidegger is of course the classic example of this type of positive response to death (*Sein und Zeit,* 1927), while the Welsh philosopher D. Z. Phillips has attempted to interpret religious language about eternal life as expressing values rather than facts, (*Death and Immortality,* Macmillan, U.K., 1970). Since the immanentalist standpoint is to be found described in Kierkegaard's writings, at a first superficial reading it may be tempting to think that his personal view of existence is immanentalist. Yet this is not the case. His entire authorship with its delineation of various attitudes to death is strongly transcendentalist in terms of an actual transcendence and faith in an actual personal God.

It is, however, because Kierkegaard lays such stress on personal faith instead of on attempts to achieve certainty that he approaches the problem of death by clearly depicting the various options and even emphasising the difficulties of a transcendentalist position. To the 19th century Danish Christian taking religion and personal immortality for granted, or asking to be totally convinced of his survival of death, Kierkegaard replies by attacking the self-assurance and pointing out that there is no absolute proof but only the consequences of the option we choose to accept.[1]

Kierkegaard reminds us that in ordinary human terms death is the only finality and certainty, an uncertain certainty because it can strike us down at any time. The dead return to dust, to nothing, their efforts to leave any lasting form of immortality of name behind them are frustrated by the hand of time. Death in itself offers no explanation to account for the perpetual annihilation of creation,

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to account for the event that reduces all to one common mould, mocking the distinctions made in life. This is what the physical position really is regarding death: man is finite, the human race is finite—individuals and cultures pass away, everything eventually passes away.[2]

In *Either/Or* the response of Kierkegaard's young aesthete to this situation is one of despair. He wants to view enjoyment as life's 'purpose' but sees man as tragically at the mercy of fate, suffering and death robbing him of pleasure and happiness:

> No one returns from the dead, no one has come into the world without weeping; no one asks one if one wants to come in, none when one wants to go out.[3]

Even 'Life's highest and richest moment of enjoyment is accompanied by death'.[4] Thus pleasure cannot be the meaning of life. In fact if man has no basic control over his destiny and cannot retain enjoyment of the world it looks as if the direction and end of life is only death, even though 'to say that the meaning of life is to die, seems . . . a contradiction'. The young aesthete therefore sees not only the 'nothingness' of regarding pleasure as the goal of life, but the nullity of any human pursuit. He is 'through with life', speaking of it as a comparatively short activity that is 'empty and meaningless'—one might as well jump into the grave of the person one is burying, bury the entire human race as soon as possible. The young man has thus discovered for himself that the meaning of life cannot be that which renders life meaningless, and regarded as a purely biological endeavour, both work and pleasure are meaningless, the one because it merely keeps man inside the circle of working in order to stay alive to work, the other because it goes as soon as one has got it, and, as Constantin Constantius of *Repetition* discovers in Berlin, can never be repeated. External factors that helped make the pleasure pleasurable, change, while the very fact of repeating it destroys the vital element of novelty.[5]

By demonstrating the aesthete's failure in the battle with his problem, Kierkegaard shows the inadequacy of such a view of life—of the lowest type of immanentalist position: One can join the Symparanekromenoi club, the fellowship of those already dead, and celebrate death as a release from the struggle, negatively admit that suffering rather than pleasure is the fact of one's existence. One can seize what pleasure one can, fighting off boredom by teaching oneself to produce novelty out of any situation. One can build up a mental eternity of pleasure through 'recollection', the selective hoarding up of past pleasures in one's memory. None of this is of any avail. Sharing misery negatively with others in a spirit of egocentric defiance achieves nothing, least of all a way out of one's problem.[6] The 'crop rotation' method for producing novelty is a self-defeating policy when put into practice, for, as the diary of Johannes the Seducer shows, if others practise the same method, all become unhappy victims.[7] Lastly, recollection of pleasure and happiness, however selective, is no substitute for the real thing and no barrier against the real world. After the party comes the hangover and the dawn of daily life, while the aesthete knows that his recollections are not really immortal but will perish with him. Kierkegaard's young aesthete therefore lives in a state of suicidal depression punctuated by occasional frantic bursts of pleasure. Because he has become reflective enough to

consider the question of the meaning of existence in the light of the fact of death his conclusion that it is meaningless has split him between wanting to live and die at the same time. It is encouraging however, that the young man has reached 'the final aesthetic life view' of conscious despair. Those who amble on unreflectively or blaming discontent on external factors are further away from truth than those who face up to their unhappiness and reflect about the meaning of existence.[8]

In his criticism of what he understands as being Hegel's philosophy, Kierkegaard again shows how little an immanentalist standpoint can cope with the problem of existence and death. In his view, the Hegelian position identifies subject and object, thought and being, in a metaphysic that wrongly emphasises the historical. —History is treated as a type of necessary evolution in which Christianity is presupposed as a stage in the progress of the eternal immanent spirit, each stage transcending the preceding one. Such a transcendence or 'higher unity' of the oppositions in existence is no real transcendence, however. There is no proof that philosophy is the highest transcending stage, nor can it prove its metaphysical assumptions. One cannot get outside the whole of human existence to see if such assumptions are correct, especially when human existence is not yet over. The preconceived idea that history is morally good in its ultimate outworking, evil subordinate in the process, is thus dangerously misleading. It encourages the myth of future Utopia by sliding over the problem of 'what it is to live'. If the natural order of existence (immanence) is identified with the religious (the actually transcendent), nationality and religion can be equated and God made into the image of man as a 'man-god' so that 'all theology' becomes 'anthropology'.[9] The purpose of human existence is then self-assertion of the human race as a whole, but when no meaning is given individual existence other than serving the race, human society at its best operates only on basic ethics designed to protect its interests and keep it functioning, e.g. prohibitions against stealing and murder.

On such a view, as Kierkegaard's Johannes de Silentio points out in *Fear and Trembling*:

> ... the entire existence of the human race rounds itself off, a perfect self-contained sphere, and the ethical is what limits and fills it at one and the same time. God becomes an invisible vanishing point, a powerless thought. His power is only in the ethical which fills all of existence.[10]

Such a view ascribes to the human race as a whole the role of God and fate, yet it encourages a minimal standard of morality that can never rise higher than the goal of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. The individual is encouraged to work for the welfare of the group and of future generations without any enlightenment about the problems that afflicted the young aesthete. The Hegelian standpoint as Kierkegaard sees it attempts to give individual life meaning by pointing to the race. It would do away with the personal egoism of the young aesthete only to replace it by human egoism in the mass—namely the self-assertion of the human species. Yet in the light of the fact of death this gives life no more meaning than did the aesthetic line of argument, and is worse, in that it operates by covering up the problem of death. It falsely assumes the immortality of the human race in terms of permanent physical continuity in

immanence and tries to make the individual believe that this is the same as personal continuity and participation in future happiness. As Kierkegaard's Vigilius Haufniensis points out however, in *The Concept of Angst,*[11] personal immortality is not included in the speculative metaphysical 'system', while what is called immortality is not what Christians have traditionally understood by it. There is therefore no way of springing over the problem of death by pleading teleological evolution, for, as Johannes Climacus says in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript:*

> *If one posits only the evolution of the race, the generations of men, or posits it as the Highest, how does one then explain the divine wastefulness which uses the infinite host of individuals one generation after the other in order to set the world-historical process going?*[12]

Kierkegaard as Climacus accuses the speculative philosopher of trying to put the whole of existence into the realm of thought. He points out that while existence includes man's thought about it, thought can never contain existence. The speculative attempt is merely speculation, a metaphysical picture of a total future Utopia tacked on to what is basically past-oriented Greek thought about eternity. When therefore in the *Postscript* Climacus makes an important distinction between Plato and Socrates, it is not surprising that he speaks of the speculative philosopher as following 'what is Platonic'. For Climacus, both Socrates and Plato hold to the principle that 'all knowledge is recollection', but whereas Plato is seen as retreating into speculation about his eternal world of forms or ideas, retreating from the imperfect present viewed as 'non-being under the category of time', Socrates, the '*existing* thinker' constantly departs from the recollection principle and the sphere of thought in order 'to exist'. With the speculative philosopher the movement is otherwise, he departs from real life in order to think, and in his contemplation of the past 'only his coat tails remain in the present'.[13]

In his description of the Greek world, Judaism and Christianity, Kierkegaard gives us concrete examples of man's response to death in societies of an immanentalist, semi-immanentalist and transcendentalist type. In the immanentalist or semi-immanentalist types, Kierkegaard shows us that the norm is to assume that man is meant to be as happy as possible in this life, even if there is nothing else after death. One must make the best of human existence, even if it cannot be given a meaning or significance that really transcends immanence. Even where belief in an actual transcendence begins to appear, it is a shadowy version of this life, whereas for a strongly transcendentalist outlook it is this life that is merely a sketch of what is to come: 'The more intense earthly life is, the weaker eternity becomes' says Kierkegaard in one of his Journal entries.[14]

Kierkegaard demonstrates this through his discussion of ancient Greek culture. For the early Greek endeavouring to develop his life to the full in this world, death at its best never ceases to be 'sinister' and sad, for it is seen as that which conducts the individual only to annihilation or to a shadowy underworld, the sad abode of the 'powerless and bloodless bodies of the dead'. Hence for the tragic hero, death is 'the final struggle and the final passion' as irresistible fate in the form of offended gods (the impersonation of natural forces, guardians of the

city-state) demands his life or the life of a loved one.[15]

According to Kierkegaard it can also be seen in Greek philosophy. The Stoic treats death as an escape exit into oblivion when his wounded pride cannot endure, the Epicurean makes a joke of the inevitable. Even when death itself is made 'the point of departure for the view of life', the explorative discussion fails to explain 'the relation of opposition between life and death' and leads into abstract Platonic metaphysics, because such speculation, like that of the Hegelian philosopher, is a purely intellectual and immanentalist attempt. In Kierkegaard's view the philosophical 'longing for death' leads towards nihilism rather than immortality, because the eternal world of ideas of Platonic recollection, however transcendently located within immanence, is essentially an attempt to achieve harmony with the natural and social environment. 'In Plato immortality becomes still more unsubstantial' than the Homeric underworld because it is an abstract theory about the soul and the pre-existence to which it must return that is 'totally predicateless and indeterminate' if there is no actually transcendent sphere of existence.[16]

If Socrates is important for Kierkegaard because he is an 'existing' thinker he is also important for him because he marks the beginning of a break with the immanentalist outlook. While refusing to dabble in speculation about life after death he posits the possibility of a division between this life and another, making no absolute decision about death's significance, though ever conscious of his mortality. Through learned 'ignorance' he strives for truth instead of man's usual goal of earthly happiness and thus destroys 'the immediate, substantial consciousness of the state' because not only does he cause people to reflect about moral norms based only on the social urge to protect community life, but also he acknowledges his 'daimon' or conscience and eternally valid norms of action superior to group and civic morality. He rejects the state gods sanctioning the laws for a god who is the eternal or divine principle 'underlying all things'. Since his investigations lead him to view state and family as individuals and to relate himself:

> to members of the family and state as to individuals, every other relationship being to him an indifferent matter,[17]

he empirically attacks the view that family and state are higher than the individual and that the individual's life significance is to be ultimately derived from his membership of the race. In other words, by making individual subjectivity a universal starting-point, he frees himself from a naturally immanentalist standpoint. He can even be free and go unpunished in the hour of condemnation because he has destroyed the 'rational connection' between his alleged crime and society's use of death as an ultimate sanction: it may be possible that death is a good and not merely expulsion from society into annihilation.[18]

Yet though he regards Socrates as the 'founder' of authentic morality, Kierkegaard finds himself obliged to describe Socrates' standpoint as one of 'lone self-satisfaction'. His attitude of ironic philosophical ignorance, though transcending an immanentalist-based outlook, cannot take him further towards transcendence than the extent of his finite understanding, while it prevents him

from developing a serious sense of moral obligation to family and state. Despite Socrates' humility towards his ignorance, his idea of gods and divine justice, he has 'objectivity' but is not 'pious', he has an 'ironic intellectual mastery of existence that makes him conduct his life as an interesting experiment and feel free to dispense with moral virtues if he wishes. Socrates thus stands out as a question put to existence. He has no 'speculative consideration able to overcome death', he cannot find a higher actual transcendent than himself or the human race, yet a higher actual transcendent is what is needed if the problem of life's meaning and death is to be solved.[19]

Kierkegaard finds this higher actual transcendent in Judaism, where the community as a corporate entity puts itself under the transcendent authority of God as eternal, righteous Law-Giver. Each member of God's chosen people is required, as a member, to obey the divinely-revealed moral commandments. The temporal civic order is made subservient to the realm of the eternal, the actually transcendent Jehovah replacing Greek fate and 'the gods'. Yet such a community must be described as semi-immanentalist, for it is life in this world that is the highest life, the individual's significance lying in the fact of his membership of the community as a nation under God. Temporal blessings and long life are viewed as the reward of righteousness, suffering and early death as punishment for wrong-doing. Law-keeping is thus connected with community survival and prosperity, the emphasis on 'family' and 'the reproduction of the race' clearly indicating a this-worldly immortality. Thus, as in the Greek world, nothing much awaits the individual beyond the grave. Sheol swallows rather than restores its victims, while not only is community life marred by self-righteous legalism and pride, but also material expectations concerning the Promised Land are disappointed. Subsequent ideas in Judaism about a future eternity of life for the restored community are also conceived in immanentalist terms: the future eternity is 'in a simple continuity with the present' there is no clear division between this life and the next, no thought of a radical breach with the life of immanence.[20]

If the sphere of immanence is the natural realm of man's self-assertion in existence, all views treating man as the ultimate in creation and promoting his life materially can be classified as basically self-assertive, belonging to the self-assertion of humanity in existence, even though they may strongly advocate individual self-denial for other members of the community. Thus, when he comes to making a sharp distinction between an immanentalist standpoint and a transcendentalist one, despite his respect for the element of actual transcendence in Judaism, Kierkegaard is critical of it as the religion 'closest to the ordinary human life'.[21]

For Kierkegaard, Christianity indicates an absolutely transcendent realm above all time, past, present, and future. Both for the individual and in itself as a whole, immanence culminates in eternity so that unlike in Judaism, Christian eternity is not in 'simple continuity' with the present but in transcendent continuity. Thus, there is a radical difference between the life of immanence and transcendence:

> Judaism unites the divine and this life— Christianity makes a division. The life of

> the true Christian will therefore be fashioned according to the paradigm which for the Jews is the paradigm of the ungodly man.[22]

If Judaism is 'divinely sanctioned optimism, nothing but promise for this life', Christianity is 'renunciation', and a kingdom 'not of this world'. It is the realm of spirit, standing against the realm of flesh—the selfishness and egoistic self-orientation of man as he becomes reflective in nature. On this view, although death automatically becomes the natural 'punishment' and end of man's self-assertion, Kierkegaard shows that Christianity is an 'enthusiasm which sees in death the clarification of life', because it is a 'view that life properly consists in dying'. Unlike the Greek philosophic 'longing for death' that Kierkegaard regards as abstract, empty and nihilistic in its immanentalism, Christianity is an 'otherworldly empiricism' teaching that the individual should die to sin in order to attain new life. Through a right 'repetition', a persistent continuance in the Christian life, the individual is shown as embarking upon the development of his potentiality for eternal life in the hereafter.[23]

Thus when Judge Wilhelm in *Either/Or* extols the joys of living an ethical–religious life in society, it is from the standpoint that man is a 'synthesis of the temporal and the eternal', and though he concentrates on the life of immanence as existing 'for mankind's sake', the vital element is always that the individual is under an actually transcendent God. This is the right 'Idea of the state'. The community is not 'the highest', but the Christian God, 'the eternal Power who omnipresently pervades the whole of existence'.[24] It is in fact only the spiritual relationship of individual to God and neighbour that holds society together. 'The single individual' is 'dialectically decisive as the presupposition for forming community' being 'related primarily to God and then to the community'. True neighbour-love is 'self-denial, rooted in the relationship to God'. The ideal ethical–religious society is:

> an association of people who do not covet anything either separately or together, but each one is willing to make a sacrifice and now associates only to that end; so the one encourages the other to sacrifice more and more. As soon as someone wants to have something, he is *eo ipso* out of the association.[25]

The individual can therefore live the life of eternity now, building up society at the same time, and if he does not die rightly in this life to his self-centredness, not only does community life fail, but he puts his immortal soul at risk and cannot when he physically dies escape 'Judgement'.[26]

In this way, the life of the individual and of the community gain significance in the light of the fact of death, for on the Christian view death is a transition and not the end of the individual's life. Ordinary perishable human happiness is no longer the goal of existence, but eternal life with God and the fellowship of the transcendent kingdom of heaven.

Yet just because the transcendent kingdom is the end and aim of existence, marriage and the physical continuity of the race are treated ambiguously in Kierkegaard's writings. For Judge Wilhelm, if the temporal is the realm where man is placed by God, then the individual's duty is to aim at the highest within the finite sphere by living a self-denying and hence eternally-orientated life within

finite relationships. Since marriage unites the spiritual and the physical, providing the spiritual and physical continuity of the race, marriage must be the highest and a duty, otherwise the physical and spiritual structure in which individuals make up families and the social whole would disappear. Yet the Judge's outlook is not to be confused with that of one for whom this life is all. The social order exists to sustain the ethical–religious life of individuals and not vice-versa. Immanence remains the sphere of man's unavoidable self-orientation as man extends himself in space and time, and even the Judge can see that this is what gives marriage—'the deepest form of life's revelation' and 'the beautiful mid-point of life and existence'—a natural egocentricity from which it cannot be freed by the most unselfish love. For, as Climacus points out in *Philosophical Fragments,* 'self-love' is 'the ground of all love', the basic starting-point of all human relationships before they are transformed into something higher.[27]

Judge Wilhelm is therefore not inconsistent when he says that 'from a religious standpoint, it does not matter at all' whether one marries or not and that not marrying is 'higher' than marrying. His revision of his earlier statement is a necessary consequence of a transcendentalist standpoint that has the transcendent kingdom of God as its ultimate goal. This is seen clearly in Climacus' discussion in *Postscript* of 'Religion A' where the individual is shown as directing his attention more profoundly towards the transcendent. Here 'self-annihilation is the essential form of the God-relationship'. The individual concentrates on his God-relationship with greater detachment from human relationships though paradoxically he is able to participate in them more effectively because he can aim to do so on a totally non-self-regarding basis.[28]

If death is a transition to a transcendent eternal life and something that one can begin upon in this life through self-denial and renunciation, there can be total death to the realm of immanence, total renunciation of it as a realm. From this standpoint marriage and the state no longer appear as the physical and spiritual structure of individual ethical–religious life but as the centre of egoism and 'human egoism in its great proportions and dimensions'.[29] Kierkegaard therefore makes a very clear distinction between the immanentalist outlook in which the individual is not immortal—has no prospect or potentiality for immortality—and consoles himself with offspring as a substitute, and the transcendentalist in which the individual has the possibility of actual immortality and may renounce marriage and all that this implies. The story of Abraham and Isaac is discussed from the Jewish and then a Christian standpoint: In Judaism Abraham is the father of faith because he is ready to destroy his only God-given possibility of immortality in his descendants—he is ready to die to immanence even though immanence is his whole life. Yet God's demand is only a test of his faith and love of God; he receives Isaac back with even greater blessings in and for this life. He does not however, get 'a claim on eternity'—'there is no hope of eternity' for him. In 'the Christian view' though, Isaac would actually be sacrificed—but then God's blessing would be actual 'eternity'. Thus Kierkegaard points out the difference between absolute sacrifices made in the context of immanentalism or semi-immanentalism and those made in a transcendentalist context.[30]

As regards death as self-denial in this life, Kierkegaard shows through Climacus in *Postscript* that the individual should have 'an absolute relationship

to the absolute' and a 'relative' one to what is 'relative', though it cannot be decided in advance what the 'absolute relationship' to the transcendent God will require. It may require renunciation of marriage and the really good things of this world, it may require that the individual does not renounce them even if he would like to do so. If he responds to Christianity as 'Religiousness B' he will be required to renounce the attempt to arrive at certain knowledge of God, in order to live by faith, and he may be required to give up his physical life in martyrdom. Essential however to all cases of absolute death to immanence, to all the various possible forms of renunciation, is the requirement that the individual die to whatever is the absolute of his life—to whatever form of human happiness or satisfaction that is tending or may tend to take the place of God as absolute. Even the desire for eternal happiness or fear of eternal punishment must not become an absolute—a reward disease—wrongly influencing the individual's motives in his life of humble obedience to God.[31]

If Kierkegaard stresses the 'nonsocial' aspect of a really Christianised human society, it is because he is worried that the Danish State Church has neglected Christian teaching about absolute renunciation of the life of immanence. If the Christian ethical–religious society is no different to a well-run pagan one, transcendence has been reduced to immanence: Abstract 'humanity and numerical equality between man and man', the immanentalist principle of the greatest happiness of the greatest number in this world, has replaced the individual's relationship to the transcendent God in eternity and reassured him 'in being a clever egoist'.[32]

It is thus hardly surprising that Kierkegaard sets out to raise standards by showing how difficult Christianity is. If the individual refuses to acknowledge 'what it means to be in the strictest sense a Christian', that it is 'to die' for 'the whole of one's life' in order 'to see God', then he must be subjected to shock tactics consisting of an assault on the values of immanence and an emphasis on the transcendent nature of Christian ideality. Kierkegaard therefore does this by, for example, letting Climacus ask rather awkward questions about what it means 'to die', 'to be immortal', 'to thank God for the good' and 'to get married'. Or, more terrifyingly in his discourse on 'The Resurrection of the Dead', he announces to those who would like proof of immortality without too much personal involvement: 'Nothing is more certain than immortality . . . fear it'—it is 'the Judgement'.[33]

Kierkegaard therefore firmly espouses the transcendentalism of the Christian tradition. If he makes people face up to the physical fact of death by displaying the graveyard in all its nakedness, he also reveals the grave as the symbol of, and way to, a higher existence that gives significance to every single life and therefore to the life of mankind as a whole. Naturally Kierkegaard does not attempt to provide a geography or metaphysic of the transcendent heavenly kingdom. As a possible destiny for each individual, an actual state of being opposite the realm of immanence, he and his pseudonyms indicate and underline its factual existence. For example, he speaks of the individual going 'into eternity', 'another world'—'heaven' where God 'waits'.[34] When however he speaks of Christian eternal life and immortality—life with God beginning in this world and continuing into the next, he stresses the quality of life rather than the state of existence because he does not wish the individual to think that 'immortality' is merely a continuation

of the life of immanence even though it implies that the individual continues in the transcendent sphere after death. Kierkegaard therefore does not contradict himself when he says that 'sociality and all fellowship is unthinkable' in 'the life of eternity' and then speaks of meeting others there. In the former instance he is speaking of the eternal— eternity—in its aspect of quality of life, and in the latter about the afterlife as such.[35]

If one asks whether Kierkegaard describes the afterlife as immortality or resurrection, the answer seems to be that he does not view immortality and resurrection as two conflicting possibilities, though unlike immortality, resurrection cannot be applied to eternal life in its aspect of quality of life now. Since the individual's nearest approach to God is in terms of discovering only more ethical-religious ideality and consequently only more 'untruth' or sin in himself, salvation must ultimately depend on faith in God's grace and not on works. Hence resurrection is linked to the individual's future at death—to the fact of his final salvation through the agency of God in Christ.[36]

Regarding Kierkegaard's thought about eternal damnation, he certainly views it as a definite possibility for the individual. Although from the Christian point of view death is but 'a little event within that which is all, an eternal life', and can be described as a 'liberating metamorphosis', the 'last struggle between day and night' and a day to be celebrated since 'by death the soul is united with the beloved', God, it ought to be an object of horror to the one who is 'already in a state of dissolution' because he has 'lived in despair'. For such a one:

> everything is lost for you, eternity does not acknowledge you, it never knew you—or, even more terrible, it knows you as you are known, it binds you fast to yourself in despair.[37]

Even the one personally concerned with Christianity must not expect to escape judgement however, and one catches the sense of urgency as Kierkegaard describes his own case as an author:

> There is something very specific I have to say, and I have it so much on my conscience that I feel as if I dare not die without having said it. For in the instant I die and leave the world, I will—so I understand it—I will in the same second—so fearfully fast it goes!—still in the same second I will be infinitely far from here, at another place, where still in the same second—fearful speed!—the question will be put to me: Have you carried out the errand, have you said what you had to, *very decidedly?* And if I have not done so, what then![38]

Although Kierkegaard accepts the possibility of individual damnation and suggests that people need the re-introduction of teaching about 'hell-punishment' to awake them from their complacency, there is conflict in his writings between the idea of probation for eternal life and the notion of unlimited grace with its risk that the minimum level of 'social justice' will count as religion. He resolves this conflict by pointing out that Christianity is not a matter of fulfilling identical conditions. While it is true that the individual is required to deny himself and die to the world, he has to work out his own particular Christian commitment in the light of what he feels is God's demand upon him, God

adapting everything to the individual's capacities and possibilities. In this way leaving the matter of the individual's task as an individual affair, Kierkegaard also of course answers the problem of those who honestly find they cannot believe in God, let alone aim at the heights of self-denial, and in spite of himself, he feels that all are in fact ultimately saved.[39]

Thus, although one may criticise Kierkegaard's description of Hegelian philosophy, of the Greek world and Judaism as being one-sided and containing inaccuracies, it is undeniable that his own view of death is transcendentalist, and it can also be argued that he correctly represents the weaknesses of immanentalism through the standpoints to which he gives their names. Not only death, but the fact of pain and suffering—death's encroachment on life— already raises the question of whether man has ever been correct to struggle for lasting pleasure and happiness in the immanentalist Utopia. For if this life is all, then in the light of the fact of death existence is ultimately meaningless and 'despair', a thought that has surely prompted a great deal, if not all, of the 20th century evasion of death. As Kierkegaard points out though, it is no use evading the fact of mortality because it is a truth about existence that cannot be ignored. As soon as the individual becomes conscious of death as an inevitable future prospect, he will need an explanation of its meaning in relation to life 'in order to live in that light'.[40] Whether we like it or not, and whether we admit it or not, how death is regarded (or disregarded) is intimately bound up with the individual's entire view of life.

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NOTES

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1. See, for example, Søren Kierkegaard, 'The Resurrection of the Dead is at hand', *Christian Discourses,* SV X, pp. 203–13.
2. Søren Kierkegaard, 'At a Graveside', *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions,* SV V, pp. 226–53. See also, 'The Work of Love in Remembering One Dead', *Works of Love,* SV IX, pp. 327–39.
3. Søren Kierkegaard, 'Crop Rotation', 'Diapsalmata', *Either/Or,* SV I, pp. 261, 10.
4. 'Diapsalmata', *Either/Or,* SV I, p. 4.
5. 'Diapsalmata', 'The Balance between the Æsthetic and the Ethical', *Either/Or,* SV I,

p. 15, II, p. 183, I, p. 13–14. Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, SV III, pp. 191–209.

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36. See Gregor Malantschuk, *Kierkegaard's Way to the Truth* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963, and Montreal: Inter Editions, 1987), chap. V, pp. 79–86.
37. *The Sickness unto Death*, SV XI, p. 122, *The Concept of Irony*, SV XIII, pp. 158, 169, 160, Søren Kierkegaard, 'The Expectation of Faith', *Eighteen Edifying Discourses*, SV III, p. 34, *Kierkegaard's Journals*, Pap. XI, 1 A 157, 'The Balance between the

Æsthetic and the Ethical', *Either/Or*, SV II, p. 153, *The Sickness unto Death*, SV XI, p. 141.

38. *Kierkegaard's Journals*, Pap. X, 6 B 232, p. 371.
39. *Kierkegaard's Journals*, Pap. XI, 1 A 126, XI, 1 A 325, XI, 1 A 260, XI, 1 296, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, SV VII, pp. 326, 332, 373–4, *Kierkegaard's Journals*, Pap. XI, 1 A 384, XI, 2 A 244, XI, 3 B 57.
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