

SOLITARY SOULS AND INFINITE HELP: KIERKEGAARD AND WITTGENSTEIN

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In a collection of his reflections on 'culture and value' (assembled under that title), Wittgenstein says:

The Christian religion is only for the man who needs infinite help, solely, that is, for the man who experiences infinite torment . . . The Christian faith—as I see it—is a man's refuge in this *ultimate* torment.¹

What this ultimate torment consists in many seem to have a distinctively Kierkegaardian flavour. It has to do with the 'single' individual and its sense of abandonment.

The whole planet can suffer no greater torment than a *single* soul . . .

No greater torment can be experienced than One human being can experience. For if a man feels lost, that is the ultimate torment.²

This might tempt us to add the above remarks to others in *Culture and Value*, and elsewhere, which confirm the influence of Kierkegaard on Wittgenstein's thoughts on religion.³ But there are difficulties in calling these, and some other connected remarks, Kierkegaardian in the sense that one might reasonably expect to find parallel expressions of closely similar views in Kierkegaard's own writings.

These stem from the fact that Wittgenstein's remarks express the point of view of a person who understands a problem to which Christian faith is a (or even the) solution, while Kierkegaard's point of view is of one who (at least writes as if he) is totally committed to the solution. There is indeed a crucial disparity regarding what can or is to be said about Christianity as between a person who sees the need it satisfies and one who 'uses' it to satisfy that need (the quotes here already signal that disparity). I shall return to this below. But there is also a crucial disparity regarding what is or can be said about Christianity as between a person who does not and one who does see the need which it satisfies, whether or not in the latter case it is used to satisfy that need. Kierkegaard wrote that the 'suffering, sins, and fearful introversion' that made his need for Christianity so great, also made him 'unintelligible' to others.⁴ The fact that these others numbered many who called

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themselves Christians testified, in Kierkegaard's mind, to the spiritlessness of institutionalised Christendom.

Wittgenstein, on the other hand, though not it seems a professed Christian, clearly appreciated the kinds of need to which Christian faith might minister. And this provides us with the basis for a distinction I wish to make between an 'outside' point of view from which Christian faith is understood as a solution to a problem that is not in itself inherently religious, and the 'inside', or believer's, point of view, from which Christian faith—it might seem paradoxically—is precisely not intelligible as a solution to that, but only to a religious problem. We can begin to chart the boundary between these two points of view by indicating four ways in which Wittgenstein's remarks implicitly *depart* from the views expressed by Kierkegaard and those of his pseudonyms who represent the (supposedly authentic) Christian viewpoint.

(1) Take Wittgenstein's idea of Christian belief as a 'refuge' (*Zuflucht*). This sounds as if it were some kind of shelter in an emergency. But Kierkegaard writes of Christianity less as a refuge than as a special vantage-point. True, he often describes faith in the traditional way as an absolute certainty; but if this is a refuge it is also a 'fortification' in which 'the good man . . . is *stronger* than the whole world' (PH, 98, emphasis added). And although faith does indeed protect—the advantage of Christian over natural love, we are told, is that the former is 'eternally secure against every change',⁵ and Christian faith in general screens one from the vicissitudes of nature and 'fate'⁶—Kierkegaard wants to say that faith confers a unique advantage which means that the emergency that leads one to take refuge in it is not one that a person ought to seek to avoid. On the contrary, in order to secure the special advantages of the Christian life this kind of emergency should be cultivated. Whatever it is, it offers people their only insight into the true nature of human fulfilment, and thus their only chance of actually being fulfilled. 'The possibility of [despair]', says the strictly religious Anti-Climacus, 'is man's advantage over the beast . . . an advantage which characterizes him quite otherwise than the upright posture, for it bespeaks the infinite erectness or loftiness of his being spirit . . . to be aware of [it] is the Christian's advantage over natural man; to be cured of [it] is the Christian's blessedness.'⁷ Far from authentic Christian faith's being a refuge for the despairing soul, from Anti-Climacus's own vantage-point the sanctuary which despairing souls seek is worldliness and the respect of their fellows (SUD, 91).

(2) Wittgenstein connects the idea of Christian faith with that of sickness. He writes:

People are religious to the extent that they believe themselves to be not so much *imperfect*, as *ill*. . . . Any man who is half-way decent will think himself extremely imperfect, but a religious man thinks himself *wretched*.⁸

But then so does Kierkegaard. The original words replaced by 'despair' and 'it' in the immediately preceding quotation are 'this sickness'. Thus Christianity is a cure for a sickness, the recognition of which, and therefore also its very possibility, are prerequisite for that fulfilment unique to human beings in which the cure consists.

Now Wittgenstein's remark could be interpreted in various ways. It might be

read as saying that to be religious amounts in itself to being ill; i.e. having religious beliefs, or specifically Christian ones, is either a symptom of sickness or (if this is different) itself a manifestation of sickness. More likely, however, Wittgenstein means that the kind of help religion provides is only suitable for people who diagnose their own condition as sickly and who then turn to or apply Christian faith as a cure. This, of course, might simply mean that what makes a person religious is a sickly surrender to wishful thinking, but the interesting reading would be that faith requires belief in a constitutional incapacity to attain fulfilment without the special kind of help that Christian faith provides. We can thus distinguish between (i) a person's being sick just because his faith is itself a form of illness, or (ii) a person's having faith just because he is pathologically weak-kneed or irrational, and (iii) a person's having faith in so far as he believes the incapacity he suffers from is one for which, unlike other kinds of unfulfilment, he believes he needs 'infinite' help if it is to be remedied.

But none of these captures Kierkegaard's meaning. What we have in Kierkegaard, or more exactly in *Anti-Climacus*, is a concept of illness, or sickness, which already assumes the framework of the cure. In (iii) one *first* acquires the belief in one's sickness, *then* reaches out to religion as the framework in which health can be recovered. In *Anti-Climacus*, however, there is no room for a *non*-religious state of deprivation (a sickness of the soul, let us call it) to remedy which one then adopts religion in order to exploit the resources uniquely available there. The sickness which is the 'sickness unto death' is not one which has religion as such as its cure, it is a sickness which has *faith* as its cure, a sickness all of whose symptoms are to be described as forms of *sin*, that is in terms which already presuppose the religious framework. The despair which is the sickness Kierkegaard is concerned with is therefore not a condition in which 'natural man', however solitary and abandoned, can find himself. It is the condition in which someone, who more or less consciously acknowledges his divine origin, fails in practice or refuses outright to conform to the requirements of that origin. The sickness of despair, for Kierkegaard, is resistance to the challenges of the promise of everlasting life. It is the attempt to reject that challenge, in effect an attempt to die. But it is a useless attempt (SUD, 18), because the project of becoming merely finite is countermanded by the more basic project of standing alone before God (SUD, 77 and *passim* thereafter). The sickness of despair is a *self*-inflicted sickness, defined against the background of a more basic project which Kierkegaard's pseudonym regards as constitutional to humankind. If Christian faith were to be construed as some kind of response appropriate only to people who feel 'ill' or 'wretched', this on Kierkegaard's view can be coherently expressed only by saying that the state of illness or misery is one which people must ascribe to themselves in view of a prior acceptance of the Christian way of defining humankind, that is, as sinning, in need of redemption, and so on. Of course, an abandoned, solitary person might *choose* that self-definition in order to escape a certain kind of natural deprivation (particularly the kind one would be inclined in purely naturalistic terms to classify as a sickness of the soul), but at least for *Anti-Climacus* this choice can only occur to a person who, by adopting the self-definition, knows he is dealing with the 'sickness unto death'. And the sickness unto death is not a natural deprivation. On the contrary, it is a vain attempt to accept that natural deprivation is the only kind of deprivation there is.

(3) Wittgenstein's remarks are at least compatible, however, with the deprivation's being of some normal, let us say *naturally* remediable kind. The refuge of religion would then be a resort for those unfortunates who are deprived in practice, but not necessarily (i.e. *qua* human beings) in principle, of the means of satisfying these normal, natural demands of human fulfilment. Religion is a resort where what is possible in principle is not so in practice. But once natural remedies are applied and favourable conditions restored, the refugees can return once more to their homeland of normal daily rounds and humanly fulfilling occupations. Religion is presented here as a surrogate satisfaction of essentially natural needs, that is, of needs whose ultimate satisfaction consists in providing the human species with what is already naturally congenial to it.

On the other hand, Wittgenstein might have meant something else. He might have meant that the problem to which religion is a solution is one that first emerges in the ultimate torment. This could be understood trivially, as merely saying that so long as you avoid the torment of solitary abandonment you escape the problem, but the best solution is to avoid solitary abandonment. This would not be Kierkegaard's view, and perhaps it is not the one we should attribute to Wittgenstein either. His remarks may have been intended to convey the view that such abandonment gives the solitary individual privileged access to a problem which in the normal daily round goes unnoticed; and one might even surmise whether Wittgenstein approached the characteristic Kierkegaard position that the normal daily round is in some sense exploited, more or less consciously, to keep the problem at a distance.

If the problem to which Christian faith is a solution is indeed one which emerges first in the emergency of that ultimate torment, then this makes it harder to dismiss the beliefs forming the solution as merely ideological. It is quite easy, of course, to see a religious solution to human misery as being chiefly significant for its ability to ameliorate the natural needs of those who endure undue oppression and loneliness in this life, by enabling them not only to look forward to restitution or better in a life to come, but to lend some ultimately positive cosmic significance to their wretched condition in the present. But it is easy only if it is assumed that the problem would vanish were the oppression and loneliness to be remedied in *this* life. If the problem raised is some new *form* of misery, and it is not a problem to which any possible remedies in this life can be applied, then it is plausible to conceive of Christian faith as in some sense an appropriate, or at least not a specious remedy.

But thinking of it in this way is to go beyond Kierkegaard. Nowhere outside the Journals will one find in Kierkegaard's writings the notion that Christian faith is a solution to a problem. On the contrary, the Christian framework defines the problems and whatever options are open to the problem-solver. There is no room in the Kierkegaardian universe for a problem of solitariness or forsakenness that the problem-solver might decide to leave unsolved rather than accept the solution which Christianity offers. If a person is confronted with the choice of believing in Christ or rejecting Christianity, the latter alternative is specified within the Christian framework as sin, indeed as the 'highest intensification' of sin (SUD, 131). There is no position from which the framework itself presents itself as a genuine option, that is, as an alternative the rejection of which might be accorded the status of an authentically human

choice. As for conceiving Christianity as a remedy that mankind has hit upon or devised to minister to its utmost torment, Kierkegaard tries hard to scotch that idea by insisting that no human intellect could ever have contrived the paradox of the Incarnation (SUD, 118; cf. PF, 138).

(4) The very idea of refuge or escape suggests that the remedy Wittgenstein speaks of should afford protection from the suffering he mentions. But although I think it is true that Kierkegaard means to say that there is some aspect of the suffering that the remedy is supposed to banish, according to him religious belief is not a protection against normal suffering, against misfortune or those kinds of unwanted eventuality that defeat our hopes and expectations and which lie outside our control. Rather it is a way of coming to terms with suffering, of seeing normal suffering not as an expungeable blot on the human landscape, or even as an unexpungeable blot, but as an integral part of life itself.⁹ In this way it is not a flight from suffering so much as a preparation, or at least a preparedness, for it (CUP, 386 ff. and 390). It would be proper in this context to refer to it as a way of 'accommodating' suffering. Admittedly, there is a connection between 'normal' suffering and Kierkegaardian despair. Too much normal suffering may cause a person to despair of authentic selfhood before God, just as too little may enable a person to live through life without realising that his attitude to good and bad fortune is due at bottom to fear of the challenge of such an ideal of selfhood. But this again does not mean that Kierkegaardian despair has normal despair as its 'intentional' object. Nor does it mean, therefore, that the solution to despair (for Kierkegaard, or Anti-Climacus, faith) is also a means of circumventing or mitigating normal suffering. Indeed, not only does the solution to despair not mitigate normal suffering, it introduces a further dimension of suffering: the notion of guilt that can deprive one of the consolation even after the 'solution' of faith has been applied. The thought that one may not deserve the consolation, say Climacus, 'reduces [what is] absolutely the only consolation [to its] minimum' (CUP, 497).

What these four points of divergence mark is a difference of viewpoint as between that on a problem (an ultimate torment) and that on the solution (the adoption of the Christian framework). Wittgenstein's remarks are those of one who understands that there can be an emergency which only Christian faith can deal with. Kierkegaard writes as a committed religious author for whom that help has arrived. Let us call these the 'outside' and the 'inside' viewpoint.

The outside viewpoint is humanistic, or perhaps one might call it anthropological. Its topic is human response and reaction and its perspective relates these to common experience, human needs, and human problems. The inside view denies itself that perspective because its framework relates those experiences, needs and problems to solutions that redefine them. You might think that all a person calling on infinite help is looking for is some exotically new form of solution to an already identified problem, all 'finite' remedies for which have proved fruitless. This makes the natural man's situation analogous to that of the driver who resigns himself to the fact that no normal procedures (tinkering with the engine, filling the tank, reinflating the tyres) will get the car moving again and in jest or desperation admits that only magic or a miracle will do the job. Similarly, if anything is to help the natural man in his 'ultimate torment', it has to be 'infinite' help.

It might be right to say his need (Wittgenstein's *Not* also translates as 'need') is of the kind that only infinite help will satisfy, and that only those placed in such a predicament resort to such measures. But this is how it looks only from the outside point of view. It doesn't admit the perspective from which the person in need can say, 'There *is* a form of infinite help and now I need it!', as the would-be driver might though most likely would not say, in all seriousness, 'We can still hope for a miracle!'. Infinite help is not grasped at as one more resort, only this time the last, and offered from a 'beyond'. One can only grasp at it by reconceiving oneself as a being with the enlarged range of possibilities necessary for receiving help from such a source. Natural man must first reconceive himself as more than natural. By the same token, it might be said, he must reconceive himself as sick or handicapped; not 'naturally' handicapped in the sense that he might have been complete *qua* natural, but handicapped precisely *qua* natural, i.e. handicapped even if naturally whole. And the point of calling the help he now avails himself of 'infinite' is that the distance between his present repertoire of abilities and his ideal of fulfilment, as now conceived, is not one he can close either by his own effort or by the efforts of others. For a person to believe that religion will help him he must first take the step of redefining himself as congenitally handicapped as a 'mere' human being but as not thereby condemned to (in Wittgenstein's words) imperfection and wretchedness.

Careful account must be kept of the disparity between the problem and solution as seen from the outside, and the problem and solution as seen from the inside. From the outside point of view religion is the way out of a nihilistic alternative. If one grants Kierkegaard's Climacian conception of the incoherence or fundamental unintelligibility of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, Christian faith is a desperate way out, and therefore not desirable in general or in itself, although it will be desired—though not necessarily accepted—by someone with the appropriate need, and one may understand why a person does accept it. But it is not possible for such a person to construe his faith as an escape from a nihilistic alternative, since his adopted framework leaves no room for that alternative. From the point of view of the solution the notion of being rescued from that option is redefined as that of being rescued, or of rescuing oneself, from the sin of renunciation of one's divine origin. Faith is now the avoidance of untruth, not of nihilism, and nihilism itself is a sin. This means that from the point of view of the solution, faith is no longer the solution to the problem that leads one to faith. Nor therefore can it any longer be considered a desperate solution to that problem, as one that is not desirable in general or in itself but only for people in a pitiable condition. From the point of view of the solution, what the pitiable condition allows one to do is reap the rewards of one's properly human advantage.

Our distinction between an outside and an inside viewpoint corresponds significantly with that between 'left' and 'right' as applied originally in the interpretation of Hegelian theology and Christology. Those on the left, conspicuously Feuerbach, saw Christianity as a symbolic representation of purely human goals of fulfilment; religious concepts were to be explained and justified by reference to basic human psychology, and God and Christ were fashioned in the image of a fulfilment projected onto the *natural* human future. Those on the right saw Christianity and its key concept of the Incarnation, as

betokening the divinity in principle of finite persons and events. In terms of this distinction, talking of the Christian vision as a refuge is decidedly leftist, while talking of it as though it were literally true is rightist. Kierkegaard's authorship is consistently rightist, and this invites the judgment that he is a kind of half-way modernist who, although he rejects the traditional rationalist epistemology, retains in a religious form the traditional rationalist conclusions that the epistemology was once (and more recently again in Hegel) thought to justify.

There are two ways of qualifying this judgment. One, which I have discussed elsewhere,¹⁰ involves prefixing to Kierkegaard's view from the right a leftist account of the function of a religious life-view. This means starting from the left and ending at the right, but leaves the problem of justifying acceptance of a life-view that is inherently irrational. This is indeed a problem for someone who prefixes his rightest view with a leftist one, presumably in the attempt to justify the belief that infinite help is available; for there has to be some justification for preferring that belief to the nihilist alternative, and so long as the Christian religion is presented as a refuge from ultimate torment it will be exposed to the objection that wanting to believe something cannot be the only, or even the decisive, reason for taking it to be true.¹¹ Of course, if the believer refuses to prefix the leftist account, he can simply keep repeating the account of nihilism that his belief commits him to, namely that it is a form of sin. But in that case he has simply given his beliefs the status of axioms and withdrawn them from rational debate.

The other way is to go from right to left; and this is the way Anti-Climacus goes. That is, the rightist view embraces the leftist one and straightforwardly stigmatises nihilism as untruth. This looks an unpromising approach, and perhaps in the end it is. But a brief rehearsal of the Hegelian background to Anti-Climacus's concept of the human spirit may help to show just how far it can or cannot raise the level of the Christian believer's beliefs above the philosophically barren level of axioms.

In the famous Preface to his *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Hegel describes spirit as the only 'actuality' (*Wirkliche*) and as 'self-relating' (*das sich Verhaltende*).¹² Hegel's notion of 'spirit' is that of the Absolute in which subject and substance are one. In other words it is the notion of God, an ideal of completeness or perfection which, according to Hegel's speculative idealism, is the inherent goal of all history. It is the realisation, or actualisation, of a possibility latent in all nature and life, and grasped in an ascendingly adequate fashion in the fields of art, religion, and philosophy, respectively. In relating to itself, spirit is conscious of itself as being 'the only actuality', or if you like, it is actuality conscious of itself, self-conscious actuality. If one focuses on the self, or the individual, that has this latent possibility, the goal of spirit is reached by what might be described as the self's 'returning' to itself.¹³ Hegel's view is, in effect, that individual consciousnesses are programmed in the direction of the goal of absolute spirit. It is important to realise how much of this is retained in Kierkegaard. According to Anti-Climacus, 'every human being is primitively organized as a self' and is 'the psychophysical synthesis planned as spirit'.¹⁴ The difference, of course, is that where for Hegel not just the ideal but also the movement towards its realisation is programmed (in the subject's progressive conceptualisations of its relation to, and ultimately identity with, the whole of reality), for Kierkegaard whether the

subject moves in that direction or not depends on a choice. Kierkegaard talks of the 'choice' of oneself. By this he does not mean, as commentators eager to associate him with modern existentialism often assume, selecting a self-definition from a cafeteria of value-neutral alternatives. As Judge William remarks, 'I do not create myself, I choose myself' (ED, II 219–20). In order to choose oneself in the sense Kierkegaard has in mind, one chooses not some identity other than the one already possessed to be the person one already is in another way, one chooses to accord one's present personality the 'eternal validity' it is already implicitly recognised as having (ED, II, 219). One chooses oneself 'absolutely' (EO, II, 219). The choice, in other words, is to be the self one presently is but in a way that reflects the traditional philosophical goal of completeness or perfection. In one sense '[t]his self did not exist previously, for it came into existence by means of the choice', but in another it *did* exist, 'for it was in fact "himself"' (EO, II, 219).

The crucial point is that for Kierkegaard one does not choose the goal. As with Hegel, there is an ideal of true selfhood, specified in terms of 'spirit', which one renounces in vain. Not because, due to the unfolding of some inner dialectic, renouncing it will inevitably, or in the long run, be transformed into acceptance; but because to try to renounce the ideal is to try not to be the programme one inescapably is. In a way, the attempt to destroy the programme is a 'useless passion', though in a Sartrean light paradoxically so, in that it is an attempt to abandon rather than assume the absolute,¹⁵ and also, for Kierkegaard, despairing of the absolute is not at all passionate, but a frustration or inhibition of the passion with which the individual must choose himself.

But is one inescapably this programme? Is there no possibility of this ideal's being dislodged and replaced by another, e.g. by a Heideggerian passionate freedom towards death, or a cool Stoic resignation? Can't we simply bring these old pre-Copernican conceptions of the cosmic centrality of humankind into the open and set them aside, curing ourselves of Kierkegaardian despair not through faith but by divesting ourselves of an antiquated and hopelessly exaggerated standard of authenticity before which, if we do not have faith, we are all found wanting?

Whatever the answer, the continuing challenge of Kierkegaard's writings is undoubtedly the critical gaze they direct on the questions. Even raising them, according to his position, is preparing to make do with second best. It is a manifestation of despair. We may resist this diagnosis, but it is not one we can so easily dismiss; at least doing so too easily might be taken to confirm it. And there is more psychological, anthropological, or philosophical territory to be uncovered by locating the nihilist option (or any other alternative to the Anti-Climacian ideal of selfhood before God) within a framework which presupposes that it *is* a second best, than by presenting it as the neutral starting-place from which any alternative requires rational justification, or is intelligible only in the sense that one 'understands' how people in a certain kind of extremity need a certain kind of help. From that point of view it seems remiss of Kierkegaard not to have allowed for the nihilist option. We have to resign ourselves to the fact that he was a religious author who therefore adopts the 'inside' view to the exclusion of the 'outside' one, which we then prefix to the authorship and diagnose the author as ensconced in the world of a solution to a

problem he can no longer talk about in the way he would before he adopted the solution.

But there is this other way of construing the fact that the outside view is not represented in Kierkegaard's 'stages'. As Anti-Climacus presents it, the nihilist option arises when the background assumption people grow up with of their unity and continuity with their 'worlds' is brought to consciousness and pressed to the point where it becomes an ethically strenuous and intellectually paradoxical idea. Nihilism arises then not as a refusal to be taken in by irrational presumptions of immortality or whatever, but as a refusal to maintain a goal that in one's 'innocence' or 'immediacy' one virtually took to be attained, but which when considered now in the light of the human situation appears too demanding. The crux is that when the human situation stands revealed for what it is, the goal appears not less but more important. For in its relation to the human situation, unclouded by the distractions of everyday living, the goal is not one that human beings have it in their power to attain. In that sense they are abandoned. And they are solitary in the sense that the choice of accepting 'infinite help' is their own, not one that reason or any other authority can help them to make. The problem, as Climacus says, is one that requires 'thought-passion',

not to want to understand it, but to understand what it means to break with the understanding in this way and with thinking and with immanence, in order to lose the last foothold of immanence—of eternity behind one—and to exist constantly at the extremity of existence on the strength of the absurd (CUP, 505, trans. altered).

When 'all original immanence [is] annihilated and all connection cut off, the individual reduced to the extremity of existence' (CUP, 507, trans. altered), the goal can be attained only if infinite help is extended through the paradox of the Incarnation.

According to this way of construing the exclusion of the outside view from Kierkegaard's writing, the goal that can be consciously retained only at the price of absurdity first appears as a native assumption. The fact that it is native can be said to lend it some kind of authority, though not of course a rational authority. It is simply a deeply embedded presumption, or even presupposition, and not so easily dislodged. It is true, of course, of all belief that believing something is responding to the force of evidence. That is why the notion of believing at will is so 'bizarre'.¹⁶ But evidence is not always in the form of clear-cut data, gathered and processed to form rationally justifiable inferences. Or if it is, then belief can be a response to some less articulate, and less easily revisable authority. Interspersed with Wittgenstein's remarks on the Christian religion we find this:

Believing means submitting to an authority. Having once submitted, you can't then, without rebelling against it, first call it in question and then once again find it acceptable.¹⁷

From the context it is clear that Wittgenstein is thinking of religious faith. The authority might be God, but really you cannot submit to God unless you already accept in some way or other that there is a God you should be submitting to. In

that case the authority is somehow presupposed. Assuming it not to be an external authority, but internal, though perhaps internalised through exposure to a culture which bears its imprint, submitting to it will be aligning oneself to what presents itself as being one's 'true' selfhood. If this is the meaning of Wittgenstein's remark, then it could equally have come from the Kierkegaard of *The Sickness unto Death*. Wittgenstein goes on to say that you cannot call the authority in question and then accept it anew without rebelling against the authority. The first part is exactly Anti-Climacus's notion of sin, the calling in question of one's divinely dimensioned ideal of selfhood. The second part, about accepting it again after doing that, is a departure. Anti-Climacus advocates faith as the only solution to the despair of (what amounts though in many different forms to) putting the authority in question. Unless, of course, the believing Wittgenstein has in mind as occurring *after* the authority has been put in question is based on reasoning, or is simply a 'creative' choice on the part of the person and does not involve appealing for 'infinite' help in choosing the self one already is. Anti-Climacus (and no doubt Kierkegaard too) would certainly agree with that. But then perhaps Wittgenstein is saying that once the authority is questioned, you have rebelled against it for good, whatever you do to try to restore its hold. Or then again, perhaps he means that you can only restore its hold by accepting that your calling it in question is or was indeed a rebellion, a form of Kierkegaardian despair, a refusal to submit to the authority but because of that not a nihilistic denial of the authority as such. In that case we are again within Kierkegaard's Anti-Climacian framework.

What this suggests is that it is wrong to take belief in this context to be 'believing at will', that is, believing something only because you want it to be true. Here it is rather a question of 'daring to believe', *against* the evidence even, if by 'evidence' one means what in isolation from one's native predispositional attitudes and assumptions it would be rational for one to accept, but *in conformity with* those attitudes and assumptions. The vehicle of Anti-Climacus's account of the progression from 'immediacy' to 'self-consciousness' in *The Sickness unto Death* is despair, i.e. unwillingness to be one's true self, an unwillingness that culminates in downright refusal. But if one could imagine a similar progression with *faith* as the vehicle, culminating in faith proper, i.e. the solitary individual standing before God, the progression would be marked by an ascending series of occasions to renew one's faith in increasingly difficult circumstances, both existential and intellectual. To retain one's faith one would have increasingly to dare to believe in the face of those circumstances. It ends at the 'extremity' of existence where all that intellect, or 'dialectic', can do is, as Climacus puts it, 'help find where the absolute object of faith and worship is' (CUP, 438, trans. altered). That might be the place where Wittgenstein's man finds he is a single soul in need of an infinite help. My proposal is that the help be seen as needed in order to retain an ideal when undiverted attention to both the facts and the epistemic possibilities of human life show it to be humanly unattainable.

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NOTES

1. 'Die christliche Religion ist nur für den, der unendliche Hilfe braucht, also nur für den, der unendliche Not fühlt... Der christliche Glaube—so meine ich—ist die Zuflucht in dieser *höchsten* Not.' L. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, parallel ed. with English trans. by Peter Winch (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), pp. 46 and 46e.
2. 'Der ganze Erdball kann nicht in grösserer Not sein als *eine* Seele. . . . Grössere Not kann nicht empfunden werden, als von Einem Menschen. Den wenn sich ein Mensch verloren fühlt, so ist das die höchste Not.' *Ibid.* See also *ibid.*, pp. 45 and 45e.
3. See, e.g. *ibid.* pp. 31, 32, 38 and 53.
4. *Søren Kierkegaards Papirer*, 2nd expanded edn by Niels Thulstrup, vols I–XVI (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1968–78) Vol. X² A 459 (1850), p. 326.
5. *Kjerlighedens Gjerninger* (Works of Love), *Samlede Værker*, ed. A.B. Drachmann, J.L. Heiberg and H.O. Lange, Vols 1–20 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1962–64), Vol. 12, p. 34.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
7. *Sygdommen til døden* (The Sickness unto Death), *op. cit.*, Vol. 15, p. 74. My translation (Penguin Classics, pp. 44–45). For the Hong translation see SUD, 15.
8. 'Menschen sind in dem Masse religiös, als sie sich nicht so sehr *unvollkommen*, als *krank* glauben. . . . Jeder halbwegs anständige Mensche glaubt sich höchst unvollkommen, aber der religiöse glaubt sich *elend*.' *Culture and Value*, *op. cit.*, pp. 45 and 45e.
9. See *Sygdommen til døden*, *op. cit.*, p. 84: '[G]ood fortune is not a specification of spirit', (SUD, 25 in the Hong translation). Cf. CUP, 386 ff. According to *Postscript*'s pseudonymous author, Johannes Climacus, the immediate individual sees misfortune and fortune as accidents. If he cannot be rid of misfortune he despairs because he has no way of coming to terms with it. Climacus says that immediacy 'expires' (*udaander*) in misfortune, while in suffering the religious individual 'begins to breathe' (*at aande*) (CUP, 390). The Danish for 'spirit' is *Aand*.
10. See my 'Refuge and Religion', in George L. Stengren, ed., *Faith, Knowledge, and Action* (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzels Forlag, 1984), pp. 43–53.
11. The oddity of the idea of 'believing at will' was first pointed out in the recent literature in Bernard Williams's 'Deciding to Believe', in Williams, *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), See, e.g., p. 149.
12. G.W.F. Hegel. *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. Philosophische Bibliothek Bd. 114, ed. G. Lasson (Leipzig: Verlag der Dürr'schen Buchhandlung, 1907), p. 17. A.V. Miller, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), p. 14, translates '[Das Geistliche ist] das sich Verhaltende und Bestimmte, das Anderssein und Fürsichsein' as '[The spiritual] is that which relates itself to itself and is determinate, it is other-being and being-for-self'. The reflexive form 'relates itself to itself' can mislead and the more straightforward form 'relates to itself', or 'is self-related', is to be preferred. The same applies to Anti-Climacus's definition of the self as a 'relation which relates to itself' (*Sygdommen til døden*, *op. cit.*, p. 73), commonly translated 'relation which relates itself to itself'. Hegel too describes the *self* as self-relating, and indeed, literally translated, the passage would be rendered '[T]he self is the self-relating-to-itself sameness and simplicity' (*op. cit.*, p. 15); but the first 'self' is in fact redundant and due to the reflexive form taken by the German 'beziehende' ('referring').
13. The self is 'das in sich Zurückgekehrte' (*Phänomenologie*, *op. cit.*, p. 15).
14. *Sygdommen til døden*, *op. cit.*, pp. 91 and 100 (SUD, 33 and 43 for the Hong translation).
15. See J.-P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), p. 615.

16. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 149.
17. 'Glauben heisst, sich einer Autorität unterwerfen. Hat man sich ihr unterworfen, so kann man sie nun nicht, ohne sich gegen sie auflehnen, wieder in Frage ziehen und auf's neue glaubwürdig finden'. *Culture and Value, op. cit.*, pp. 45 and 45e.