

ABSTRACT

Living, like the Lily, in the Present:
Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Time

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Each of us experiences two conflicting attitudes towards time. On the one hand, we all, at least to some degree, look ahead towards the future. On the other hand, we sometimes feel like we ought to live in the present, without this concern about the future. Derek Parfit claims that we would be happier if we lacked our focus on the future: we would not be sad when good things were in the past, we could take life's pleasures as they come, and we would have fewer reasons to regret aging and death.

Given his emphasis on the future as a philosophical problem, Kierkegaard seems especially challenged by Parfit's claims. I argue that a response to Parfit's challenges can be found in Kierkegaard's discourses on the lily of the field and the bird of the air. Though not often read philosophically, these discourses also contribute to Kierkegaard's philosophy of time. They can provide readers of Kierkegaard with a response to Parfit's challenges by proffering a way to care for the future while living in the present. To defend this thesis, my first chapter recounts Parfit's challenges and extant responses by readers of Kierkegaard to them. Chapters Two and Three develop Kierkegaard's

metaphysics of time by working through *The Concept of Anxiety* and *Philosophical Fragments*. The former chapter emphasizes Kierkegaard's focus on the eschatological future while showing how Kierkegaard can contribute to contemporary debates within the philosophy of time. The latter considers Kierkegaard's Christology and Trinitarian theology by working through Kierkegaard's understanding of the past event of the incarnation. The fourth and fifth chapters discuss the ethical implications of Kierkegaard's metaphysics of time through readings of *Christian Discourses* and *Works of Love*. Chapter Four contains my account of the attitude towards time Kierkegaard exhorts us to adopt: facing away from the future and towards the work we are called to do in the present. Chapter Five concludes by discussing the implications of this account for the ways we hope for and love our neighbors.

Living, Like the Lily, In the Present: Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Time

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For Karen

CHAPTER ONE

Parfit's Challenges to our Attitudes Towards Time, and Extant Kierkegaardian Responses

1.1 Introduction

In this dissertation I shall lay out Søren Kierkegaard's philosophy of time in both its theoretical and practical dimensions. Often our experiences of time and our attitudes towards time shape our metaphysics of time. We argue, based on our experiences and attitudes, about whether events in time succeed each other or only exist in relation to each other. Kierkegaard also has theoretical views about time rooted in his experience. However, Kierkegaard's philosophy of time gives equal attention to how our understanding of time should inform our attitudes towards time. Transforming our attitudes towards time is one of the central aims of Kierkegaard's discussions of the lily and the bird found throughout his signed authorship. Kierkegaard's philosophy of time is thus ultimately meant to be edifying: to shape both our attitudes towards time as well as certain aspects of the ethical life, like hope, that are temporally oriented.

To examine Kierkegaard's philosophy of time, I will begin by using the work of contemporary philosopher Derek Parfit. Parfit poses some crucial questions for those interested in time. After recounting these questions, I will consider how Kierkegaard might answer them. I shall discuss both Kierkegaard's theoretical discussion of time (in *The Concept of Anxiety*) and his edifying discourses which deal with our attitudes towards time (throughout his signed authorship). In these latter texts Kierkegaard argues that having an appropriate concern for the future enables living in the present. This

understanding of our attitudes towards time can provide a Kierkegaardian response to Parfit's challenges as well as directing our attitudes towards time more broadly construed.

In this chapter I shall first use Parfit to challenge some common understandings of our attitudes toward time. Then I discuss how Parfit's views are especially challenging for Kierkegaard's understanding of time, and recount the ways in which Kierkegaard's readers have responded to those views. I will show that these responses to Parfit are insufficient. This lack demonstrates the need for the reading of Kierkegaard's philosophy of time that I will present in subsequent chapters.

1.2 Parfit's Challenges to our Attitudes Towards Time

We often enjoy anticipating pleasant future events, but are sad when pleasant events are in the past—though we may also enjoy remembering pleasant past events. Many of our daily activities are future-oriented. We make schedules, rely on calendars, and make promises about what we will do in the future. We get jobs so that we will have enough resources for the future. Conversely, we may fearfully anticipate unpleasant future events, but be thankful when those events are over and in the past.¹ Yet our attitudes towards time are shaped in part by where we are in life. An elderly person might enjoy reminiscing about past events rather than planning for the future. Or someone who has been affected by a traumatic event might be focused on this past event rather than on his present or future.

When people focus on the future (or prioritize the past), their attitudes towards time are asymmetrical. These attitudes are asymmetrical in that they view the future (or

¹ C.f. Arthur Prior, 'Thank Goodness That's Over,' *Philosophy* 34 (1959), 12–17.

past) as different from the rest of time. The alternative to an asymmetrical attitude towards time is temporal neutrality. Someone who is temporally neutral does not favor the past or the future. Parfit argues that it would be better for us if we were temporally neutral. His argument has two parts. First he diagnoses most of us with a particular kind of asymmetrical attitude towards time: a bias towards the future. Then he argues that temporal neutrality is both psychologically possible and preferable to our bias towards the future.

Parfit uses a thought experiment to diagnose his readers with a bias towards the future. He asks the reader to consider a case that involves having surgery. The surgery will be extremely painful, but afterwards the patient receives a drug that causes him or her to forget that pain as soon as it has been completed. If the patient were to wake up in the hospital not remembering whether the procedure had already occurred, Parfit claims that the patient would prefer that the surgery were in the past rather than the future. Being biased towards the future explains why most people would prefer to have experienced pain in the past rather than experience it—even with the proviso that it will soon be forgotten—in the future. Given most readers' intuitions in response to this case, Parfit concludes that most people are biased towards the future.²

Parfit claims that we ought not be biased towards the future.³ He challenges this bias in two ways. Against those who claim that our attitudes towards time are necessarily asymmetrical, Parfit provides an account of a character, *Timeless*, who lacks the bias towards the future. He argues that such a character is psychologically possible. Against

² Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 165-167.

³ Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 177.

our everyday intuitions about time—and specifically the common view that focusing on the future is good for us—Parfit claims that not all of our experiences of time support having an asymmetrical attitudes towards time. He claims that being temporally neutral, like Timeless, would be superior to being biased towards the future. I will discuss each of these challenges in turn.

Parfit's argument that temporal neutrality is psychologically possible involves examining the way in which our mental states are temporally indexed. Some mental states, like anticipation, are directed towards the future. Parfit notes that we lack analogous mental states directed towards the past. For example, when we remember past pains, we do not actually feel those pains. Parfit claims that most people, "unless their memories are painful ... regard their past suffering with complete indifference."⁴ Some people do experience painful memories, e.g. people who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. With the exception of these cases, people are generally unconcerned about the suffering they have undergone in the past. By contrast, when we anticipate future events, we anticipate the way those events will feel. We feel pleasure while looking forward to pleasant events, and feel pain when looking forward to unpleasant events. This asymmetry within our mental states provides further evidence that we are biased towards the future.⁵ But it also gives us a framework with which to imagine what a temporally neutral character would be like.

Timeless is similar to us in every respect, except that he views past events similarly to the way in which he views future events. Likewise, Timeless finds

⁴ Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 173-174.

⁵ Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 173.

contemplating past pleasures just as enjoyable as anticipating future ones. He is distressed by past pains just as much as he worries about future pains. Even though Timeless is very different from us, he is a coherent character—we could imagine someone who is like him. Even if we cannot anticipate past events (because anticipation is necessarily future-oriented), we can imagine someone who finds past events just as pleasant or unpleasant as future events.⁶ The coherence of Timeless as a character shows that our attitudes towards time are contingent. They could be otherwise. So it is psychologically possible for someone to be temporally neutral like Timeless (even if no such persons actually exist).

Parfit offers two arguments in support of his claim that temporal neutrality is superior to having an asymmetrical attitude towards time. First, if we cared as much about past pains and pleasures as we do about future ones, we could enjoy contemplating past pleasures as much as we enjoy anticipating future ones. Without the bias for the future, we would be able to think about (and thus enjoy) more pleasures. Furthermore, we can afford to be selective when we are thinking about the past in ways that we cannot be selective when we are thinking about events in the future. For example, no bad consequences follow from being indifferent towards the pain I suffered in a past surgery. But bad consequences will follow if I do not think about a future surgery. For example, if I do not think about my future surgery, I might not go to the hospital in order to have that surgery. So if we abandoned our bias towards the future, we would have both access to more pleasures (those in our pasts, which we might enjoy contemplating) without

⁶ Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 174.

suffering more pains (because we would not have to dwell on our past pains).⁷ Second, relinquishing our bias for the future would allow us to adopt a different attitude towards death. If we did not have the bias, we could enjoy contemplating our past as much as we enjoy anticipating the future now. Parfit thinks if we lacked the bias we “would not be greatly troubled by the thought that we shall soon cease to exist, for though we now have nothing to look forward to, we have our whole lives to look backward to.” He concludes that since the bias towards the future is bad for us, we ought not have that attitude towards time.⁸

1.3 Parfit’s Challenges Applied to Kierkegaard’s Views

Parfit’s arguments against asymmetrical attitudes towards time challenge most philosophers. For example, Parfit argues against Socrates’s claim in the *Protagoras* that we imagine future pains less vividly.⁹ We might also think of Socrates’s contention from the *Phaedo* that philosophy is training for death, i.e. training for the future.¹⁰ Other philosophers echo Plato’s approach. For example, Pascal bemoans that our hopes for the future seem to prevent us from actually living in the present.¹¹ More recently, Heidegger describes the human individual as being-towards-death. He writes that that “Death is Dasein’s *ownmost* possibility”—the possibility that separates the individual from “the

⁷ Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 174-5.

⁸ Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 176-77.

⁹ Parfit, 161. C.f. Plato, *Protagoras*, Trans. Stanley Lombardo and Karen Bell, in *Plato: Complete Works*, Ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 356a-e.

¹⁰ Plato, *Phaedo*, Trans. G.M.A. Grube, in *Plato: Complete Works*, Ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 64a.

¹¹ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, Trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (New York: Penguin, 1995), 47.

‘they.’”¹² Thus, our orientation towards our future death is vitally important for Heidegger’s philosophy. Death enables us to stand forth from the mass of humanity and become individuals. Each of these philosophers is significantly challenged by Parfit’s claims that temporal neutrality is possible and superior to focusing on the future.¹³ As I will argue, Kierkegaard is especially challenged by these Parfit’s claims.

Given his emphasis on our asymmetrical attitudes towards time, Kierkegaard is especially vulnerable to Parfit’s criticisms. Since Kierkegaard is not best known for his philosophy of time, this claim might be surprising. Yet, as John McCumber argues, Kierkegaard is one of the first philosophers “to grasp the future as a problem.”¹⁴ Likewise, John Heywood Thomas writes that “It could be argued that Kierkegaard’s idea of time is one of the most decisive notions in his whole authorship, underlying as it does his view of human existence and even his understanding of philosophy itself.”¹⁵ Although Heywood Thomas notes that time is only one Kierkegaardian theme among many, he thinks that Kierkegaard ultimately advocates a Christian understanding of eternity. On this understanding, “our attitude towards [the eternal] is Christian in so far as it shows a particular aspect of temporality, namely *facing the future*.”¹⁶ Here Heywood

¹² Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Collins, 1962), 307.

¹³ Spinoza is rare figure from the history of philosophy who seems to reject our bias towards the future. He claims that the wise man is content in the present because the wise man knows his own necessity. The wise man “never ceases to be, but always possesses true spiritual contentment.” Since the wise man has this contentment now, he—unlike Socrates’s philosopher—need not focus on the future. Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, Trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992), Sch., Pr. 42, V.

¹⁴ John McCumber, *Time and Philosophy: A History of Continental Thought* (Durham: Acumen Publishing, 2001), 94.

¹⁵ John Heywood Thomas, *The Legacy of Kierkegaard* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 197.

¹⁶ Heywood Thomas, 208.

Thomas emphasizes the importance of our attitudes towards time for Kierkegaard's ethics. As we will see, Kierkegaard does indeed think that our attitudes towards time have ethical implications. In this section of the chapter, I will show how Parfit's claims challenge the standard interpretations of Kierkegaard's philosophy of time. According to these interpretations, Kierkegaard claims that our attitudes towards time are necessarily and beneficially asymmetrical. Parfit's claim that temporal neutrality is both psychologically possible and superior to asymmetrical attitudes towards time challenges these accounts.

The standard accounts of Kierkegaard's philosophy of time, like those of McCumber and Heywood Thomas, emphasize Kierkegaard's claim that we are necessarily oriented towards the future. For example, Mark Taylor, in perhaps the first major commentary on Kierkegaard's philosophy of time, argues that the way we experience time depends on the way in which we make decisions. Taylor writes that for Kierkegaard, the present (as the moment of decision in which human freedom is exercised) differentiates the past from the future. Taylor describes the imagination as a talent that people use to shape their decisions. We imagine a future, ideal self, and then strive to become that self.¹⁷ So for Kierkegaard, our attitudes towards time are necessarily asymmetrical because the decisions we make are always about the future—the things we can change—rather than about the present or past, which we cannot.¹⁸ Parfit's claim that it is psychologically possible for someone to be temporally neutral challenges Taylor's reading of Kierkegaard. If we could, like Timeless, abandon our bias

¹⁷ Mark Taylor, *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship: A study of time and the self* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 113-5.

¹⁸ Taylor, *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship*, 125.

towards the future, we would not need to interpret time through the way in which we make decisions. We would still have to make decisions about whether to contemplate past pleasures or anticipate future pleasures, and we would need to decide which pleasures to contemplate. But we would not need to direct our decisions through appealing to our ideal future self. Since Timeless lacks the bias towards the future, he (and those like him) could appeal to some other criterion to guide his decision-making. So Parfit's claim that temporal neutrality is psychologically possible challenges Taylor's claim that for Kierkegaard our experience of time is necessarily oriented towards the future.

Parfit's claim that temporal neutrality is psychologically possible also threatens interpretations of Kierkegaard in which our asymmetrical attitudes towards time play an important role in his understanding of the self. For example, Arne Grøn notes that Kierkegaard understands the phenomena of anxiety to be especially concerned with the future. Grøn writes that "What is reflected in anxiety is the fact that we relate to ourselves in dealing with the time coming to us."¹⁹ So Kierkegaard's concept of anxiety—as discussed in his pseudonymous work of that name, and elsewhere—depends on the necessary role the future plays in the formation of the self.²⁰ For authors like Taylor and Grøn, something essential for Kierkegaard's understanding of the self (e.g. imagination or anxiety) relies on approaching time asymmetrically—as viewing either the past, present, or future as different from the rest of time. By arguing that it is

¹⁹ Arne Grøn, "Time and History," in *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard* (Oxford, Oxford University Press), 2013: 276.

²⁰ John McCumber's interpretation of Kierkegaard's understanding of dread is similar to Grøn's analysis of angst with respect to these points. C.f. McCumber, *Time and Philosophy*, 88-90.

psychologically possible for us to be temporally neutral like Timeless, Parfit challenges these Kierkegaard scholars' claims that human selves necessarily have an asymmetrical attitude towards time.

Given Kierkegaard's emphasis on philosophy that is edifying, Parfit's claim that temporal neutrality is superior to focusing on the future also poses problems for Kierkegaard's philosophy of time. Kierkegaard's edifying discourses are not, strictly speaking, discourses about temporality. However, time is "an indirect or accompanying theme throughout the edifying discourses."²¹ Many of these discourses are meant to direct their reader's attitudes towards the future. For example, Anthony Rudd argues that for Kierkegaard, someone who has the virtue of patience is "oriented to the future, to a continual working at the constantly on-going task of gaining and preserving one's soul."²² Being patient and gaining one's soul requires focusing on the future. So gaining one's soul involves approaching time asymmetrically. On accounts like Rudd's, Kierkegaard seeks to edify his readers by directing their attitudes towards the future. If Parfit is right that we would be better off if we were like Timeless, Kierkegaard's edifying texts would fail to actually edify their readers.

1.4 Earlier Kierkegaardian Responses to Parfit's Challenges

In this section, I will recount the three best Kierkegaardian responses to Parfit's claims that temporal neutrality is psychologically possible and superior to asymmetrical attitudes towards time. The best direct responses to Parfit's philosophy of time from a

²¹ Arne Grøn, "Temporality in Kierkegaard's Edifying Discourses," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2000*, Ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn et al, (Walter de Gruyter: New York, 2000), 192.

²² Anthony Rudd, Kierkegaard on Patience and the Self: The Virtues of a Being in Time," *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 36.3, (2008): 500.

Kierkegaardian perspective are those of Anthony Rudd and Patrick Stokes. Rudd compares Parfit's perspective with that of several of Kierkegaard's aesthetes from *Either/Or*. He argues that Kierkegaard's critical portrayal of the aesthetes extends to other temporally neutral characters, like Parfit's Timeless. Stokes follows Rudd in comparing Timeless to Kierkegaard's aesthetic characters. He supplements Rudd's argument by proposing that *The Concept of Anxiety* provides a positive alternative to the aesthetic characters' temporal neutrality. Though Stokes invokes Parfit in order to better read Kierkegaard, his discussion of Kierkegaard's view of temporality can be construed as directly responding to Parfit's challenges. The best indirect response to Parfit's challenges is that of David Kangas. Kangas defends a Kierkegaardian philosophy of time in which humans ought to affirm the present rather than the future. On his view, we still approach time asymmetrically—but we privilege the present rather than focusing on the future. Though he does not respond to Parfit directly, Kangas's reading of Kierkegaard might also provide responses to Parfit's challenges. After considering Rudd, Stokes, and Kangas's accounts, I will argue that their readings of Kierkegaard do not adequately answer Parfit's challenges.

1.5 Kierkegaard and Our Bias Towards the Future

In *Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical*, Anthony Rudd argues against Parfit's claim that temporal neutrality is superior by comparing Parfit's perspective to that of Kierkegaard's aesthetes. On Rudd's view, Parfit shares with Kierkegaard the view that a person may be more or less of a self. Parfit differs from Kierkegaard, however, by exhorting us “to not become selves, to refrain from developing a personal

identity.”²³ Rudd bases this reading of Parfit on Parfit’s broader views about personal identity rather than on his philosophy of time in particular. Parfit’s denial of personal identity shares with his philosophy of time the view that we should not be especially concerned with our futures. He claims that being less concerned for our own futures will make us more concerned for others.²⁴ Rudd responds by comparing Parfit’s self-less person to Kierkegaard’s aesthetes. Like Parfit’s self-less person, Kierkegaard’s aesthetes lack continuity in their lives and also the capacity to enter into relationships with others. The aesthetes’ inability to form relationships is a result of their lack of continuity: “a short-term self would have little reason to care about either his successors, or any other selves.” Rudd concludes that Parfit’s philosophy results in “an egoistic hedonism of the present moment.” He argues that Kierkegaard correctly diagnoses the lack of coherence in this kind of life as a form of despair.²⁵ Although Rudd’s response to Parfit is not specifically aimed at the latter’s philosophy of time, we can construe this argument as a rejoinder to Parfit’s claim that temporal neutrality would be better for us. If Rudd is right, it would not be better for us to be temporally neutral because temporal neutrality would prevent us from becoming a self and cultivating relationships with others.

Patrick Stokes corroborates Rudd’s argument by comparing Parfit’s character Timeless to Kierkegaard’s aesthetes. On Stokes’s view, Kierkegaard is preoccupied with the problem of our attitudes towards time throughout the pseudonymous authorship and especially in *Either/Or* and *The Concept of Anxiety*. He sees *Either/Or* as exploring

²³ Anthony Rudd, *Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 113.

²⁴ Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 281.

²⁵ Rudd, *Kierkegaard and the Limits of the Ethical*, 114.

problems for our attitudes towards time, and the latter text as providing solutions for those problems. Stokes likens Timeless to three of Kierkegaard's aesthetic characters who also pursue temporal neutrality: Johannes the Seducer, the character "A" (the author of "Rotation of Crops"), and the Unhappiest One. Each of these aesthetic characters imaginatively recollects his experiences. The character A, for example, selectively and poetically remembers his experiences in order to control which of them are significant. Johannes the Seducer focuses on anticipating and remembering his erotic conquests rather than on Cordelia herself, or presumably any of the other women he seduces.²⁶ Johannes and A claim to be living in the present. But by imaginatively recollecting their experiences, they psychologically remove themselves from those experiences. Their imaginative recollection renders them temporally neutral. To understand how this removal works, consider A's example of focusing on the sweat on the face of the unpleasant man lecturing him.²⁷ Focusing on the sweat rather than on the lecture allows A to remove himself from his situation. Even though he is still literally in the situation (still being lectured), he has imaginatively removed himself from the situation by focusing on the lecturer's sweat. By removing himself from the situation, the aesthete psychologically steps out of time, and relinquishes the bias towards the future for temporal neutrality. As Stokes notes, aesthetically "trying to live 'in the moment' is therefore not a submersion in the present to the exclusion of the past and future, but

²⁶ Patrick Stokes, "Fearful Asymmetry: Kierkegaard's Search for the Direction of Time," *Continental Philosophy Review* 43, (2010): 490-494.

²⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Part I*, Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 1:299.

rather a suspension from *all* moments, and therefore an attempt to occupy a moment outside time, an atemporal *nowhen*.”²⁸

Stokes’s discussion of The Unhappiest One provides his strongest indictment of temporal neutrality. The Unhappiest One is a character who is even more temporally alienated than Johannes the Seducer or A. Johannes or A could become present to themselves—their attempts to be temporally neutral could fail. By contrast, the Unhappiest One’s temporal neutrality is complete.²⁹ He approaches time symmetrically, somehow remembering what he should anticipate and anticipating what he should remember. As Kierkegaard’s symposiast writes, “what he is hoping for lies behind him; what he recollects lies ahead of him.”³⁰ The Unhappiest One’s future undermines his past and his past undermines his future. Consequently, he is never present to himself. The Unhappiest One is significant for two reasons. First, he demonstrates the unpleasant consequences that follow from temporal neutrality. As Stokes notes, the Unhappiest One is unhappy precisely because he is not present to himself. Second, the Unhappiest One’s unhappiness is not an accidental feature of his unusual temporal orientation. Kierkegaard’s other aesthetes celebrate and honor the Unhappiest One. They think that he is actually the happiest person, despite—or perhaps on account of—his temporal alienation.³¹ However, the aesthetes’ celebration of temporal neutrality is a consequence

²⁸ Stokes, “Fearful Asymmetry,” 491. Rick Anthony Furtak makes a similar point about the aesthete’s dis-integration. See Rick Anthony Furtak, *Wisdom in Love: Kierkegaard and the Ancient Quest for Emotional Integrity* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2005), 59.

²⁹ Stokes, “Fearful Asymmetry,” 487-489.

³⁰ Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 1:225.

³¹ Stokes, “Fearful Asymmetry,” 494; Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 1:221, 230.

of their own attempts to be temporally neutral. From the perspective of someone who is trying to be temporally neutral—trying to be like the Unhappiest One, or like Parfit’s character Timeless—actually achieving temporal neutrality is something to be celebrated. However, we should only try to be temporally neutral if temporal neutrality is superior to approaching time asymmetrically.

Rudd and Stokes argue that the similarities between Timeless and Kierkegaard’s aesthetes show that it would not be better for us to be temporally neutral. Since the aesthetes pursue temporal neutrality, we might think that Kierkegaard’s aesthetes agree with Parfit that temporal neutrality makes our lives better. But Stokes emphasizes the psychological costs accompanying the aesthete’s form of temporal neutrality.³² The Unhappiest One, as the superlatively aesthetic character, exemplifies these costs. For example, The Unhappiest One is described as being unable to love.³³ For Kierkegaard (pseudonymously in *Either/Or*, and in his own voice in *Works of Love*), loving requires temporal directionality. That is, loving always occurs in the present and is directed towards the future.³⁴ There is no backward-looking analogue to loving someone, just as there is no exact backwards-looking analogue to anticipation. We might remember someone lovingly, but this sort of recollection is distinct from actually loving that person. By adopting temporal neutrality, The Unhappiest One gives up his ability to love. This feature of the Unhappiest One’s life (among others) makes him unhappy. His inability to love also applies to other temporally neutral characters, like Timeless. Such characters

³² Stokes, “Fearful Asymmetry,” 487.

³³ Stokes, “Fearful Asymmetry,” 488; Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 1:226.

³⁴ Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 1:226.

thus pay a price for their temporal neutrality. Losing the ability to love is a high price to pay for the ability to enjoy contemplating pleasant past events just as much as we enjoy future ones.

Aesthetic characters like A recognize this cost and are willing to pay it. In “Rotation of Crops,” A exhorts his readers to avoid friendship and marriage. He is willing to give up these robust forms of relationships with people in exchange for his ability to control those relationships.³⁵ But giving up on love, friendship, and marriage is nevertheless a high price to pay for temporal neutrality. On Stokes’s view, the aesthetes’ unhappiness is a terrible psychological cost of temporal neutrality.³⁶ Thus, Stokes’s reading of *Either/Or* corroborates Rudd’s response to Parfit’s claim that temporal neutrality would be better for us.

Stokes’s treatment of *The Concept of Anxiety* can be construed as a response to Parfit’s claim that temporal neutrality is psychologically possible. On Stokes’s view, Kierkegaard’s claims about our attitudes towards time are normative rather than psychological. For Kierkegaard our attitudes towards time are shaped by how we should view time rather than how we could view time.³⁷ Stokes argues that *The Concept of Anxiety* shows that from certain ethico-religious perspectives, we have a normative reason to reject temporal neutrality. For Kierkegaard’s pseudonym Haufniensis, time must be understood eschatologically—as concerned with last things, and specifically the future day of judgment. Knowledge of this future day of judgment re-orientes our actions

³⁵ Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 1:295-298.

³⁶ Stokes, “Fearful Asymmetry,” 487.

³⁷ Stokes, “Fearful Asymmetry,” 487.

in the present. Since we know that our actions will be judged in the future, we understand our past and present actions differently. As Stokes write, “I cannot be *anxious* about some past event, except insofar as I see it as having a future-oriented possibility of being repeated; nor can I become anxious about a past misdeed but must instead *repent* of it.”³⁸ We are anxious—in this technical sense—only about outcomes that might change. We cannot change the past, so we cannot be anxious about past events. Following Kierkegaard in understanding time as leading up towards a future day of judgment obligates us to preserve the distinction between past, present, and future. So the eschatological nature of time requires us to have asymmetrical attitudes towards time. Stokes concludes that understanding time eschatologically “licenses the asymmetrical attitudes towards time that Parfit declared to be without warrant.”³⁹ At least those who share Haufniensis’s ethico-religious framework are obligated to approach time asymmetrically.

Rudd’s and Stokes’s responses to Parfit’s challenges each face significant problems. First, Stokes responds to Parfit’s claim that temporal neutrality is psychologically possible with a moral argument rather than a psychological argument. Though Stokes is right to emphasize Kierkegaard’s normative arguments about our attitudes towards time, his response to this claim should not satisfy either Parfitians or Kierkegaardians. Parfit (or his readers) could demand a psychological rather than a normative response to his claim that temporal neutrality is psychologically possible. The fact that we have some normative reasons to reject temporal neutrality does not show that

³⁸ Stokes, “Fearful Asymmetry,” 504-505.

³⁹ Stokes, “Fearful Asymmetry,” 505.

temporal neutrality is an impossible psychological stance. Stokes could at this point concede that temporal neutrality is possible but undesirable, but as we will see, his argument against the superiority of temporal neutrality also faces significant problems. Readers of Kierkegaard should not be satisfied with Stokes's response to Parfit for a similar reason. Many readers of Kierkegaard (including McCumber, Heywood Thomas, Taylor, and Grøn) have seen Kierkegaard as presenting metaphysical arguments about the nature of time. But Stokes emphasizes throughout his paper that his project is normative rather than metaphysical: "Kierkegaard, of course, is not concerned with the metaphysical question of why time only runs in one direction, but with the normative question of whether we should face time with a specific directional comportment."⁴⁰ By reducing Kierkegaard's response to Parfit to a merely normative one, Stokes gives up on what these readers have found important within Kierkegaard's discussion of time: namely, Kierkegaard's metaphysics. So even if Stokes's argument succeeded, we might wonder if his approach gives up too much of what makes Kierkegaard's philosophy of time distinctive.

Second, Rudd's and Stokes's comparisons between Timeless and Kierkegaard's aesthetes do not refute Parfit's claim that temporal neutrality is superior to asymmetrical attitudes towards time. Rudd's claim is specifically directed against Parfit's account of selfhood, not his philosophy of time as such. Parfit could revise his account of selfhood while retaining his philosophy of time. So, despite its prescience, Rudd's comparison between Parfit and Kierkegaard's aesthetes does not protect Kierkegaard's philosophy of time from Parfit's criticisms. Stokes's comparison between Parfit's character Timeless

⁴⁰ Stokes, "Fearful Asymmetry," 487.

and specific Kierkegaardian aesthetes is more promising. Stokes has shown that Kierkegaard's temporally neutral aesthetic characters pay significant costs for their temporal neutrality. Yet identifying the costs of temporal neutrality does not show that it would be better for us to approach time asymmetrically.

We might be willing to pay the costs of adopting temporal neutrality. After all, Kierkegaard's aesthetes seem to enjoy their unhappiness. As their celebration of the Unhappiest One demonstrates, the aesthetes view their sadness as yet another source of poetic recollection, not as a bad consequence of their attitude towards time. Furthermore, the fact that Kierkegaard's aesthetic characters are unhappy does not show that his eschatologically-oriented ethical-religious characters are better off. These characters may be just as unhappy as the aesthetes are. Finally, given *The Concept of Anxiety's* emphasis on anxiety, those who focus on the future might be worse off than those who pursue temporal neutrality. For example, the eschatological focus on the future that Haufniensis advocates involves focusing on the future day of judgment. Parfit (or one of his defenders) might argue that constantly focusing on the future day of judgment would be psychologically bad for us. So Haufniensis's focus on the future also has psychological costs. Stokes has not shown that the costs of temporal neutrality outweigh the costs of focusing on the eschatological future. So his response to Parfit's claim that temporal neutrality is superior does not go far enough.

1.6 Kierkegaard on Living in the Present

Though not directly responding to Parfit like Rudd and Stokes, David Kangas's reading of Kierkegaard's philosophy of time can provide a response to Parfit's challenges. Like Stokes, Kangas claims that in order to understand Kierkegaard's

philosophy of time, we must interpret Kierkegaard's texts (like *The Concept of Anxiety*) that explicitly discuss the philosophy of time in light of Kierkegaard's broader authorship. Instead of reading *The Concept of Anxiety* alongside other texts in which Kierkegaard discusses our attitudes towards time like Stokes, however, Kangas situates Haufniensis's text within his interpretation of the pseudonymous authorship. He interprets the pseudonymous authorship as concerned with beginnings: "Most basically at issue in Kierkegaard's texts, I argue, is a beginning, a coming-into-existence, that falls essentially prior to any beginning that could be represented, posited, or recollected by a subject."⁴¹ Kangas sees Socrates (as discussed by Kierkegaard in *The Concept of Irony*) as recognizing this sort of irretrievable beginning throughout his discussions of irony. Socratic irony is absolutely negative, and cannot be contained or circumscribed, even by Socrates himself.⁴² Kangas interprets this sort of absolute negativity as governing time, at least as humans can understand it: "Phenomena are not ordained toward their becoming conceptually graspable via their ground." Time is therefore not wholly representable or knowable, and our understanding of time should reflect our inability to fully grasp it. Accordingly, Kangas argues that in order to understand temporality (at least enough to adopt the appropriate attitudes towards it) we need to consider specific phenomena "that obey a discontinuous, sudden temporality."⁴³ Examining phenomena like boredom, melancholy, anxiety and despair can help us to clarify the nature of

⁴¹ David Kangas, *Kierkegaard's Instant: On Beginnings* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), x.

⁴² Kangas, *Kierkegaard's Instant*, 25-27.

⁴³ Kangas, *Kierkegaard's Instant*, 31.

temporality. Kangas discusses the anxiety Haufniensis describes as one such phenomena.⁴⁴

On Kangas's reading of *The Concept of Anxiety*, Haufniensis portrays anxiety as directing our attitudes towards time. For Kangas, "anxiety is the mode of disclosure of the self's possibility."⁴⁵ The realm of possibilities ("the possible") is one of the unknowable beginnings that guide Kangas's reading of Kierkegaard. A person is anxious when he or she recognizes possibilities—ways in which he or she could be different in the future—and is attracted to more than one of them. For example, a recovering gambling addict experiences anxiety upon seeing a casino.⁴⁶ Seeing the casino presents the addict with a choice: he can go to the casino, or not. Either outcome will have an effect on his self. So the addict is anxious not only in the sense of facing a stressful situation, but in the technical sense of experiencing the possibility of his self changing. Often the phenomenon of anxiety is bad for people, e.g. in the demonic forms of anxiety that drive people to despair and suicide. However, there is a way to respond to anxiety positively rather than being threatened by it.

Kangas thinks that people can experience anxiety "as saving through faith" by focusing on the present rather than the future. He discusses this attitude towards time in terms of a person's actuality and his or her possibilities. "Actuality" refers to the actual situation a person finds himself or herself in.⁴⁷ By contrast, a person's possibilities are all

⁴⁴ Kangas, *Kierkegaard's Instant*, 6.

⁴⁵ Kangas, *Kierkegaard's Instant*, 177.

⁴⁶ Kangas, *Kierkegaard's Instant*, 178.

⁴⁷ Kangas, *Kierkegaard's Instant*, 191.

of that person's possible situations or possible futures. Haufniensis claims that actuality can weigh heavily or lightly on a person. One's situation may be easy or difficult. But regardless of his situation, the person properly educated through anxiety—the faithful person—will “praise actuality, even when it weighs heavy on him.” He or she will affirm his or her actual situation in all of its finitude rather than focusing on other possible situations. So the faithful person prefers actuality to possibility. As Haufniensis notes, this may seem odd, since many people view possibilities to be lighter and more pleasing than actuality.⁴⁸ But Haufniensis views possibility as terrifying because in the realm of possibilities, all oppositions (e.g. the terrible and the joyful) are equally possible. Since terrible and joyful futures are equally possible, everything is unresolved.⁴⁹ Given this understanding of possibility, we can see why Haufniensis prefers the actual—whether it is pleasant or not—to the possible. The person who has been educated by anxiety affirms the actual through recognizing that his or her possibilities are ultimately unknowable. Recognizing that these possibilities (including all of a person's possible futures) are unknowable frees the faithful person to affirm the actual (his or her actual situation). This recognition frees the faithful person from the anxiety caused by attempting to contemplate or calculate all of the alternative possible futures. So a faithful person is someone who stops trying to calculate what to do in the future and instead affirms the good and bad aspects of her present situation. Someone might object that Kangas's approach to anxiety only provides a strategy for resolving or living with anxiety rather

⁴⁸ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, Trans. Reider Thomte (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 156.

⁴⁹ Kangas, *Kierkegaard's Instant*, 192.

than being saved by anxiety. But this worry about Kangas's view does not, as we will see, affect the way that Kangas might respond to Parfit's challenges.

We can construe Kangas's reading of Kierkegaard's philosophy of time as responding to Parfit's claim that it would be better for us to be temporally neutral like Timeless. Kangas's claim that the saving sort of anxiety involves living in the present entails that temporal neutrality would not be better for us. On Kangas's view, anxiety is unavoidable for any self that is capable of changing. The only positive sort of anxiety involves affirming actuality over and against possibility, and thereby focusing on the present. Kangas would agree with Parfit that bad consequences follow from focusing on the future. As Parfit claims, focusing on the future leads to worry and prevents us from enjoying certain sorts of pleasures. However, Kangas could argue that temporally neutral persons like Timeless are also subject to these bad consequences. Someone who is temporally neutral can enjoy past pleasures as well as future pleasures. However, the temporally neutral person's ability to contemplate past pleasures requires her to choose which past pleasures to contemplate and how to contemplate them. Kangas could argue that having to selectively remember one's past experiences (like the temporally neutral person must) increases the possibilities that the temporally neutral person must face. If this is the case, then the temporally neutral person will face even more anxiety than someone with an asymmetrical attitude towards time. Thus, on Kangas's reading of Kierkegaard, it would not be better for us to be temporally neutral like Timeless. Temporal neutrality gives a person more possibilities at the cost of more anxiety. It does not lead to the saving sort of anxiety, i.e. affirming actuality and one's present situation.

Unfortunately, Kangas's argument for affirming the present is also an inadequate response to Parfit's claim that temporal neutrality is superior to approaching time asymmetrically. Parfit could claim that affirming our actual situation in the present, regardless of whether that present is pleasant or unpleasant, is not always better for us. For example, a person's present situation might actually be awful. It might be better for such a person to be temporally neutral like Timeless, so that she could contemplate pleasant events in her past rather than having to dwell on the unpleasant events in her present. Experiencing more anxiety as a result of contemplating the past might be better than having to affirm one's unpleasant present situation. So Parfit could yield to Kangas that for some people affirming the present is better than temporal neutrality, while still maintaining that for many people—perhaps for most—it would be better to be like Timeless. Thus, Kangas's reading of Kierkegaard's philosophy of time as affirming the present does not provide an adequate response to Parfit's claim that temporal neutrality would be better for us.

1.7 Conclusion

To summarize my arguments so far: Parfit contends that temporal neutrality is psychologically possible, and would be better for us than our usual asymmetrical attitudes towards time. These claims are particularly challenging for Kierkegaard's philosophy of time. Readers of Kierkegaard have directly or indirectly responded to these challenges through defending our focus on the future (Rudd and Stokes), or by instead affirming the present (Kangas). But these responses do not provide a satisfactory Kierkegaardian answer to Parfit's challenges. I will attempt to provide such a response by presenting a new reading of Kierkegaard's philosophy of time in the remainder of this

dissertation. However, I want to acknowledge my interpretive debts to Rudd, Stokes, and Kangas here at the onset. Although their work does not provide a sufficient answer to Parfit's challenges, they may still help lead us to such a response. For example, Stokes's conclusion directs us to other resources within Kierkegaard's corpus. He suggests that there are additional resources for examining Kierkegaard's understanding of time in the edifying discourses, citing Grøn's claim that in the edifying discourses "the problem of time is fundamentally ethically defined."⁵⁰ Kangas agrees: "The edifying writings... address the human condition in terms of this irremissible exposure, this suffering, its inability to posit time."⁵¹ So Stokes and Kangas agree that the signed authorship contains further resources for understanding Kierkegaard's philosophy of time. I will follow their suggestion and turn to the signed authorship in search of a more satisfying response to Parfit's argument for the superiority of temporal neutrality in the third chapter of this dissertation. In the next chapter, I will provide my own reading of *The Concept of Anxiety* in order to respond to Parfit's claim that temporal neutrality is psychologically possible. Parfit's second challenge,

⁵⁰ Stokes, "Fearful Asymmetry," 505; Grøn, "Temporality in Kierkegaard's Edifying Discourses," 198.

⁵¹ Kangas, *Kierkegaard's Instant*, 198.

CHAPTER TWO

The Concept of Anxiety and Our Orientation Towards the Future

In this chapter, I read *The Concept of Anxiety* as contributing to our metaphysical understanding of the nature of time. To that end, I'll first briefly recount (and offer arguments against) two reasons why Kierkegaard is not usually read as contributing to the philosophy of time. Second, I'll survey the contemporary debate between A-theorists and B-theorists about the nature of time. Then I'll show how Kierkegaard offers a unique perspective on this debate. Surprisingly, there is a sense in which Kierkegaard affirms both the A-theory and B-theory. With this framework in hand, I will show that *The Concept of Anxiety* can answer Parfit's claim that temporal neutrality is psychologically possible. I will conclude the chapter by discussing the ways that Kierkegaard's metaphysics of time restricts the psychological attitudes towards time that we may adopt. In the next chapter, I'll discuss the attitudes towards time that Kierkegaard thinks we should adopt.

2.1 Reading Kierkegaard as a Philosopher of Time

Despite the reoccurrence of temporal themes throughout his corpus, Kierkegaard (in general) and *The Concept of Anxiety* (in particular) are not frequently read as contributing to our understanding of time. There are two kinds of reasons for this feature of Kierkegaard's reception. The first kind of reason is external to Kierkegaard's texts. Readers of Kierkegaard have not often considered his writings in light of ongoing debates within the philosophy of time. The second reason is internal to Kierkegaard's texts.

Specific features of Kierkegaard's texts suggest that Kierkegaard should not be read as a metaphysician. In this section, I will argue that these reasons should not prevent us from reading Kierkegaard as contributing to our understanding of the philosophy of time.

Readers of Kierkegaard often present him as proffering responses to particular philosophers of time (e.g. Parfit or McTaggart) rather than contributing to broader concerns, e.g. the ongoing debate between static and dynamic theories of time. For example, in the previous chapter I discussed ways in which Anthony Rudd and Patrick Stokes have offered Kierkegaardian responses to Parfit rather than presenting Kierkegaard's philosophy of time as such. Each of these authors offers a Kierkegaardian perspective on the work of individual philosophers who are engaged with the philosophy of time. By engaging with specific philosophers of time rather than ongoing debates within the philosophy of time, these articles implicitly portray Kierkegaard as irrelevant to these ongoing debates.

Yet the lack of discussion about Kierkegaard as a philosopher of time does not mean that Kierkegaard has nothing to contribute to the philosophy of time. Instead, this lack of discussion is a contingent feature of Kierkegaard's reception. The fact that Kierkegaard is infrequently seen as a philosopher of time should not preclude us from reading Kierkegaard as a philosopher of time now. We can fruitfully compare discussion of Kierkegaard as a philosopher of time to discussions of Kierkegaard as a systematic philosopher. If Kierkegaard is read primarily as responding to Hegel and/or the Danish Hegelians, we would expect him to reject systematic claims. However, if we read Kierkegaard in the broader context of 19th century philosophy, we might find him contributing to broader projects than merely the rejection of Hegel. Michael O'Neill

Burns provides one such reading of Kierkegaard, reading *The Concept of Anxiety* as describing an ontological structure influenced by both Schelling's and Hegel's metaphysics.¹ My own reading of *The Concept of Anxiety* is not as ambitious—I will only present Kierkegaard's philosophy of time, not an interpretation of his metaphysics more broadly construed.

A second kind of reason for not reading Kierkegaard as contributing to our understanding of time arises from within Kierkegaard's texts. Texts like *The Concept of Anxiety* do not appear to be proffering metaphysical arguments about the nature of time. *The Concept of Anxiety* is "a simple psychologically orienting deliberation on the dogmatic issue of hereditary sin."² The form of this deliberation is very different from both those of the speculative metaphysical works of Kierkegaard's day, as well as contemporary arguments within the philosophy of time. Kierkegaard's pseudonym Haufniensis's project is to consider the psychological phenomenon of anxiety with reference to the Christian dogma of hereditary sin.³ So some work will have to be done in order to establish that *The Concept of Anxiety* contains metaphysical claims. Doing that work—and elucidating those arguments—is the central task of this chapter. Before I turn to that task, however, I will address another obstacle to reading *The Concept of Anxiety* as contributing to our metaphysical understanding of time: Haufniensis's claim (in the Introduction to *The Concept of Anxiety*) that his project is not a metaphysical one.

¹ Michael O'Neill Burns, *Kierkegaard and the Matter of Philosophy: A Fractured Dialectic*, London: Rowan and Littlefield, 2015, 35-38.

² Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, xiv.

³ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 14.

Haufniensis's disavowal of metaphysics presents another obstacle to reading *The Concept of Anxiety* as contributing to our understanding of time. Haufniensis argues that metaphysics cannot adequately deal with the concept of sin. Metaphysics, like other sciences, deals with ideal cases. It promotes a mood of uniformity and disinterestedness in those who practice it. But sin can only be addressed by actual individuals rather than ideals. As Haufniensis writes "Sin does not properly belong in any science, but it is the subject of the sermon, in which the single individual speaks as the single individual to the single individual." Rather than disinterestedness, such sermons would prompt earnestness and appropriation in their hearers.⁴ Haufniensis argues that sin cannot be addressed metaphysically. It must instead be addressed by considering actual individuals rather than universals or ideal cases. Accordingly, Haufniensis claims that ethics must resist the temptation to use metaphysical categories.⁵ He proposes to address anxiety using a new science, in which dogmatics (i.e. theology) replaces metaphysics: "the new science begins with dogmatics in the same sense that immanent science begins with metaphysics."⁶ Since Haufniensis employs dogmatics rather than metaphysics, someone might argue that we cannot view Haufniensis's text as offering metaphysical arguments, including metaphysical arguments about the nature of time. I will address this concern about reading *The Concept of Anxiety* as offering metaphysical arguments before proceeding to discuss those arguments.

⁴ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 15-16.

⁵ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 17.

⁶ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 20.

Haufniensis's rejection of the science of metaphysics is not a condemnation of metaphysical inquiry as such. Haufniensis merely rejects metaphysics that focuses on ideality at the expense of actuality. This feature of Haufniensis's rejection of metaphysics is best seen through his discussion of the characteristic moods of metaphysics and the other sciences. One of the problems with metaphysics is the disinterested mood it promotes. By contrast, Haufniensis claims that sermons produce earnestness in the individuals who hear them. Sermons presuppose dogmatics. However, it is possible for other sorts of discourse to promote earnestness in their readers. Haufniensis's project in *The Concept of Anxiety* is a psychological deliberation performed on behalf of dogmatics. As Haufniensis notes, the mood of psychology is antipathetic curiosity, which is different from the dogmatic mood of earnestness.⁷ However, Haufniensis's psychological deliberation is meant to promote earnestness through its contributions to dogmatics. For example, Haufniensis concludes that anxiety, with the help of faith, "can bring up the individuality to rest in providence."⁸ So it is possible that understanding anxiety, a psychological concept, can help people to become more earnest. Other sciences might serve dogmatics in an analogous manner. For example, a philosophical project might consider questions about the nature of reality not out of disinterestedness, but in response to an earnest individual concern. This dissertation is meant to explore metaphysical questions about the nature of time. However, my motivation for exploring these questions is not disinterested speculation. I aim instead to answer questions about our conflicting intuitions concerning our attitudes

⁷ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 15-16.

⁸ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 161.

towards time, as well as presenting a Kierkegaardian response to Parfit's specific challenges. So my project is in part metaphysical (especially in the current chapter), but metaphysics undertaken in order to answer specific ethical questions. It is not the disinterested sort of speculation that Haufniensis condemns. Haufniensis (and perhaps also Kierkegaard) might welcome this sort of metaphysical inquiry, insofar as it remains committed to promoting earnestness while considering these questions. As C. Stephen Evans notes, insofar as Kierkegaard is doing metaphysics, he is not proffering a systematic project but rather directing us to understanding the implications of our commitments.⁹ Thus, Haufniensis's apparent rejection of metaphysics need not prevent us from reading his text in search of metaphysical insights, especially if the context for our search is not merely speculative.

2.2 The A-theory and the B-theory of Time

Kierkegaard can contribute to our understanding of time by offering a unique perspective on the ongoing debate between the A-theorists and B-theorists of time. To explain this perspective, I'll first briefly survey this debate. Then I'll show how Kierkegaard is uniquely suited to contribute to this debate, and provide passages from *The Concept of Anxiety* that support both the A and B theories. In the next section, I'll argue that there is a sense in which Kierkegaard ultimately affirms both the A and B theories of time.

Philosophers of time inherited the language of the A-theory and B-theory of time from the British Hegelian John McTaggart, who coined these terms to capture the ways

⁹ C. Stephen Evans, "Kant and Kierkegaard on the Possibility of Metaphysics," in *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self*, Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006, 47-65, 49.

in which time seems to involve both change and permanence. A-theorists of time view time as dynamic and changing. On their view, times and events have properties like being past, being present, and being future. For example, when I was born I had blonde hair. Now my hair is brown. In the future, my hair will turn grey. When my hair changed from blonde to brown, my bloneness ceased to be present and became past. Since temporal properties like “being past” or “being present” are constantly changing, the A-theory is sometimes characterized as the dynamic theory of time. Some A-theorists believe that only the present exists. Others think that the past and present exist, but deny the existence of the future. And some believe that past, present, and future all exist, but that the present is metaphysically special. By contrast, B-theorists claim that times and events never change properties. Instead, they claim that apparent changes in temporal properties—e.g. the way that the present appears to slip into the future—are only changes in relation. B-theorists explain the appearance of change through relations like “earlier than” and “later than.” A given event’s temporal relations to another event never change. For example, a B-theorist would say that the times when I had blonde hair are earlier than the times in which I have brown hair. Since on this view an event’s temporal properties never change, the B-theory is sometimes characterized as the static theory of time.

McTaggart proposed the A and B theories of Time in order to respond to Hegel’s notoriously problematic view of time. McTaggart flags this debt in “The Unreality of Time” when he acknowledges that his conclusion resembles Hegel’s view (as McTaggart understood it). Both Hegel and McTaggart reject the Kantian distinction between phenomenon and noumenon.¹⁰ I propose that Kierkegaard’s works do contain a

¹⁰ J. Ellis McTaggart, “The Unreality of Time,” *Mind*, New Series, Vol. 17, No. 68, 1908: 457, 462, 474.

philosophy of time. This philosophy of time is well-suited to respond to McTaggart's, since both Kierkegaard and McTaggart are reacting to Hegel. In addition to this historical reason for reading Kierkegaard and McTaggart's philosophies of time alongside one another, there are philosophical similarities between their views. For example, Marcus Pound argues that Kierkegaard anticipates McTaggart's claim that we need a point outside of time in order to objectively measure the succession of time.¹¹ Furthermore, Stokes notes that Kierkegaard and McTaggart agree that time is inherently non-directional.¹² Stokes proceeds to argue that Haufniensis's normative commitments to an eschatological understanding of time license him (and those who share those commitments) to view time directionally and focus on the future.¹³ So on Stokes's view, we need not consider Kierkegaard's metaphysical arguments about time in order to view Kierkegaard as adequately responding to McTaggart's argument against the reality of time. However, we need not limit ourselves to Kierkegaard's normative arguments about the nature of time. We can also consider his metaphysical arguments.

Kierkegaard's pseudonym Haufniensis offers metaphysical arguments about the nature of time in *The Concept of Anxiety's* third chapter. As he states earlier in the text, "Anxiety is a *sympathetic antipathy* and an *antipathetic sympathy*." When someone is anxious, she both fears something while also desiring it.¹⁴ In the first two chapters, Haufniensis considers the origins of anxiety (in hereditary sin) and how that anxiety

¹¹ Marcus Pound, "Having a Good Time with Kierkegaard: McTaggart, Kierkegaard, and the Ethics of Time," *Philosophical Writings*, No. 28 (Spring 2005), 13-22, 17.

¹² Stokes, "Fearful Asymmetry," 502.

¹³ Stokes, "Fearful Asymmetry," 505-506.

¹⁴ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 42.

progressed from its historical originator (the biblical Adam) to individuals today. In the third chapter, he explores anxiety as experienced in each individual's life.¹⁵ In order to discuss the individual's experiences of anxiety, he must discuss time (and other associated metaphysical entities, e.g. eternity) en route to doing so. For example, Haufniensis begins by considering the familiar definition of time as the past, present, and future.¹⁶ By beginning with past, present, and future, Haufniensis provides further evidence that his view of time can be read metaphysically. As Stephen Crites notes, there is "an ontological premise" (i.e. a metaphysical claim) at work in Kierkegaard's discussion of temporality, even if Kierkegaard did not wish to associate his project with systematic metaphysics.¹⁷

In addition to Haufniensis's direct claims about the nature of time, the structure of his argument proffers another reason for approaching his project metaphysically. Kierkegaard contrasts his view of time (as relying on the moment) with that of Plato and the Greeks (who lack the moment).¹⁸ This comparison is only intelligible if Kierkegaard's understanding of time is also metaphysical. If Kierkegaard's understanding of time were only a normative one, it would not make sense to compare it to Plato's clearly metaphysical account of time. So Kierkegaard's account of time must be (at least partially) metaphysical. Reading Kierkegaard as doing metaphysics does not prevent readers like Stokes from approaching *The Concept of Anxiety* as also proffering

¹⁵ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 81.

¹⁶ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 85.

¹⁷ Stephen Crites, *In the Twilight of Christendom: Hegel vs. Kierkegaard on Faith and History*, Chambersburg, PA: American Academy of Religion Studies in Religion, 1972: 66-69.

¹⁸ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 82.

normative arguments. However, we should not allow Kierkegaard's normative arguments to prevent us from reading and assessing his metaphysical claims.

2.3 Kierkegaard, the A-Theory, and the B-theory

Now that we have established that Kierkegaard provides metaphysical arguments about time, we can delve into those arguments in order to determine what sort of theorist of time he is. To do so, we must turn to the third chapter of *The Concept of Anxiety*, in which Kierkegaard's pseudonym Haufniensis focuses on the relationship of the temporal and the eternal.¹⁹ Kierkegaard distinguishes between time, eternity, and temporality, and introduces a new concept, the moment, to explain how time and eternity are connected. Considering these distinctions will help us to determine whether Kierkegaard is an A-theorist or a B-theorist.

Considering Kierkegaard's account of time without also examining his account of eternity might lead us to identify Kierkegaard as straightforwardly holding a dynamic view of time. Kierkegaard notes that time is frequently defined as "an infinite succession" and as "the present, the past, and the future."²⁰ Both definitions can support viewing Kierkegaard as an A-theorist. On the A-theory, events actually have the properties of being past, present, or future. So by defining time in terms of past, present, and future, Kierkegaard seems to be affirming the A-theory. Viewing time as a dynamically-changing succession also supports the A-theory. If events succeed each other through a change in their temporal properties—e.g. an event with the property being present loses that property while acquiring the property being past, those events are

¹⁹ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 85.

²⁰ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 85.

dynamically changing. And the A-theory views events as least changing in respect of temporal properties. Kierkegaard's account of time retains these dynamic, A-theoretic features even after he complicates his account by discussing time's relation to eternity. The defining feature of time is that it "passes by."²¹ In fact, the passage of time is what prompts Kierkegaard to supplement his account of time with an account of eternity.

While Haufniensis initially describes time as dynamically changing, his view of time's dependence on eternity complicates viewing him as holding a simple A-theoretical account of time. Haufniensis claims that the distinction between past, present, and future cannot be found within time by itself. We cannot distinguish these tenses of time because we have no way to distinguish the present from the past and the future. Haufniensis writes that "precisely because every moment, as well as the sum of the moments, is a process (a passing by), no moment is a present, and accordingly there is in time neither present, nor past, nor future."²² Stokes takes this facet of Haufniensis's argument as anticipating McTaggart's claim that the A-series of time is unreal.²³ However, as we will see, Haufniensis thinks that we need to consider time in light of eternity. Evaluating Haufniensis as holding an A-theory or B-theory of time will have to wait until we have examined the rest of Haufniensis's view of time.

In order to distinguish the present from the past and future, we must view time in relation to the eternal. Eternity and the eternal are frequently used throughout Kierkegaard's authorships. C. Stephen Evans identifies four significant uses of the term

²¹ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 87.

²² Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 85.

²³ Stokes, "Fearful Asymmetry," 502.

“eternity” within the Climacus literature alone: as referring to logical possibilities, moral obligations, God, and our future life.²⁴ As we will see, Haufniensis discusses eternity in similar ways. For Haufniensis, eternity is a metaphysical reality that is incommensurable with time. We know that Haufniensis views eternity as metaphysical because he criticizes the Greek understanding of eternity as connected with the past. If Haufniensis did not think that eternity is a metaphysical reality, he would not claim that the Greeks mistakenly viewed eternity as lying behind, “as the past that can only be entered backwards.”²⁵ The Greek view is not wrong in viewing eternity as metaphysical reality—it is only mistaken in associating eternity with past time.

Contra the Greek view of eternity as in the past, Haufniensis writes that the eternal “signifies the future.”²⁶ We might from this statement alone conclude that here Haufniensis understands eternity eschatologically, as an afterlife or realm outside of time that we will experience after our deaths. Stokes makes this interpretive move, viewing Haufniensis’s discussion of repentance (which the future day of judgment prompts) as licensing our asymmetrical attitudes towards time.²⁷ Stokes is right to note that eternity does refer to the future day of judgment here and elsewhere in Kierkegaard’s authorships. However, Haufniensis’s emphasis in this section of *The Concept of Anxiety* is not only on the afterlife or the day of judgment, but our future lives more broadly construed.

²⁴ C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard’s Fragments and Postscript*, Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanity Books, 1989, 94.

²⁵ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 90.

²⁶ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 89

²⁷ Stokes, “Fearful Asymmetry,” 505.

Haufniensis goes on to claim that “the possible corresponds exactly to the future.”²⁸ This specification forestalls a purely eschatological interpretation of eternity. We experience possibilities (and anxiety about those possibilities) throughout our lives. Our anxiety about those possibilities is not limited to our worries about what will happen after our deaths. So we must not view eternity in this context as only referring to our eschatological future. It must include all of our future possibilities, not just those that Haufniensis thinks will occur after our deaths.

Might the eternal refer to something other than an external metaphysical reality? Some readers argue that Haufniensis’s discussion of eternity does not refer to an entity or special domain apart from time. Poul Lübcke argues that for Haufniensis, eternity is a second order property of a self rather than an externally existing entity.²⁹ On this view, eternity is a property of connecting one’s past to one’s present situation. It does not refer to the afterlife or a separate metaphysical reality. While Lübcke’s interpretation of the eternal as a property is compelling, it sidesteps the main problem Haufniensis raises concerning time. If we only had time, we could not identify the present. Lübcke construes this problem as concerning our relationship with the present rather than identifying the present. He discusses the present (when viewed from only the perspective of time) as yielding no time as more important than any other.³⁰ But Haufniensis’s problem is not identifying which events are important—his problem is with distinguishing times (or events) from each other. Remember that Haufniensis’s problem

²⁸ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 91.

²⁹ Poul Lübcke, “Identity and Despair,” lecture, St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN, October 31, 2011, 8.

³⁰ Lübcke, “Identity and Despair,” 7.

is that “precisely because every moment, as well as the sum of the moments, is a process (a passing by), no moment is a present, and accordingly there is in time neither present, nor past, nor future.”³¹ He is concerned at this point in his argument with identifying the present and defining time, not with identifying events in time as especially significant. Certainly Haufniensis cares about the events in time that are more important than others, but the importance of these events is discussed elsewhere, through his concept of the moment. Haufniensis invokes importance (in his concept of the moment) in order to help identify the present rather than to solve the problems that arise from being unable to view specific times as more or less important. So Lübcke’s view of time and eternity as properties does not solve the problem with which Haufniensis begins: can we identify the present? Since Lübcke’s properties view of eternity does not solve this problem, we should not adopt his interpretation of *The Concept of Anxiety*.

If Haufniensis’s understanding of eternity is not limited to the afterlife, and construes eternity as an objective reality rather than merely a property, what does eternity consist of? Since Haufniensis associates eternity with the future and the possible, we might view eternity as containing our possible futures. Lübcke’s work on Kierkegaard’s modal ontology in the Climacus, Anti-climacus, and Haufniensis literatures supports this interpretation. Although Lübcke’s emphasis is on the former two pseudonyms, his account also fits Haufniensis’s approach. Lübcke notes that Climacus uses the term possibility in a temporal and dynamic sense. Possibility usually denotes “that which does not necessarily exclude existence.” But Climacus focuses on “the capacity of the possible to come into existence.” So for Climacus, things that are possible are real, but

³¹ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 85.

may or may not come into existence, i.e. become actualized in time.³² As for Climacus, so also for Haufniensis. For Haufniensis, the future is not actual. Possible futures exist, but only one possible future will become actualized, i.e. come into existence in time. Thus, our anxiety about the future is strictly speaking about something that does not (yet) exist. “Anxiety and nothing correspond to each other,” as Haufniensis remarks, because anxiety is about the future and the future does not yet exist in time.³³ Our future possibilities exist only in eternity, which contains all possibilities and thus all possible futures. They only become actual as they enter into time and become present. Haufniensis writes that the possibilities in eternity are “an annulled succession.” These possibilities are not arranged into timelines or branching decision trees. Instead, possibilities only acquire successiveness once they become actualized in time.³⁴

We are now in position to see how Kierkegaard can be read as affirming both the A-theory and the B-theory of time. Events in time change from possible to actual and acquire properties such as successiveness as they enter into time. So with respect to events in time, Kierkegaard should be read as an A-theorist. However, the annulled successiveness of eternity challenges our earlier reading of Kierkegaard as holding a dynamic view of time. In eternity, the way events seem to undergo changes in their temporal properties is annulled. There is no succession, i.e. no change from present to past like there is in time. Thus, with respect to eternity, we can view Kierkegaard as having a static view of time, similar to that advocated by B-theorists. Events in eternity

³² Poul Lübcke, “A Comparative and Critical Appraisal of Kierkegaard’s Theory of Modality in the ‘Interlude,’” *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2004*, Ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn et al (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2004): 166.

³³ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 96.

³⁴ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 86.

do not become present or become past. They are only earlier than or later than each other. Since Kierkegaard, as we will soon see, thinks that time depends on eternity, Kierkegaard's view of time appears to ultimately be static. However, we are not yet in position to fully evaluate Kierkegaard's metaphysical understanding of time. At this point in Kierkegaard's account, we have only considered time (the infinite succession of actualized possibilities) and eternity (the annulled succession of possibilities). We have not yet seen how time and eternity are connected, and how considering time in relation to eternity allows us to distinguish between past, present and future. How does a person actualize one future from the set of all of her possible futures that exist in eternity? And does Kierkegaard ultimately view time as dynamic (as his account of time suggests) or static (as his account of eternity seems to support)?

Kierkegaard views the moment (i.e. the instant; Danish: *Øieblikket*) as connecting time and eternity: "The moment is that ambiguity in which time and eternity touch each other." Scholars disagree about the significance of the moment within *The Concept of Anxiety*. Louis Dupré identifies the moment (and specifically Haufniensis's discussion of it) as "perhaps Kierkegaard's most original category."³⁵ By contrast, Christopher A. P. Nelson, in his survey of the importance of the moment throughout Kierkegaard's early, middle, and late writings, claims that "the author of *The Concept of Anxiety* has avoided offering anything like a direct, conceptual explication of the nature and significance of 'the moment.'"³⁶ While Nelson is correct that Haufniensis does not provide us with a

³⁵ Louis Dupré, "On Time and Eternity in Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Anxiety*," *Faith and Philosophy*, Volume 1, Issue 2, 1984, 160-176, 171.

³⁶ Christopher A. P. Nelson, "The Eye-Glance: On the Significance of *Øieblikket* as a Concept, a Title, and a Figurative Expression" in *The Moment and Late Writings*, Ed. Robert L. Perkins. International Kierkegaard Commentary, Volume 23. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009): 21.

comprehensive or systematic account of the moment, we are given an account of the role the moment plays in our experience of time. Specifically, Haufniensis tells us that the moment allows humans to experience temporality (which includes both time and eternity) rather than time by itself. “The moment is that ambiguity in which time and eternity touch each other, and with this the concept of *temporality* is posited...As a result, the above-mentioned division acquires its significance: the present time, the past time, the future time.”³⁷ So temporality is not mere succession, but is instead tensed time. Temporality is made possible by the moment. But what is the moment? And how does the moment allow us to experience the past, present, and future?

Haufniensis specifies that we must view the moment as having some determinate content. If “the moment” only signified that which is neither the past nor the future nor eternity, the moment would be nothing at all—like the specious or vanishing present we could not identify while considering time (without also considering eternity).³⁸ So the moment has to have some specific content—it cannot just be that which exists between the past and the future. The moment’s content is precisely the anxiety that Haufniensis examines throughout the book. Haufniensis identifies the moment with anxiety, writing that “anxiety is the moment.”³⁹ So we need to understand anxiety in order to understand the moment, and understanding the moment will allow us to understand how we experience past, present, and future.

³⁷ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 89.

³⁸ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 87.

³⁹ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 81.

For Haufniensis, anxiety is necessarily directed towards the future. Haufniensis initially defines anxiety by distinguishing it from fear. Fear is always about something definite. By contrast, anxiety is about something indefinite: “anxiety is freedom’s actuality as the possibility of possibility.”⁴⁰ Here freedom refers to the self’s ability to choose—the possibility of “*being able*.”⁴¹ That is, the anxiety is not a result of the conflict between good and evil. Rather, as Stephen Backhouse notes, anxiety is an intermediate state between possibility and actuality. It is caused by the self’s ability to choose which possibilities to make actual.⁴² The self becomes anxious upon awareness of the possibility of possibilities, not the particular possible outcome that the self chooses to pursue. Haufniensis clarifies this understanding of freedom by discussing Adam’s freedom to eat or not eat the prohibited fruit. Before Adam heard the command not to eat from the tree of knowledge, he was ignorant of his freedom and his ability to choose. But “the prohibition induces in him anxiety, for the prohibition awakens in him freedom’s possibility.”⁴³ Hearing the command not to eat the fruit makes him recognize his ability to eat or not eat, and causes him to be anxious. When Haufniensis identifies anxiety as freedom’s actuality, he is referring to Adam’s ability—and the ability of subsequent persons—to freely choose among possible outcomes.

Now that we have identified freedom’s actuality with the self’s ability to choose, let us consider the second part of Haufniensis’ definition of anxiety: “the possibility of

⁴⁰ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 42.

⁴¹ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 44.

⁴² Stephen Backhouse, *Kierkegaard’s Critique of Christian Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 108.

⁴³ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 44.

possibilities.” We have already discussed the possibilities that the self can choose between as possible outcomes. In the context of the discussion of time, we can identify these possible outcomes with the possible futures contained in eternity. I say that eternity contains these futures because events in eternity are real but lack existence. Thus, it would be misleading to say that possible events exist in eternity because merely possible events are not actualized and thus lack existence. Kierkegaard’s discussion of anxiety supports this reading. He writes that “the possible corresponds exactly to the future” and goes on to claim that anxiety corresponds to “the future” and “the possible.”⁴⁴ Our possible futures cause the anxiety that we experience. In fact, we cannot be anxious about the past. Anxiety can only be about the future because the future is possible whereas the past and present are actual. We cannot be anxious about the past because we cannot change it. “The past about which I am supposed to be anxious must stand in a relation of possibility to me. If I am anxious about a past misfortune, then this is not because it is in the past but because it may be repeated, i.e. become future.”⁴⁵ So Kierkegaard’s claim that “anxiety is freedom’s actuality as the possibility of possibility” means that we are anxious not just because the future is unknown. Rather, we are anxious because of the possibility of many possibilities—i.e. because it is possible for us to pursue many different future outcomes.

Another passage from an unpublished draft of *The Concept of Anxiety* supports identifying anxiety as concern about possible futures: “anxiety is really the *discrimen* (ambiguity) of subjectivity. It is therefore very clear that ‘future’ and ‘possibility’

⁴⁴ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 91.

⁴⁵ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 91.

correspond to this.”⁴⁶ This passage emphasizes that anxiety is a temporal phenomenon. Anxiety is prompted by our ability to choose between possible outcomes. We feel anxious not because the particular outcomes we might pursue worry us—although they might. Instead, we feel anxious because of our subjectivity—our ability to choose which outcome to pursue. This ability to choose—and the anxiety we necessarily feel about it—orients towards both the future and eternity (as the realm of possibilities). We need to be oriented towards the future because our possibilities exist there until they can become actual in the present. With this understanding of anxiety as prompted by and directed towards our possible futures, we can return to Haufniensis’s discussion of the moment.

Understanding anxiety as directed towards possible futures helps us understand how the moment enables us to distinguish between past, present and future. In the moment, a person experiences anxiety about her possible futures. Many commentators on *The Concept of Anxiety* have stressed the ways in which the moment involves actualizing future possibilities. Mark Taylor initially identifies the moment as the moment in which a person makes a decision about which possible future to pursue.⁴⁷ John McCumber agrees, identifying the moment as the moment of Christian conversion. He claims that the moment refers both to the moment of atonement or redemption (on the part of God) and the moment of faith in that atonement or redemption (on the part of the sinner).⁴⁸ Arne Grøn writes that “the moment of anxiety is decisive in that it is about

⁴⁶ Kierkegaard, *Papier V B* 55:10 n.d. 1844., quoted in Supplement to *The Concept of Anxiety*, Trans. Reidar Thomte, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980, 197.

⁴⁷ Mark Taylor, “Time’s Struggle with Space: Kierkegaard’s Understanding of Temporality,” *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 66, No. 3 (1973): 324-325.

⁴⁸ John McCumber, *Time and Philosophy: a History of Continental Thought*, 86-88.

gaining one's own history."⁴⁹ These commentators agree that anxiety is about the future. Since anxiety is always directed towards the future, it enables us to experience time as divided into past, present, and future. Our experience of anxiety allows us to distinguish the present moment (the time in which I am anxious) and the future (the time about which I am anxious). The present and future in turn allow us to identify the past: "The moment and the future in turn posit the past."⁵⁰ Viewing temporality in light of our experience of anxiety in the moment thus allows us to distinguish between past, present, and future.

Since Haufniensis thinks that temporality involves both time and eternity, his contribution to the A-theory vs. B-theory debate must take both time and eternity into account. In the moment, time and eternity intersect each other. We cannot consider time without eternity because doing so would leave us with no way to distinguish between past, present, and future. Likewise, as temporal beings, we cannot consider eternity apart from time. We have no way of considering possibilities apart from our particular perspectives as subjects—we can only consider them as possibilities *for us*. So we cannot consider eternity (the realm of possibility) apart from time (the realm of possibilities that have become actual) either. We must always take both into account. Haufniensis' understanding of temporality is thus both static and dynamic. In time, we experience change, as events move from present to past. As Haufniensis notes, we experience time as a succession.⁵¹ Once possibilities come into existence in time, they gain successiveness and seem to move from being present to being past. They are

⁴⁹ Arne Grøn, "Time and Transcendence: Religion and Ethics," in *Impossible Time: Past and Future in the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Marius Timmann Mjaaland; Ulrik Houliind Rasmussen; Philipp Stoellger, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013: 124.

⁵⁰ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 89.

⁵¹ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 85, 86.

dynamic. Eternity, by contrast, is an annulled succession. The possibilities contained by eternity remain static until they become actualized in time. Since Kierkegaard thinks time and eternity contribute to our experience of temporality, there is a sense in which we can identify Kierkegaard with both the A-theory of time and the B-theory of time.

Kierkegaard thinks that temporality is both static and dynamic.

Someone might at this point object that it's contradictory to affirm both the A-theory and the B-theory of time. I will conclude this section by laying out how precisely Kierkegaard affirms certain aspects of each of these theories. Since Kierkegaard thinks that eternity is more fundamental than time, and in eternity, successiveness is annulled, we can identify Kierkegaard as ultimately holding a B-theory of time. However, Kierkegaard does not think that temporal beings like humans should let the truth of the B-theory direct the way they try to live. Remember, Kierkegaard's attempts to determine the nature of reality are guided by his concern for ethics. And ethically, we should not try to live as though the B-theory is true. From the perspective of those within time, time is successive. So humans experience time as an ever-vanishing A-series of events. Kierkegaard cautions against abandoning this human perspective. For example, Kierkegaard's pseudonym Climacus cautions against abstract thinking that views the world *sub specie aeterni*, or under the aspect of eternity. Such thinking "disregards the concrete, the temporal, the beginning of existence, and the difficult situation of the existing person."⁵² However, viewing the world under the aspect of eternity is not impermissible for God. According to a traditional understanding of God (in which God is eternal rather than everlasting), time does not appear as an ever-vanishing A-series of

⁵² Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*, Vol. I, Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, 301.

events. Instead, God from the perspective of eternity timelessly knows which events become actualized in time and which do not. These possible futures are real but lack existence. Their successiveness is annulled until they come into existence in time. So for God, eternity appears as a static B-series, in which events (or possible events) can be located according to unchanging properties like “earlier than” and “later than.” But for temporal beings like humans, we should live according to the A-theory—because we experience events as constantly changing their properties as they become present and recede into the past. Affirming the B-theory but understanding time to be changing and dynamic is not self-contradictory, since both A-theorists and B-theorists can take seriously the view that most of the propositions we express are non-eternal.⁵³

This perspectival understanding of time may resemble a sort of Kantianism, in which humans experience time as dynamic whereas God has access to eternity itself, which remains static because its successiveness is annulled. But for Kierkegaard, the distinction between a temporal and perspective is a difference that makes a difference. That is, Kierkegaard thinks that time really is both dynamic (for humans) and static (for God). The distinction is not an epistemological claim about our human inability to know time as it is. Rather, the distinction emphasizes the way in which for Kierkegaard, knowledge is always situated and shaped by the perspective of the knower. Humans experience time as successive because time really is successive *for us*. We do not experience eternity as static because we are not eternal and lack access to eternity, even though eternity really is unchanging. By contrast, God experiences eternity as static because, unlike humans, God can legitimately view the world *sub specie aeterni*. God

⁵³ Dean W. Zimmerman, “The A-Theory of Time, the B-Theory of Time, and ‘Taking Tense Seriously,’” *dialectica*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (2005), 401-457, 412.

views eternity as unchanging because eternity actually is unchanging. So Kierkegaard affirms both time (as changing) and eternity (as unchanging) not through an epistemological distinction (like Kant's distinction between phenomenal and noumenal) but on the basis of his understanding of how time and eternity really are.

What are the ethical implications of the plausibly Kierkegaardian view that the B-theory is true but we should live according to the A-theory? One implication of emphasizing the appropriate differences between God's B-theoretic view of eternity and our A-theoretic approach to time is that we need to "take tense seriously."⁵⁴ While this slogan is familiar for metaphysicians, its ethical implications need further development. I will discuss some of these implications using texts from Kierkegaard's signed authorship in Chapters Four and Five. In the remainder of this chapter and Chapter Three, I will continue to develop Kierkegaard's philosophy of time using the pseudonymous authorship.

2.4 Conclusion

While *The Concept of Anxiety* may present Kierkegaard's most developed metaphysics of time, further questions remain. I have to this point only claimed that Kierkegaard's understanding of anxiety commits us to being oriented towards the future. But I have not yet discussed the implications of this orientation towards the future for our attitudes towards time. In addition to answering this central question for my project, I need to further develop Kierkegaard's metaphysical understanding of time. Some readers, on account of their metaphysical or theological commitments, may resist this

⁵⁴ Dean W. Zimmerman, "The A-Theory of Time, the B-Theory of Time, and 'Taking Tense Seriously,'" *dialectica*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (2005), 401-457.

reading of Kierkegaard on account of his affirmation of eternity as a realm of possibilities. I will address these concerns in the next chapter, where I will consider how *Philosophical Fragments* both clarifies and complicates what Haufniensis tells us about Kierkegaard's philosophy of time.

Despite the need to go further within the Kierkegaardian corpus to understand his philosophy of time, we are in a position to consider a Kierkegaardian response to Parfit's argument that temporal neutrality is psychologically possible. Since Kierkegaard's philosophy of time affirms our bias towards the future, his view entails that Parfit is wrong to claim that it is psychologically possible for us to be temporally neutral like Timeless.

Kierkegaard's philosophy of time affirms our bias towards the future as a necessary feature of human temporal existence. For Kierkegaard, we experience temporality through the moment. The moment is the moment of anxiety. But our anxiety is always anxiety about the future. We cannot be anxious about the past because the past is determined whereas the future remains possible. Remember, Kierkegaard's pseudonym Haufniensis writes "The past about which I am supposed to be anxious must stand in a relation of possibility to me. If I am anxious about a past misfortune, then this is not because it is in the past but because it may be repeated, i.e. become future."⁵⁵ So anxiety can only be about the future. Since we experience temporality in the moment and anxiety is the moment, we experience temporality through our anxiety. Without the bias towards the future, we cannot distinguish between past and future.

⁵⁵ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 91.

If our bias towards the future is a necessary feature of our existence, it is not psychologically possible for us to reject this bias. Remember, Parfit claims that it is psychologically possible for us to lack our bias, like his character Timeless. But on Kierkegaard's view, someone who lacked our bias towards the future would also lack the ability to experience anxiety. Since anxiety—in its future-oriented technical sense—is necessary for us to experience time, someone who lacked anxiety would be unable to distinguish between past, present, and future. Stokes claims that Timeless and Kierkegaard's aesthetes occupy a standpoint outside of time, a temporal *nowhen*.⁵⁶ However, this view does not take into account the important role anxiety plays within our experience of time. Since we need anxiety in order to experience time, we should not view the aesthete or Timeless as considering time while occupying a standpoint outside of time. Rather, we should understand these characters to be unable to distinguish between past and future. Contra Parfit, Timeless cannot enjoy remembering past events just as much as he enjoys anticipating future events. Since Timeless lacks the ability to distinguish between past and future, he cannot enjoy remembering or anticipating. Rather, he is unable to remember or anticipate temporal events whatsoever. So, on Kierkegaard's view, Parfit is wrong to claim that temporal neutrality (of the sort enjoyed by Timeless) is possible. Temporal neutrality removes a person from time rather than enabling her to better enjoy her past or future experiences within time.

⁵⁶ Stokes, "Fearful Asymmetry," 493

CHAPTER THREE

Philosophical Fragments and Being Eternally Occupied with the Incarnation

3.1 *Philosophical Fragments as a Transition*

While *The Concept of Anxiety* provides us with Kierkegaard's metaphysics of time (and, insofar as the human is a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal, his anthropology), it does not satisfy the ultimate aim of Kierkegaard's philosophy of time: understanding the philosophy of time's ethical implications. While I will ultimately argue that these implications are only fully developed in Kierkegaard's signed authorship, other pseudonymous texts can help us transition from Kierkegaard's metaphysics to its ethical implications. *Philosophical Fragments* is ideal for this purpose because it fruitfully weds Kierkegaard's metaphysics of time with ethical considerations. In this text, Climacus considers how time exists for God, how time exists for humans, and how God came to relate to time as a human through the incarnation. I will develop Climacus's account, with reference to both Boethius's understanding of time and eternity and the commitments to kenotic Christology and social trinitarianism that Climacus's account entails.

In addition to explicating *Philosophical Fragments* in light of the foregoing discussion of Kierkegaard's metaphysical understanding of time, this chapter anticipates several criticisms of this project and my interpretation of Kierkegaard as a philosopher of time more broadly construed. In *Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard's pseudonym Climacus is interrupted by an objector who denies that his project is original. Climacus

replies that the goal of his project is not originality.¹ After developing the implications of *Philosophical Fragments* for Kierkegaard's philosophy of time, I will anticipate the response of objectors who claim that Kierkegaard's philosophy of time merely reiterates other perspectives. Some readers of Kierkegaard, for example, take Kierkegaard's philosophy of time to be wholly determined by his Christian theology. This objection takes two forms. First, readers like Peder Jothen interpret Kierkegaard's understanding of time as entirely theological. On their view, theological interpretations of Kierkegaard can answer our questions concerning his understanding of time such that there is no need for philosophical approaches like my own. Second, some readers claim that Kierkegaard's philosophy of time is ultimately unknowable. This group is notably different from those who deny that Kierkegaard is a metaphysician, whose concerns I addressed in the previous chapter. Instead, these critics argue that Kierkegaard's metaphysics renders time unknowable. For readers like Jamie Aroosi and Michael Burns, Kierkegaard is at his most insightful when he helps us recognize what we do not and cannot know. While I appreciate this Socratic feature of their interpretations of Kierkegaard, I will show that Kierkegaard proffers a more thoroughgoing epistemology and metaphysics.

I will conclude by arguing that we need to look beyond *The Concept of Anxiety* and *Philosophical Fragments* in order to move from Kierkegaard's metaphysical understanding of time to his ethical account of our attitudes towards time. We need to move beyond these texts because they appear to disagree about whether our attitudes towards time should be directed towards the future or to events that occurred in the past.

¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Vol. VII. Kierkegaard's Writings. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 35-36, 53-54.

3.2 God's Relationship to Time

In the last chapter, I claimed that God's relation to time differs from our human relation to time. Kierkegaard's pseudonym Climacus discusses these differences in *Philosophical Fragment's* "Interlude," which discusses the ways in which metaphysical considerations, including "the paradox of the god in time," impact the life of faith.² This section of the book contains Climacus's arguments that neither past events nor future events are necessary. This follows from his understanding of necessity, according to which only things which are eternal are necessary. Climacus writes that "No coming into existence is necessary—not before it [the thing coming into existence] came into existence, for then it cannot come into existence, and not after it has come into existence, for then it has not come into existence."³ Thus, past events are also not necessary because they were not necessary when they came into existence.⁴ Climacus concludes on the basis of these arguments that it does not matter whether a person is a contemporary of the incarnation or a follower at second hand. In both cases, they face the apparent contradiction of the eternal god coming into existence in time.⁵ While Climacus's goal is connecting these metaphysical concerns with the life of faith, his reflections can shed light on the ways that God and humans relate to time.

In this section, I will first show how God relates to time and distinguish Kierkegaard's view from that of Boethius. I will then show how the event of the

² C. Stephen Evans, *Passionate Reason: Making Sense of Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 119-120.

³ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 75.

⁴ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 77.

⁵ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 87-88.

incarnation changes God's relation to time (though it does not, on Kierkegaard's understanding, change God).⁶ I will conclude by showing how *Philosophical Fragments* also sheds light on how humans relate to time. This understanding of how humans relate to time will both illuminate Kierkegaard's metaphysical understanding of time and help us to consider how our human approaches to time affect our happiness.

The key to the Interlude is its first section, in which Climacus presents his understanding of coming into existence. In this section, Climacus demonstrates that he also affirms the distinction between eternity (as the realm of possibilities) and time (including past and present events) that Haufniensis draws in *The Concept of Anxiety*. Climacus claims that coming into existence differs from other sorts of change. Other sorts of change presuppose that whatever is changing already exists. When ice melts into water, the hydrogen and oxygen molecules that comprise the water already exist. This presupposition is necessary even in cases in which something ceases to exist, such as when a fire consumes pipe tobacco. In order for the tobacco to be burned up, it had to already exist. By contrast, changes in which something comes into existence are of a different sort. Since on Kierkegaard's view, possibilities come into existence when they are actualized in time, this sort of change is precisely what we need to consider in order to understand Kierkegaard's philosophy of time. As a possible future becomes actualized and occurs as an event in the present, it undergoes a change in being—"from not existing to existing."⁷ Possibilities are real before they are actualized, but only come into

⁶ Some readers may wonder about the ways in which Kierkegaard's view of God as eternal affects what Kierkegaard might say about familiar debates from the philosophy of religion, e.g. the relationship of freedom to foreknowledge. While I think that Kierkegaard can contribute to these debates, developing these contributions is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

⁷ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 73.

existence as they are actualized. Importantly, the content of the possible future remains the same when it comes to be actualized as an event. In Shannon Nason's terms, "what is possible does not become something absolutely different from itself when it is actualized but rather becomes something relatively different, in that its mode of existence is changed."⁸ Since coming into existence is a change of being, a possible future undergoes a change of being—from possible to actual—when it becomes an event in the present. Historical (i.e. past) events have come into existence, and present events are present by virtue of having come into existence.⁹

In noting Kierkegaard's distinction between coming into existence and other sorts of change, I have not gone further than careful readers of Kierkegaard as a metaphysician like Nason, Noel Adams (whose work I will discuss below), Paul Lübcke, and R. Zach Manis.¹⁰ Each of these readers argues that *Philosophical Fragments* proffers metaphysical claims. My contribution to our understanding of Kierkegaard lies in developing Kierkegaard's philosophy of time in particular.

In Chapter Two, I claimed that on Kierkegaard's view God and humans relate to time in different ways. With Climacus's account of the change from possibility to actuality in hand, we are now in a position to develop Kierkegaard's understanding of the difference between God and humans' relationships to time. According to *Philosophical Fragments*, God relates to time from the perspective of eternity whereas humans exist in

⁸ Nason, 149.

⁹ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 87. C.f. Noel Adams, "The Significance of the Eternal in *Philosophical Fragments*, 161.

¹⁰ Poul Lübcke, "A Comparative and Critical Appraisal," 161-183. R. Zach Manis, "Johannes Climacus on Coming into Existence: The Problem of Modality in Kierkegaard's *Fragments* and *Postscript*," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2013*, Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2013, 107-130.

time. The difference between God and humans' relationship to time produces the metaphysical paradox Climacus discusses in *Philosophical Fragments*. Adams distinguishes this metaphysical paradox from what he calls an epistemological paradox. The epistemological paradox "arises in so far as the human being wants to have knowledge of the god ... but such knowledge can only be taught by the god himself." By contrast, the metaphysical paradox concerns the event of the incarnation itself—not only human being's knowledge of that event. Adams thinks that the epistemological paradox and metaphysical paradox are ultimately aspects of the absolute paradox. But since only the metaphysical paradox directly relates to questions of time and temporality, I will focus my discussion on it.¹¹

Climacus claims that the timelessness of the god is one of the reasons the event of the incarnation presents the believer with the absolute paradox. Climacus claims that "the contradiction" precisely arises from the god having come into existence.¹² Importantly, Climacus does not identify "the contradiction" with human beings' knowledge of the incarnation. If "the contradiction" involved human beings' inability to know the god without the god revealing godself, we would expect some reference to knowledge at this juncture. But we have no such reference. Instead, "the contradiction" arises from the eternal and timeless God coming into existence, i.e. entering time. As José Miranda Justo writes, Climacus is concerned with "the contradiction between the

¹¹ Noel Adams, "The Significance of the Eternal in *Philosophical Fragments*," *Kierkegaard Studies: Yearbook 1997*. Ed. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn et al. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997), 147.

¹² Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 87. C.f. Noel Adams, 161.

‘historical’ proper and ‘coming into existence’ and between the ‘eternal’ character proper and the ‘essence of the god.’”¹³

Other passages support that the eternal God coming into existence is paradoxical. For example, earlier in *Philosophical Fragments* Climacus claims that “the moment is the paradox.” In *Philosophical Fragments*, the moment can refer to either the moment of decision (on the part of the learner) or to the moment of the incarnation. He describes the moment as paradoxical in a passage emphasizing the god taking on human form and being wrapped in rags and laid in a manger.¹⁴ In this passage, Climacus clearly refers to the event of the incarnation, i.e. God coming into existence in time. So the event of the incarnation presents us with what appears to be a contradiction: the eternal becoming temporal.¹⁵

Climacus’s presentation of the event of the incarnation as a metaphysical paradox does not entail that he—or Kierkegaard—views the incarnation as incoherent or logically contradictory. C. Stephen Evans argues that “an overwhelmingly strong case can be made for the claim that Climacus does not mean ‘logical contradiction’ when he claims that the incarnation is a paradox.”¹⁶ Evans identifies what I, following Adams, have called the metaphysical paradox as Climacus’s focus: “Climacus asserts that the contradiction is that an eternal condition is regarded as something that is acquired in

¹³ José Miranda Justo, “Time Determination in Kierkegaard’s *Philosophical Fragments*,” in *Kierkegaard in Lisbon: Contemporary Readings of Repetition, Fear and Trembling, Philosophical Fragments, and the 1843 and 1844 Upbuilding Discourses*, Ed. José Miranda Justo and Elisabete M. de Sousa (Lisbon: Centro de Filosofia da Universidade de Lisboa, 2012), 137.

¹⁴ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 58.

¹⁵ Adams, 160-162

¹⁶ Evans, *Passionate Reason*, 100.

time.”¹⁷ But, as Evans argues, this contradiction is not a logical contradiction. As the absolute paradox, the incarnation is incomprehensible to us. We can comprehend ordinary contradictions, e.g. round squares, because we know what it means to be round or square. Logically, something round cannot simultaneously be square. So round squares are logically contradictory. By contrast, we cannot comprehend what it means to be human or what it means to be divine. So we cannot identify the incarnation as a logical contradiction—it remains a mystery to us.¹⁸

While Evans is rightly hesitant to rely on proof-texting, other texts by Kierkegaard support distinguishing between paradoxes and mere contradictions. In the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Climacus defends the Aristotelian principle of non-contradiction.¹⁹ As Evans has argued, the incarnation does not present us with a logical contradiction. But in addition to affirming the principle of non-contradiction and its condemnation of formal, logical contradictions, Kierkegaard elsewhere praises at least some sorts of paradox. In an 1838 journal entry, Kierkegaard writes “Paradox is the real pathos of the intellectual life, and just as only great souls are exposed to passions, so only great thinkers are exposed to what I call paradoxes, which are nothing other than rudimentary majestic thoughts.”²⁰ In this passage, Kierkegaard identifies paradoxes as positive. Importantly, the incarnation is not the sort of paradox described here. According to Climacus, people can only be efficaciously exposed to the incarnation by

¹⁷ Evans, *Passionate Reason*, 99.

¹⁸ Evans, *Passionate Reason*, 102-105.

¹⁹ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 304-305. C.f. Evans, *Passionate Reason*, 101.

²⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers Vol. 3, L-R*, Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967, p. 451, Entry 3070, II A 755 n.d., 1838. I am grateful to Anne Jeffery for bringing this passage to my attention.

the god. So the incarnation cannot be the sort of paradox that is limited only to great thinkers. Nevertheless, the journal passage demonstrates that Kierkegaard does not view all paradoxes as contradictions.

The paradox of the incarnation discloses the ways in which God and humans relate to time. Climacus specifies that because the historical fact of the incarnation “involves coming into existence, it is the object of faith. It is not a question here of the truth of it [that the god has come into existence] but of assenting to the god’s having come into existence, whereby the god’s eternal essence is inflected into the dialectical qualifications of coming into existence.”²¹ Again we see that the paradoxical difficulty arises from the god—as eternal—coming into existence, i.e. entering time. Since God did not exist in time apart from the incarnation, we can conclude that God relates to time from an eternal perspective. God views times from the perspective of eternity—as ordered possibilities that may become actualized by coming into existence in time. Furthermore, God knows which of these possibilities do become actualized. That is, God knows which times are part of the B series. Thus, we can characterize God as relating to time as a B-series—i.e. as an ordered, non-successive and static series of times. By contrast, humans exist in time, and relate to time only as an ever-vanishing A-series of events. So on the basis of this metaphysical paradox, we can conclude that on Climacus’s view, God relates to time from the perspective of eternity whereas humans exist in time.

The event of the incarnation challenges identifying God’s relation to time to only the B-series. Through the person of the incarnation, God comes to relate to time as a

²¹ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 87.

human—and thus as an A-series. Climacus confirms this point by noting that in order for the teacher (i.e. the incarnation) to give humans the condition, “he must be the god, and in order to put the learner in possession of it, he must be man”²² The incarnation is thus both divine (eternal) and human (temporal). Thus, on Kierkegaard’s view, the incarnation shows that God relates to time as both an A-series and as a B-series. As we will see, Kierkegaard’s emphasis on the incarnation distinguishes his understanding of time from some of his Christian predecessors.

At this point some readers might associate Kierkegaard’s understanding of time with a familiar Christian understanding of time, such as that of Boethius. I have just argued that for Kierkegaard, God relates to time from the perspective of eternity, in which there is no succession of event to event. By contrast, humans relate to time successively, one event at a time. Boethius’s view is similar. He claims that “God is eternal, the world perpetual.” For Boethius, God does not relate to time as a succession of events like human beings do. Instead, God has “the knowledge of a never ending presence.” God “looks forth at all things as through from a lofty peak above them.”²³ This account seems very similar to Haufniensis’s account of the way the successiveness of time is annulled in eternity.

Other readers of Kierkegaard have noted similarities between their philosophical projects. Joseph Westfall writes of *The Consolation of Philosophy*: “At the center of Philosophy’s argument is her assertion of the significance of the difference between human beings and God. It is, in fact, in terms of perspective—and the different

²² Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 62.

²³ Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Trans. V. E. Watts, London: Penguin, 1969, 165.

experiences of time proper to the different perspectives—that Philosophy resolves the apparent contradiction of divine foreknowledge with human freedom.”²⁴ Like Kierkegaard, Boethius relies on the distinction between the way God relates to time and the way humans relate to time. While this distinction plays a different role in each philosopher’s project, it is crucial for the way in which they each understand time and eternity. In addition to highlighting this shared emphasis, Westfall proffers further evidence emphasizing the similarities between their views. Climacus cites Boethius when he claims that “foreknowledge of the future does not confer necessity upon it (Boethius).”²⁵ Finally, Westfall writes that “we find in Boethius an anticipation of the distinction Johannes Climacus will famously make in the ‘Interlude’ to *Philosophical Fragments*, between necessity and actuality.”²⁶ Similarly, John Heywood Thomas claims that Kierkegaard would probably have accepted St. Thomas’s view of time, a view which cites Boethius approvingly.²⁷ So, on the basis of the similarities that I as well as other readers of Kierkegaard have identified, we can conclude that Kierkegaard and Boethius’s understandings of time are broadly similar.

The distinctive feature of Kierkegaard’s understanding of time that separates his view from that of Boethius is the former’s emphasis on the incarnation. For Kierkegaard, the incarnation enables God to relate to time from the perspective of a human being in

²⁴ Joseph Westfall, “Boethius, Kierkegaard, and *The Consolation*,” in *Kierkegaard and the Patristic and Medieval Traditions*, Ed. Jon Stewart, Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception, and Resources Volume 4 (Ashgate: Hampshire, England, 2008), 208.

²⁵ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 80.

²⁶ Westfall, 215.

²⁷ John Heywood Thomas, *The Legacy of Kierkegaard*, 215.

time. Through the incarnation, God can relate to time as both a dynamic A-series and a static B-series. By contrast, “there is no hint of the incarnation” in Boethius’s account of time and eternity in *The Consolation*.²⁸ We should not conclude from this absence that Boethius is not a Christian or not engaged in Christian philosophy and theology. Boethius’s emphasis is merely different from Climacus’s and Kierkegaard’s. Richard Holland argues that logical concerns appear to have been more important for Boethius’s definition of eternity than theological concerns. He writes that Boethius’s method “seems inadvisable if one is to preserve a view of time consistent with Christian theological priorities.”²⁹ The absence of the incarnation in Boethius’s account of time and eternity thus contrasts with Climacus (and thus Kierkegaard’s) emphasis on the incarnation. Kierkegaard’s understanding of time is ultimately more similar to those, such as Augustine, for whom the incarnation is more central.³⁰

In addition to emphasizing the incarnation more than Boethius does, Kierkegaard might also be concerned with the way that Boethius disconnects his metaphysical understanding of time from his ethical account of our attitudes towards time. As I have argued throughout, Kierkegaard’s metaphysics is always in service to specific ethical concerns. We might think that Boethius’s project is similar, in that he aims to describe the consolations proffered by philosophy. Yet Boethius does not provide us an account of how his metaphysics informs his ethics. For an example of this, consider the

²⁸ Danuta Shanzer, “Interpreting the Consolation” in *The Cambridge Companion to Boethius*, Ed. John Marenbon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009), 242.

²⁹ Richard A. Holland Jr., *God, Time and the Incarnation*, Eugene: Wipf and Stock 2012, 49.

³⁰ I will argue that Kierkegaard and Augustine hold similar views of time in “Augustine and Kierkegaard on Time,” Work in progress for *Augustine and Kierkegaard*, Ed. Kim Paffenroth, Helene Russell, and John Doody, Lexington Books, 2017.

conclusion of *The Consolation of Philosophy*, in which Boethius worries that the necessity of the future renders hope and prayer pointless.³¹ Lady Philosophy responds by arguing against the necessity of the future. Then the text ends. There is no discussion of how humans should hope and pray. Thus, Boethius's metaphysics (along with his arguments about freedom and foreknowledge) do not inform his ethical understanding of how we should live. At most, Boethius's metaphysics removes obstacles to living well, such as the idea that the necessity of the future makes hope for the future pointless. He does not tell us how we should hope for the future. By contrast, Kierkegaard's metaphysics of time is meant to inform a positive account of our ethical attitudes towards time. While Kierkegaard and Boethius's metaphysical understandings of time and eternity share certain features, their overall projects are different.

3.3 Kierkegaard, Kenotic Christology, and Social Trinitarianism

Someone may object that my defense of Kierkegaard's understanding of the incarnation does not go far enough. I have argued that despite calling the incarnation "the absolute paradox," Kierkegaard does not view the incarnation as a logical contradiction. Yet Kierkegaard's understanding of the incarnation might still be logically contradictory. For example, God entering into time through the event of the incarnation might be (or entail) a logical contradiction. If the incarnation entails a logical contradiction in this way, it might conceivably entail that the claim that God has both an eternal and temporal (non-eternal) perspective on time is also logically contradictory. My strategy in response to this criticism will be as follows. I contend that Kierkegaard is committed to a kenotic view of the incarnation, as well as social trinitarianism. These

³¹ Boethius, 153.

views allow us to understand how God might have these apparently contradictory perspectives on temporality. If kenotic Christology and social trinitarianism are logically coherent views and they are defended as such by respected theologians, then it seems plausible that Kierkegaard's view that God has both a temporal and eternal perspective on time is also logically coherent. I am not herein attempting to defend kenotic Christology or social trinitarianism as such. I only aim to show that Kierkegaard's views are no more incoherent or inconsistent than these theological positions. Some readers may object that linking Kierkegaard to the work of contemporary systematic theologians in this way is an attempt to adopt an un-Kierkegaardian sort of system. I will address this concern at the end of the section.

One way of understanding the differences between the incarnation's humanity and divinity is emphasizing God's self-emptying or kenosis. Kenotic Christology is the view that "in becoming a human being, God the Son in some way limited or temporarily divested himself of some of the properties thought to be divine prerogatives."³² Kenotic Christology might show that the incarnation is not logically contradictory. For example, on a standard understanding of kenotic Christology, the self-emptying or temporary divesting of divine properties might provide a way for God's eternal and temporal perspectives to not produce a logical contradiction. God the Son might divest himself of the property of viewing time from the perspective of eternity. By doing so, God would not simultaneously possess both an eternal perspective and a temporal perspective

³² C. Stephen Evans, "Introduction: Understanding Jesus the Christ as Human and Divine," in *Exploring Kenotic Christology*, Ed. C. Stephen Evans, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, 1-24, 4.

towards time.³³ As we will see, Kierkegaard's understanding of the incarnation is in fact kenotic, though it has some distinctive characteristics.

For Kierkegaard, the incarnation's self-limitation reveals God's divinity. Lee C. Barrett, C. Stephen Evans, and David Law argue that Kierkegaard's understanding of the incarnation in *Philosophical Fragments* is kenotic in this way. Barrett writes that "The theme of Jesus's life and death as a manifestation of God's kenotic love informs Kierkegaard's treatment of the redemptive activity of Jesus."³⁴ Whereas other commentators emphasize the role of God the Father's self-giving, Barrett highlights God the Son's self-emptying. He describes Jesus's story as exhibiting a kenotic pattern, meant to serve as a prototype for others to follow. By imitating Jesus, followers may become willing to suffer like Jesus suffered. They might also be comforted by Jesus's suffering while suffering themselves. Thus, God the Son is kenotic through his self-emptying for the sake of others.

Evans emphasizes the role of God's power in the incarnation. Compared to Socrates (who professes ignorance) and the king in the fairy tale (who woos a peasant maiden in disguise), "Kierkegaard affirms that God can enter more deeply into the limited world of the one he wishes to have a relationship with ... because God has what

³³ This kind of kenotic Christology requires that the properties that are divested are not essential to being God. Otherwise the incarnation would result in a loss of divinity. So on a kenotic view, what is essential to being divine are not properties such as omnipotence, omniscience, and having an eternal perspective on time, but rather such properties as 'being omnipotent except when choosing to limit omnipotence' and 'having an eternal perspective on time except when choosing to have a temporal perspective.' See C. Stephen Evans, "Kenotic Christology and the Nature of God," in *Exploring Kenotic Christology*, Ed. C. Stephen Evans, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, 197-198.

³⁴ Lee C. Barrett, *Eros and Self-Emptying: The Intersections of Augustine and Kierkegaard*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI, 2013, 316.

we might call a superior ability to limit himself.”³⁵ Thus, for Evans, Kierkegaard affirms kenotic Christology by emphasizing God’s omnipotence, which includes the power of self-limitation. God is powerful because God limits God’s self, not powerless because God abandons God’s power. Thus, Kierkegaard’s understanding of God the Father’s role in the incarnation is also kenotic.

Law corroborates Evans’s emphasis on God the Father’s self-giving. The servant form that the god takes on in the event of the incarnation “is not the annihilation but the *fullest* expression of the God’s divine nature.”³⁶ Law includes God’s eternal nature within the scope of this claim about the incarnation: “Climacus gives no indication, however, that he believes that the god gives up his eternal nature or that this nature is diminished in some way through his becoming a human being.”³⁷ For Kierkegaard, God did not abandon this eternal nature. Although the incarnation temporarily—i.e. while within temporality—gave up some properties proper to the divine nature, God as the Trinity retains those properties. Since the Son, even while incarnate, is part of the Trinity, the Son thus retains all of the divine properties. So the incarnation only has divine properties like eternality and omnipotence through his relation to the other persons of the Trinity, to whom he remains united.

Someone might object, however, that the incarnation’s renunciation of some divine properties does not demonstrate that the incarnation is not contradictory. Such an objector could cite the fact that the Son gives up some properties through the incarnation,

³⁵ C. Stephen Evans, “Kenotic Christology and the Nature of God,” 204.

³⁶ David Law, *Kierkegaard’s Kenotic Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 203.

³⁷ Law, 206.

but retains those properties through the Trinity. So the incarnation still simultaneously has and lacks some divine properties. Thus, we are still faced with the concern that God had eternal and temporal (non-eternal) perspectives towards time, and that having both perspectives seems logically contradictory. Kierkegaard's kenotic Christology thus provides us with no easy solutions to our concern about logical contradiction. As Barrett notes, "Kierkegaard jettisoned the effort to clarify the significance of Jesus through metaphysical speculation about 'natures.'"³⁸ That is, Kierkegaard affirms the truth of the incarnation without seeking to systematically explain it. Nevertheless, the kenoticism of Kierkegaard's Christology can provide us with a response to concerns about his view of the incarnation proving contradictory. Even if Kierkegaard does not proffer metaphysical explanations, readers of Kierkegaard can pursue such explanations in order to show that the incarnation—the absolute paradox—is not a logical contradiction.

Identifying Kierkegaard's Christology as kenotic allows us to shift the burden of proof from Kierkegaard to the project of kenotic Christology more broadly construed. As Law argues, Kierkegaard's Christology is an idiosyncratic kenotic Christology, but a kenotic Christology nonetheless. Since Kierkegaard's Christology is a kind of kenotic Christology, it entails no more logical contradictions than other kenotic Christologies do. For the purposes of this dissertation, this is a sufficient response to the concern about the incarnation leading to logical contradictions. I do not need to defend the coherence of the incarnation in general, I only mean to show that Kierkegaard's kenotic Christology presents us with no more problems than other kenotic Christologies. Given the fact that many respectable contemporary Christian theologians and philosophes defend kenotic

³⁸ Barrett, 321.

Christology as both coherent and Biblical, this is no insignificant result.³⁹ Kierkegaard's kenotic Christology seems to commit him to a social view of the Trinity. Social trinitarianism is the view that we should "take seriously" the three persons of God, and try to make sense of how those differentiated persons form a genuine community.⁴⁰ Thomas R. Thompson and Cornelius Plantinga Jr. argue that kenotic Christology requires social trinitarianism. In order for God the father to divest some divine properties through the incarnation, the first and second persons of the Trinity must be distinct and differentiated from each other.⁴¹ So Kierkegaard's kenoticism may implicitly commit him to a social understanding of the trinity.

Is social trinitarianism consistent with what Kierkegaard says about the Trinity? As Law notes, we do not find a discussion of the Trinity in *Philosophical Fragments* due to Climacus's feigned invention of Christianity.⁴² Likewise, Murray Rae claims that in Kierkegaard's writings "There is no discussion of the Trinity, though he [Kierkegaard] frames his thought in Trinitarian terms."⁴³ One source of insight into Kierkegaard's Trinitarian thinking is his prayers. For example, *Works of Love* begins with a prayer invoking each of the three divine persons: God the source of all love, God the Savior and

³⁹ For example, several contributors to *Exploring Kenotic Christology* (Stephen T. Davis, Ronald J. Feenstra, and C. Stephen Evans) defend kenotic Christology. For another recent defense see David Brown's *Divine Humanity: Kenosis and the Construction of a Christian Theology* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011).

⁴⁰ Evans, "Introduction: Understanding Jesus," 16.

⁴¹ Thomas R. Thompson and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., "Trinity and Kenosis, in *Exploring Kenotic Christology*, Ed. C. Stephen Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 170-171.

⁴² Law, 214.

⁴³ Murray Rae, *Kierkegaard and Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 3.

Redeemer, and the Spirit of Love who reminds us of “that love-sacrifice.”⁴⁴ The prayer addresses each person distinctly, and ascribes to each person a distinct role—two key features of social trinitarianism. Similarly, Paul K. Moser and Mark L. McCreary argue that Kierkegaard’s *For Self-Examination*’s Trinitarian structure supports viewing Kierkegaard’s conception of God as a personal Trinity.⁴⁵ So we can turn to these texts to evaluate Kierkegaard’s understanding of the Trinity.

While Moser and McCreary do not specify the nature of Kierkegaard’s understanding of the Trinity, *For Self-Examination* arguably presents a social Trinitarianism. The prayers that begin each section of the text emphasize the distinctions between the divine persons rather than the unity or community. The first prayer is addressed to God the Father.⁴⁶ The second prayer highlights that God the Son was forsaken by God the Father, thus establishing the distinction between these two persons.⁴⁷ The third prayer is remarkable for its brevity, referring only to the Holy Spirit as the giver of life. To see how this prayer supports viewing the Holy Spirit as a distinct person, we must consider what this section of *For Self-Examination* has to say about pneumatic life-giving. Kierkegaard emphasizes that the Spirit was sent after Christ’s ascension, which differentiates the Spirit from both God the Father and God the Son.⁴⁸ While

⁴⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Vol. XVI. Kierkegaard’s Writings. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 3-4.

⁴⁵ Paul K. Moser and Mark L. McCreary, “Kierkegaard’s Conception of God,” *Philosophy Compass*, 5/2, (2010), 128-129.

⁴⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination; Judge for Yourself!* Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Vol. XXI. Kierkegaard’s Writings. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 13-14.

⁴⁷ Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination*, 56.

⁴⁸ Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination*, 77, 81.

systematically exploring the Trinity is not part of Kierkegaard's project, his understanding does emphasize the distinction between the persons of the Trinity rather than their community. We see a similar understanding of the Trinity in the prayer that begins *Works of Love*, which also address the three persons as distinct in name and function. So it is plausible, especially given Kierkegaard's kenotic Christology, to view Kierkegaard as affirming Social Trinitarianism.

My defense of Kierkegaard's understanding of the Trinity as not logically contradictory parallels my defense of his understanding of the incarnation. While I cannot show that social views of the Trinity do not entail logical contradictions, I have shown that Kierkegaard espouses such a view. Thus, Kierkegaard's view entails no further contradictions than other social Trinitarian views. Social Trinitarianism as defined by the theologians who advocate for it entails no contradictions.⁴⁹ This understanding of the Trinity allows one of the divine persons to temporarily have different properties than the other two persons. Accordingly, the second person of the Trinity can kenotically renounce some divine properties in the act of the incarnation. The Godhead retains all of the divine properties, while the incarnation adds something new—a person who is fully human and fully divine. As Thompson and Plantinga Jr. write, “If the eternal Son really becomes human...then his is a sentient life lived vis-à-vis the

⁴⁹ These theologians include the aforementioned Thomas R. Thompson and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. Ted Peters identifies Jurgen Moltmann as presenting one extreme understanding of social trinitarianism (with Schliermacher's “strict monotheism” at the other extreme and Karl Barth in the middle). See Ted Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Westminster John Knox, 1993), 38. Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt names Catherine Mowry LaCugna, Michael Novak, Leonardo Boff, and Miroslav Volf as advocates of social understandings of the trinity. See Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, “Politics” in *The Oxford Handbook of The Trinity*. Ed. Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 534.

Father in the power and energies of the Spirit.”⁵⁰ Kierkegaard’s kenotic Christology thus depends on and accentuates his Trinitarian theology. Arguably, neither view entails that Kierkegaard thinks that the incarnation—i.e. the absolute paradox—entails a logical contradiction. So Kierkegaard’s understanding of the incarnation and the trinity are no more incoherent or inconsistent than those of other advocates of kenotic Christology and social Trinitarianism. If kenotic Christology and social Trinitarianism provide a coherent understanding of how God can have both an eternal and temporal perspective on time, then Kierkegaard’s view does not seem incoherent.

Having defended Kierkegaard’s understanding of the incarnation and Trinity as not entailing logical contradictions, I feel obligated as a reader of Kierkegaard to record one reservation Kierkegaard himself might raise about my project. Kierkegaard does not think that the primary purpose of Christological doctrine is the delivery of objective content.⁵¹ So while Kierkegaard might accept my arguments that the incarnation does not entail a logical contradiction, he is not primarily interested in considering the incarnation abstractly. As I discussed in Chapter Two, many readers of Kierkegaard have a similar sort of reservation about the project of reading Kierkegaard as proffering a metaphysics. But Kierkegaard’s opposition to speculative metaphysics is different from his opposition to pursuing abstract knowledge of the incarnation. In the former case, Kierkegaard’s worry is motivated by his general criticism of reflection, which he views as frequently an evasion of moral action. In the latter case, Kierkegaard thinks that the paradox of Christ

⁵⁰ Thompson and Plantinga Jr., 171.

⁵¹ Carl Hughes, “‘Tehomic’ Christology? Tanner, Keller, and Kierkegaard on Writing Christ,” *Modern Theology*, 31:2, (2015): 278.

exceeds our best efforts at Christology. As I will discuss later in this chapter, we cannot consider the teachings of the incarnation without considering the incarnation himself. Following Eleonore Stump's distinction from *Wandering in the Darkness*, we can have propositional knowledge of general metaphysical claims, but we can only have non-propositional second-person knowledge of persons, like the Christ.⁵² So while there is a place for a properly Kierkegaardian metaphysics—one that ultimately directs us to moral action—we cannot and ought not pursue abstract knowledge of the incarnation or the trinity. We can believe claims about the incarnation, e.g. that “in such and such a year the god appeared in the humble form of a servant, lived and taught among us, and then died.”⁵³ But we cannot, for example, provide a metaphysical explanation of what it means to say that Christ is God incarnate.

Kierkegaard's rejection of pursuing metaphysical explanations can serve as another argument against “the absolute paradox” entailing a logical contradiction. Since human knowledge of God is at most provisional, we will never be in a position to claim that the absolute paradox is logically contradictory. This argument is similar to but stronger than Evans's claim that we lack sufficient knowledge to identify the God-Man as logically contradictory. Evans's point is that we do not know what it means to be human and what it means to be divine. My point is that Kierkegaard thinks we *cannot* have abstract knowledge of the incarnation. Yet our inability to have this sort of knowledge need not prevent us from affirming the truth of the incarnation. Likewise, Kierkegaard or his readers can show that claims that the incarnation and Trinity are logically incoherent

⁵² Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in the Darkness*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, 51-56.

⁵³ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 104.

fail without pursuing abstract or systematic knowledge of the incarnation. In this section I have argued that our best attempts to understand Kierkegaard's doctrines of the incarnation and Trinity suggest that he would not think they entail logical contradictions. Kierkegaard's understanding of the incarnation and trinity is no more incoherent than other kenotic Christologies or social accounts of the trinity.

Now that I have defended the logical consistency of Kierkegaard's Christology and Trinitarian theology, let us consider the argument to this point. Our reading of Climacus's distinction between change in existence and coming into existence has led us to distinguish between humans' relation to time and God's relation to time. Humans exist in time and relate to time as a successive A-series of events, while God relates to time from the perspective of eternity as a non-successive B-series. Through the incarnation, God also relates to time as an A-series. So God relates to time as both A-series and B-series, dynamic and static. While eternity entering into time is ultimately incomprehensible (or, in Climacus's terms, paradoxical), it is not a logical contradiction. As I have argued, Kierkegaard's understanding of time and eternity is not more radical than those proposed by other proponents of kenotic Christology or social Trinitarianism. Climacus's account corroborates that of Haufniensis's *The Concept of Anxiety*. In both texts, we need to attend to both time and eternity in order to understand Kierkegaard's metaphysics of time. However, we will see that *Philosophical Fragments* complicates our understanding of Kierkegaard's view of our attitudes towards time. Whereas Haufniensis holds that humans are necessarily oriented towards the future, Climacus claims that at least some humans—specifically faithful Christians—are eternally occupied with the past. While our understanding of Kierkegaard's metaphysics of time

has become more developed and thus easier, his ethical account of our attitudes towards time will soon become more difficult.

3.4 Time's Roles in Human Happiness

Philosophical Fragments' central question is "can an eternal happiness be built on historical knowledge?"⁵⁴ In other words, is our happiness (in the fullest sense of the word, not in the sense of merely feeling happy) dependent on our beliefs about a particular historical event, or are such beliefs not decisively significant for our happiness? To answer this question, Climacus considers two alternatives. He calls these alternatives the A hypothesis and the B hypothesis. We should be careful to distinguish these hypotheses—which are about human happiness—from the A-theory of time and the B-theory of time. According to the A hypothesis, we are able to attain the truth and acquire happiness through our own efforts. The help of others, e.g. teachers like Socrates, only provides us with the occasion to acquire happiness.⁵⁵ Since each individual ultimately acquires happiness for herself, no occasion is necessary us to acquire happiness, and thus no particular temporal event is decisive.⁵⁶ According to the B hypothesis, however, we are unable to attain the truth and acquire happiness through our own efforts. Instead, truth and happiness must be given to us by a teacher (who cannot be merely an occasion, like Socrates) in a particular historical event. For Climacus, this event is the incarnation of the Christian God, who in the fullness of time gives the truth and thus happiness (both

⁵⁴ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 1.

⁵⁵ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 12.

⁵⁶ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 11-13.

to Christ's contemporaries and to followers at second hand).⁵⁷ Climacus's distinction between the A and B hypotheses links his understanding of time with ethical concerns. Our understanding of time (and whether a particular event in time is decisively significant) will shape our understanding of how we should try to attain happiness. Since this dissertation began with ethical questions related to our attitudes towards time, we should not be surprised to return to these questions in this chapter. But it is important to note that even while Kierkegaard was writing the theoretical account of time and eternity in *The Concept of Anxiety* he was also discussing the relation of temporality to ethics in *Philosophical Fragments*. The fact that these texts were published within four days of each other in 1844 suggests that Kierkegaard's philosophy of time is sensitive to these concerns throughout, even though they are emphasized to varying degrees within his authorships.

The fourth and fifth chapters of *Philosophical Fragments* are the most decisive chapters for the project of providing a Kierkegaardian account of our attitudes towards time. This interpretive decision may surprise some readers, who are familiar with Climacus's metaphysical discussions of time in the Interlude which we have already discussed. However, as Evans notes, the purpose of the Interlude's discussion of time is to illuminate Climacus's concept of faith.⁵⁸ So, while these metaphysical discussions are important for my project, they are neither Climacus's focus, nor, ultimately, my own. The fourth and fifth chapters are the most significant for my project because they show how the event of the incarnation affects our attitudes towards time. Since according to

⁵⁷ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 15-18.

⁵⁸ C. Stephen Evans, *Passionate Reason*, 119-120.

the B hypothesis, our happiness depends on the event of the incarnation— which, for those who were not contemporary with it occurred in the past—we must find some way of reconciling our dependence on the past event of the incarnation with our fundamental orientation towards the future. In this section, I will draw out the implications of the incarnation for our attitudes towards time by working through the fourth and fifth chapters of *Philosophical Fragments*. I will discuss the remainder of the book, paying special attention to Climacus's metaphysics of time in the Interlude, in subsequent sections.

While Kierkegaard's pseudonym Climacus does not show a preference for the Socratic A hypothesis or the Christian B hypothesis within *Philosophical Fragments*, a distinctively Kierkegaardian understanding of our attitudes towards time can only come from the B hypothesis. For the A hypothesis, the moment is inconsequential. So affirming the A hypothesis will not provide us with any insights into Kierkegaard's approach to our attitudes towards time. By contrast, for the B hypothesis, everything depends on the fullness of time, i.e. the event of the incarnation. The fourth and fifth chapters of *Philosophical Fragments* consider how those who affirm the B hypothesis relate to this event.

In the fourth chapter of *Philosophical Fragments*, Climacus argues that being a historical contemporary of the incarnation does not make it easier for a follower to have faith. As Lessing asserts, we might think it was easier for the earliest followers of the incarnation to have faith than it is for followers at second hand hundreds or thousands of years later.⁵⁹ Yet, Climacus claims, followers must have received their faith from the

⁵⁹ G.E. Lessing, 'On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power', in *Lessing's Theological Writings*, Ed. Henry Chadwick, London: A & C Black, 1956, 51–6.

god. They cannot be interested in the incarnation for merely historical reasons, e.g. because the god is “the news of the day in the market square.”⁶⁰ Accordingly, acquiring detailed historical information about the incarnation is insufficient for becoming a faithful follower of the incarnation.⁶¹

Climacus further claims that “faith is not a [kind of] knowledge,” and defends this claim by appealing to the distinction between the god as a teacher and merely human teachers. The teachings of the god are inseparable from the god. Those who learn from the god place their faith in the *teacher* rather than the *teaching*. So the god is inseparable from what he teaches. By contrast, the teachings provided by merely human teachers, e.g. Spinoza, are separable from those teachers. When I am occupied with Spinoza’s teachings, I am not occupied with Spinoza himself. Likewise, when I am occupied with Spinoza as a historical figure, I am not occupied with Spinoza’s teachings. By contrast, I cannot be occupied with the teachings of the incarnation without being occupied with the god. Climacus concludes that “The follower, however, is in faith related to that teacher in such a way that he is eternally occupied with his historical existence.”⁶² So the follower—whether historically contemporaneous with the incarnation at second hand—must be eternally occupied with the historical existence of the god. We know from elsewhere in *Philosophical Fragments* that Climacus thinks that proofs of God’s existence are doomed to fail, so this passage must refer to something other than the question of whether God exists.⁶³

⁶⁰ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 58.

⁶¹ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 59.

⁶² Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 62.

⁶³ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 43.

With Climacus's understanding of faith (as something other than knowledge) in hand, we are in a position to see why Climacus claims that viewing "a historical point of departure" as necessary for one's happiness "is an issue" for those in the present who are followers of the incarnation.⁶⁴ The historical event of the incarnation is not something one can simply affirm, e.g. through reciting a doctrinal statement or participating in an altar call. Instead, we must be "eternally occupied" with the historical existence of the god.⁶⁵ The Hong's translation of *evigt beskæftiget* as eternally occupied may convey the notion that Climacus thinks we need to think about the god all the time.⁶⁶ We might view "occupied" in the sense of being preoccupied. However, the Danish word *beskæftiget* has the sense of employment or occupation.⁶⁷ So the historical existence of the god is not only something that the follower thinks about—it is something that engages him fully. If we approach occupation in the sense of employment, we might say that the person of faith views her faith as a full-time commitment. Furthermore, the adjective *evigt* specifies that the follower is eternally (or "forever") occupied by the historical existence of the incarnation.⁶⁸ Unlike jobs that one can set aside at the end of the work day, the follower's occupation with the incarnation continues. As Climacus claims, "faith must continually cling to the teacher."⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 58.

⁶⁵ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 62.

⁶⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, 26 vols. Edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn et al. Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 1997-, 4: 264.

⁶⁷ J. S. Ferrall and Thorleifr Gudmundson Repp, *A Danish-English Dictionary*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1845, 30.

⁶⁸ Ferrall and Repp, 71.

⁶⁹ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 62.

Now that we have seen that the event of the incarnation “eternally occupies” those who affirm the B hypothesis, we can consider what this sort of occupation involves. Perhaps surprisingly, *Philosophical Fragments* does not provide us with a thick description of being eternally occupied with the incarnation. The book’s focus is on how people come to faith, not on how to live the life of faith. However, Climacus’s account of coming to faith provides us with a negative account of the life of faith. As Jacob Howland notes, Climacus (with the exception of his extended comparison between faith and eros) “will only tell us what faith is not.”⁷⁰ Specifically, the life of faith does not necessarily involve observing or studying the historical event of the incarnation.

Being occupied with the incarnation is not the same as studying the incarnation because studying the incarnation is insufficient to produce faith. Climacus introduces this theme in his discussion of whether being contemporary with the incarnation would help a person to become a follower of the incarnation. He argues that both sorts of followers of the incarnation are only able to have faith in the incarnation through receiving the condition for doing so from the God.⁷¹ In *Philosophical Fragment*’s fifth chapter, Climacus describes this process as involving an occasion for belief. By means of some occasion for belief, such as hearing a report that “in such and such a year the god appeared in the humble form of a servant, lived and taught among us, and then died,” a person could come to belief by receiving the condition for belief from the God.⁷² Since God’s action in providing the follower with the condition is decisive for a person to come

⁷⁰ Jacob Howland, *Kierkegaard and Socrates: A Study of Philosophy and Faith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 146-147.

⁷¹ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 64.

⁷² Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 104.

to faith, being eternally occupied with the incarnation cannot involve seeking out occasions for coming to faith. There may be other reasons for studying the historical event of the incarnation, but these follow from faith rather than preceding it.

With this negative account of the life of faith in hand, we are in a position to draw some tentative conclusions about *Philosophical Fragments*' contributions to a Kierkegaardian philosophy of time. We have seen that Climacus connects our relationship with time to ethical concerns such as our eternal happiness. For those who affirm the B hypothesis, happiness involves living the life of faith by being eternally occupied with the historical existence of the incarnation. However, it is not yet clear what being eternally occupied with the historical existence of the incarnation entails. So while Climacus's metaphysical understanding of time corroborated that of Haufniensis, his ethical account of our attitudes towards time has only presented us with additional problems. While Haufniensis argued that we are necessarily oriented towards the future, Climacus seems to claim that through their eternal occupation with the incarnation, Christians are also directed towards the past. Does the combination of these pseudonyms entail a Janus-faced perspective, in which one is both looking forward and looking backward? If so, can we square these features of our attitudes towards time with Kierkegaard's warnings against double-mindedness and exhortations that purity of heart is to will one thing? I will address these questions in the remaining chapters of this dissertation. For now, I conclude that despite its many contributions to Kierkegaard's philosophy of time, we must go further than *Philosophical Fragments* in order to determine what being eternally occupied with the incarnation involves—i.e. to develop a Kierkegaardian account of our attitudes towards time.

Since my project demands going beyond *Philosophical Fragments*, I will defend the necessity of doing so by devoting the remainder of this chapter to showing that readings of *Philosophical Fragments* (or Kierkegaard's philosophy of time more broadly construed) that claim to provide comprehensive accounts of Kierkegaard's understanding of time do not succeed. If these accounts do not provide us with a comprehensive understanding of Kierkegaard's philosophy of time, we must go further than *Philosophical Fragments* in order to develop such an account. As I have discussed, the absence of any explanation for being eternally occupied with the incarnation in *Philosophical Fragments* provides one reason why we need to go further within Kierkegaard's authorship. The lack of an adequate reading of Kierkegaard's philosophy of time on the basis of *Philosophical Fragments* presents another reason. To defend this claim, I will survey both theological and non-theological readings of *Philosophical Fragments* that claim to be comprehensive.

3.5 Against Wholly Theological Readings of *Philosophical Fragments*

Since *Philosophical Fragments* relates time to human happiness, some readers locate Kierkegaard's account of our attitudes towards time in this text. Often these readings are theological, relying on Climacus's discussion of the incarnation to guide those attitudes. For example, Peder Jothen claims that Christ is decisive for our understanding of the past, present, and future. Jothen cites *Philosophical Fragments* (among other texts) to support this thoroughly theological account of our attitudes towards time. Climacus describes Christ's incarnation as occurring through divine

love.⁷³ In the present, we are called to the happy passion of faith.⁷⁴ In the future, we are called to be imitators of Christ.⁷⁵ Thus, for Jøthen, Kierkegaard's theology provides a sufficient explanation of how we ought to relate to the past, present, and future.

Reading *Philosophical Fragments* as proffering a theological account of our attitudes towards time faces both methodological and exegetical obstacles. Neither of these obstacles are necessarily insurmountable for theological readings of *Philosophical Fragments*. But since my goal is only to motivate reading more of Kierkegaard's authorship in search of his fully developed account of our attitudes towards time, I do not need to show that a theological reading of time in *Philosophical Fragments* is impossible. I only need to motivate looking elsewhere within the Kierkegaardian corpus for Kierkegaard's account of those attitudes. I will discuss the methodological and exegetical obstacles in turn.

Theological readings of time in *Philosophical Fragments* like that of Jøthen rely on the B-hypothesis. Yet this reliance does not take into account the hypothetical nature of Climacus's project. Merold Westphal argues that the hypothetical nature of Climacus's project is an important aspect of Climacus's methodology. Specifically, Westphal claims that Climacus's repeated use of "if" while setting up his thought experiment demonstrates that we should read Climacus as a phenomenologist rather than a theologian. Westphal appeals to Jean-Luc Marion's work in distinguishing between phenomenology and theology. For Marion, a phenomenologist describes the structure of

⁷³ Peder Jøthen, *Kierkegaard, Aesthetics, and Selfhood: The Art of Subjectivity* (Farnham, Surrey; Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 103; *Philosophical Fragments* 32.

⁷⁴ Jøthen, 107; *Philosophical Fragments*, 59.

⁷⁵ Jøthen, 107; *Philosophical Fragments*, 36.

possible experiences while a theologian, “on the basis of faith, affirms the reality of what the experience refers to or purports to present.” Westphal notes that Climacus conducts his thought experiment hypothetically, flagging the bracketed and conditional nature of his project through the repeated use of “if.”⁷⁶ If Climacus (or Kierkegaard writing as Climacus) were writing as a theologian, he would not need to bracket his project.

Reading *Philosophical Fragments* as presenting us with a theological account of our attitudes towards time does not take into account the phenomenological and hypothetical nature of Climacus’s project. Of course, as Westphal notes, Climacus “cheats” by inserting Christian theological concepts into his phenomenological project. Nevertheless, Climacus’s project remains more phenomenological than theological. If Climacus’s project were at heart theological, there would be no need for Climacus’s arguments for why the god must have chosen to pursue union (with humans) through descent.⁷⁷ Since these features of Climacus’s project are at most phenomenological parallels to theological arguments rather than mere reiterations of theological arguments, we should not view Climacus primarily as a theologian and certainly not exclusively as a theologian.

In addition to responding to the methodological obstacle, theological readings of *Philosophical Fragments* must also provide an adequate exegesis of its text. One important exegetical issue is relating Climacus’s theological (or, in light of the forgoing discussion, phenomenological) claims to his anthropological and ethical conclusions. In order for a wholly theological reading of *Philosophical Fragments* to succeed in providing us with Kierkegaard’s view of our attitudes towards time, it must account for

⁷⁶ Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard’s Concept of Faith* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI, 2014), 126 fn 5.

⁷⁷ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 26-32.

the key features of Climacus's account. One key feature of Climacus's account is that the event of the incarnation can unsettle as well as comfort. In order for a wholly theological interpretation of Kierkegaard's view of time to succeed, it must consider the ways in which the incarnation makes our relation to time more difficult. In the remainder of this section, I will show how Climacus's discussion of the incarnation complicates rather than clarifies our attitudes towards time. This discussion will serve two purposes: to show that the extant wholly theological readings of *Philosophical Fragment*'s understanding of time are inadequate, and to identify further features of our attitudes towards time that a fully developed Kierkegaardian account of time must address.

Climacus claims that the event of the incarnation can terrify those who affirm the B hypothesis. In Chapter Two, Climacus argues that unity between the god and the humans god loves "must be attempted" by God's descent into human form (i.e. through the incarnation).⁷⁸ Unlike merely human teachers like Socrates who can disguise themselves in order to talk with those who are not their equals, God is able to actually become a human servant. If the event of the incarnation were dramatic—e.g. the mountains trembling upon hearing the divine voice—it would be terrifying for those who heard it. But Climacus claims that it would be even more terrifying to sit with the god as an equal. Theological readings that do not take into account the terror that accompanies the incarnation thus do not capture the full extent of Climacus's view. A robust account of Kierkegaard's understanding of time must consider how close the understanding (when considering the incarnation) is "at every moment to the border of

⁷⁸ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 31.

misunderstanding when the anxieties of guilt disturb the peace of love.”⁷⁹ Readers like Jothen emphasize “the peace of love” at the expense of deemphasizing anxiety. But instead of clarifying our attitudes towards time, the event of the incarnation makes those attitudes more difficult.

Alongside addressing the fact that the incarnation can be terrifying rather than bringing peace to those who affirm the B hypothesis, Climacus also addresses the attitudes towards time of those who remain in the A hypothesis. For these persons, the event of the incarnation did not, has not, and will never have existed. Accordingly, no particular event serves as the occasion for acquiring happiness. In fact, those who affirm the A hypothesis think that it is a jest or foolishness to view one particular event in time as especially significant. Alternatively, the person operating according to the A hypothesis might view the event as “continually pending: one *waits and watches*, and the moment is supposed to be *something of great importance, worth watching for*.”⁸⁰ Strikingly, we can map these alternatives on to the intuitions about time with which our study began. The person for whom no event is especially significant might, like Parfit’s character Timeless, prefer to focus on the present or past rather than the future. By contrast, the person for whom the events of great significance are always in the future can be characterized as being focused on the future like the philosophers of time that Parfit criticizes. Kierkegaard (through Climacus) thus anticipates contemporary discussions

⁷⁹ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 34-35.

⁸⁰ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 52. This understanding of time resembles those of Jacques Derrida and John Caputo, each of whom emphasizes the eschatological event as something that is always already to come, but never arrives. See, for example, John Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutic: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 165-171. George Pattison notes that Kierkegaard himself may anticipate this sort of deconstructive messianicity in his discussion of Anna’s expectant hope in *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*. See George Pattison, *Eternal God/Saving Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 267.

within the philosophy of time. He also considers the attitudes towards time held by everyone—not only those who affirm the B hypothesis. From Climacus's analysis of the attitudes towards time espoused by those in the A hypothesis, we can conclude that one's stance on the event of the incarnation has broad implications for everyone's understanding of temporality, regardless of whether they affirm the A or B hypothesis.

Theological approaches to *Philosophical Fragments* must also address the attitudes towards time of those who remain in the A hypothesis. By focusing on Christ as affecting our attitudes towards time, readings like Jøthen's neglect the attitudes towards time of those who do not know of or are offended by the incarnation. It is not enough to claim that the event of the incarnation shapes our understanding of the past, present, and future. We must work out *how* this event influences our understanding of the past, present and future. Furthermore, as Climacus notes, the incarnation can be a source of terror as well as peace. An adequate theological account of Kierkegaard's view of our attitudes towards time must address this terror also.

In this section, I have criticized theological readings of *Philosophical Fragments* like that of Jøthen for three significant problems. First, any reading of Kierkegaard's philosophy of time must attend to Kierkegaard's methodology. We cannot simply choose to read a phenomenological text theologically—we must attend to the experimental and hypothetical way Kierkegaard's pseudonyms proceed. Second, an adequate Kierkegaardian view of our attitudes towards time must address the terror that can accompany the revelation of the incarnation. Finally, a Kierkegaardian philosophy of time must also consider the attitudes towards time espoused by those who do not believe in the significance of the incarnation. That is, it must attend to atheologies and those who

are non-theists as well as Kierkegaard's theology. Given these deficiencies with relying a wholly theological reading, theological readers of the *Philosophical Fragments* should agree with my proposal that we look beyond Climacus's text in search of a better understanding of Kierkegaard's understanding of time.

3.6 *Against Wholly Non-theological Readings of Philosophical Fragments*

Like their theological counterparts, non-theological readers of *Philosophical Fragments* attempt to provide comprehensive accounts of Kierkegaard's understanding of time in *Philosophical Fragments*. For example, Jamie Aroosi argues that *Philosophical Fragments* shows that "all symbolic representation, the very building blocks of thought ... necessarily fall short when they try and explain time." Drawing on de Silentio's discussion of Heraclitus, he argues that since we experience time as a Heraclitean flux, the static symbols we use to represent time are insufficient to represent it. So we are epistemologically incapable of adequately understanding time.⁸¹ Michael O'Neill Burns proffers a different but related criticism of our attempts to understand Kierkegaard's metaphysics of time. Drawing on idealists like Schelling, Burns interprets Kierkegaard's metaphysics as upholding "the necessity of presupposing a primary ontological event that remains forever beyond the recuperative activity of logical reflection." For Burns's Kierkegaard, time is not unknowable on account of our inability to symbolically represent time. Instead, our understanding of time is necessarily limited because "there is no underlying structure or meaning that we could ever access." Burns concludes that "there is no higher order necessity existing outside of, or before, our experience of

⁸¹ Jamie Aroosi, "Freedom and the Temporality of Despair," in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2014*, Ed. Heiko Schulz, Jon Stewart, and Karl Verstrynge, Walter DeGruyter: Berlin, 2014, 217-229, 226.

actuality.”⁸² On this view, our understanding of time will always be lacking because time is fundamentally inaccessible to us. So the lack is metaphysical rather than epistemological. If the arguments of authors like Aroosi and Burns are correct, Kierkegaardian texts like *Philosophical Fragments* will not provide us with insights into Kierkegaard’s metaphysics of time. I will argue that each of these approaches proves unsatisfying in turn.

Against Aroosi’s claim that we are epistemologically unable to understand time, I argue that Climacus thinks that we can understand time with reference to eternity. Aroosi claims that we are unable to understand time because “what characterizes time is *uncertainty*” and “what characterizes time is change, the very change of coming into existence.”⁸³ On his view, these characteristics of time prevent us from being able to understand time. He thinks that because we ourselves are temporal, the static language we use in our discourse about time necessarily betrays the uncertainty of time.⁸⁴ Like Aroosi, I think that the change of coming into existence is centrally important for Kierkegaard’s philosophy of time. I discussed the importance of this change for Kierkegaard’s understanding of time in the first section of this chapter. I further agree with many of the conclusions that Aroosi draws from our inability to adequately capture our experience of time in language, such as his claim that we should focus on the ways that humans understand time rather than abstract metaphysics.⁸⁵ Where Aroosi’s account and my own differ is in his claim that the uncertainty of our experience of time

⁸² Burns, 40.

⁸³ Aroosi, 226, emphasis in the original.

⁸⁴ Aroosi, 227.

⁸⁵ Aroosi, 228.

renders us completely unable to explain time. As Kierkegaard's pseudonym Haufniensis claims in *The Concept of Anxiety*, time can be understood with reference to eternity and to the moment. The annulled succession of eternity provides stability to the ever-vanishing temporal present when eternity and time meet in the moment. So while Aroosi is correct to say that we cannot explain time as such, it does not follow that we are unable to speak about time with reference to other concepts like eternity. Accordingly, we should not view texts like *Philosophical Fragments* as having nothing to contribute to our metaphysical understanding of time.

Whereas Aroosi thinks we should abandon a Kierkegaardian philosophy of time for epistemological reasons, Burns claims that Kierkegaard's metaphysics involves a fundamental absence or lack. He bases this Schellingian interpretation of Kierkegaard on (among other passages) Haufniensis's claim in *The Concept of Anxiety* that anxiety is about nothing.⁸⁶ For Burns, this nothing is the absence of any metaphysical underlying structure or meaning disclosed to us by our experience of anxiety.⁸⁷ "The point is not that there is some consistent and reasonable structure which forever transcends our knowing ... but rather that there is no consistent and absolute structure to be known in the first place."⁸⁸ If Burns's interpretation is correct, then we should not read Kierkegaard in search of positive metaphysical insights.

While Burns's reading of Kierkegaard exhibits an admirable fidelity to both Kierkegaard's idealist and systematic philosophical predecessors, my approach to anxiety

⁸⁶ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 96.

⁸⁷ Burns, 40.

⁸⁸ Burns, 63.

in Kierkegaard's understanding of time differs in two ways. First, as I discussed in Chapter Two, Haufniensis's claim that anxiety is about nothing should be read alongside his claim that anxiety is about the future.⁸⁹ As I have argued, anxiety is about the future because on Kierkegaard's view, the future does not exist. In Climacus's terms, the future has not yet come into existence. If anxiety is about the non-existent future rather than about nothing as such, we need not view Kierkegaard's metaphysics of time as involving the absence of metaphysical structure. Second, I agree with Burn's claim that for Kierkegaard "there is no higher order necessity existing outside of, or before, our experience of actuality."⁹⁰ However, my agreement does not force me to abandon my reading of Kierkegaard as proffering us a metaphysics of time. On my account, Kierkegaard, views eternity as real. However, the possibilities in eternity do not exist. As *Philosophical Fragment's* "Interlude" claims, only things that have come into existence, e.g. possibilities that have become actual, exist. Burn's claim that no higher order exists outside of our experiences in time is true because eternity has not come into existence in time. Eternity is real but does not exist. Furthermore, eternity is the realm of possibilities. Thus, for Kierkegaard eternity is not a higher order necessity, but it is of a different order than the temporal order of actualized possibilities that we experience. Accordingly, we can incorporate many of Burns's insights into Kierkegaard while still reading Kierkegaard's texts as contributing to a positive understanding of time.

Like the wholly theological readings, non-theological comprehensive readings of Kierkegaard's philosophy of time like those of Aroosi and Burns should not convince us

⁸⁹ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 91.

⁹⁰ Burns, 40.

to stop reading Kierkegaard's texts in search of metaphysical insights. Neither Aroosi nor Burns intend that we cease reading Kierkegaard as such. We share the view that Kierkegaard's epistemological and metaphysical claims are meant to inform Kierkegaard's ethical and political arguments. But each of these authors proffers a reading of Kierkegaard that is comprehensive enough to exclude my project of explicating Kierkegaard's understanding of time. I have argued that, despite their insights into Kierkegaard, my project is both possible and desirable. I will conclude by arguing that we must move beyond *Philosophical Fragments*—and indeed the pseudonymous authorship—in order to develop the ethical implications of Kierkegaard's metaphysical understanding of time.

3.7 Conclusion

Combining *The Concept of Anxiety* and *Philosophical Fragments* in search of Kierkegaard's philosophy of time has provided us with metaphysical answers but produced ethical questions. The former text claims that we are necessarily oriented towards the future. But the latter text argues that those who affirm the B hypothesis should be oriented towards the historical event of the incarnation—an event that is long past. So these texts seem to present conflicting views of our attitudes towards time. While there are some resources within these texts that we might develop in search of an answer, it will be more fruitful to look elsewhere in the Kierkegaardian corpus in search of a resolution.

A peculiar passage from *Philosophical Fragments* might direct us to other Kierkegaardian texts that could help us understand Kierkegaard's view of our attitudes towards time. In Climacus's discussion of the god taking on the form of the servant, he

characterizes the incarnation as possessing an unusual attitude towards many human concerns, including time. Climacus asks “Is it right for a human being to be as carefree as the bird and not even fly hither and thither for food as the bird does? Should he [the incarnation] not even think of tomorrow?” In light of the foregoing discussion of our attitudes towards time, we might view this question as asking ‘Should the incarnation resist our necessary orientation towards the future?’ After asking this question, Climacus extends it from the incarnation to others by asking “May a human being express the same thing?” That is, might other humans imitate the incarnation’s attitude towards time? He answers “Yes, if he [some other human being] is capable of it, he may also do it.”⁹¹ So Climacus thinks that at least some humans can imitate the incarnation’s example. While most of the subsequent discussion of imitating the incarnation’s example involves imitating the incarnation’s apparent disregard for goods like food and drink, one element of imitating the incarnation here is imitating the incarnation’s attitudes towards time.⁹² So Kierkegaard’s discussions of “not thinking about tomorrow” might help us resolve the apparent disagreement between *The Concept of Anxiety* and *Philosophical Fragment*’s accounts of our attitudes towards time.

As his invocation of the bird in the above passage from Climacus indicates, Kierkegaard often considers “not thinking about tomorrow” in his discussions of the

⁹¹ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 57.

⁹² Other commentators have remarked on Climacus’s striking claim that some humans are capable of imitating the incarnation. However, these commentators have not emphasized the temporal aspects of Climacus’s claim. Benjamin Daise highlights the transformation involved in imitating the incarnation. Daise is skeptical of this sense of becoming Christ-like, saying that someone who does would “turn away from even worrying about tomorrow.” See Benjamin Daise, *Kierkegaard’s Socratic Art* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1999), 105-106. By contrast, Jacob Howland portrays Socrates as an example of someone who has (for the most part) successfully imitated the incarnation’s apparent disregard for goods like food and drink. See Howland, 141-144.

passage about the lily and the bird from the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew. While the lily and the bird are often seen as addressing worldly concerns like the accumulation of goods, one of their key features is that they do not worry about the future. If, as Climacus suggests, we can be like the incarnation (and the bird) in not worrying about tomorrow, Kierkegaard's frequent discussions of the lily and the bird might provide the key to his understanding of our attitudes towards time. I will pursue this line of inquiry by considering Kierkegaard's signed discussions of the lily and the bird in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

Philosophizing about Time with the Lily and the Bird

At this point, our inquiry into Kierkegaard's philosophy of time has raised more questions than it has answered. We began with Derek Parfit's formulation of the conflict between our orientation towards the future and our desire to live in the present. Chapter Two's discussion of *The Concept of Anxiety* demonstrated that Kierkegaard is committed to the necessity of focusing on the future. This commitment provided a preliminary response to Parfit's criticism of focusing on the future. Yet we were left with the question of how Kierkegaard thinks we should relate to time given this orientation towards the future. Chapter Three's treatment of *Philosophical Fragments* further complicated Kierkegaard's philosophy of time. Those who affirm the B-hypothesis—i.e. Christianity—must be eternally occupied with the incarnation. Since the incarnation is for most followers in the past, this feature of the B-hypothesis entails that many will be oriented towards a past event. How are we to adjudicate between our necessary orientation towards the future, the Christian's occupation with a past event, and the desire to live in the present?

In this chapter, I will develop a Kierkegaardian answer to this question through discussing what I take to be Kierkegaard's most thorough account of how we should relate to time: his signed discourses on the lily and the bird. Since most readers of Kierkegaard's signed authorship emphasize other texts, I will begin by defending my emphasis on the lily and the bird as teachers. I will first briefly survey approaches to

Kierkegaard's philosophy of time in the signed authorship. Then I will present my reading of *Christian Discourses*' account of how we should relate to time. In Chapter Five, I will discuss the implications of Kierkegaard's account of our attitudes towards time for our understanding of temporally-oriented virtues, like hope.

4.1 Two Approaches to Time in the Signed Authorship

In Chapter Three, I argued that since the pseudonymous texts containing Kierkegaard's philosophy of time do not provide an adequate account of that philosophy, we should consider the philosophy of time in Kierkegaard's signed authorship. This task poses challenges of its own. Scholars agree that *The Concept of Anxiety* and *Philosophical Fragments* are the most significant pseudonymous texts for Kierkegaard's philosophy of time. By contrast, there is little agreement about which of Kierkegaard's signed texts are most significant for his philosophy of time. Consequently, we must consider several scholarly approaches to the signed authorship. Each of these approaches emphasizes the same tension between time and eternity that we have already seen in the previous two chapters' discussion of the pseudonymous authorship. They differ, however, in the way they respond to this tension.

Some readers view Kierkegaard's signed authorship as emphasizing eternity at the expense of time. Paul Martens and Tom Millay exemplify this approach, drawing on the opposition between the temporal and the eternal that Kierkegaard employs in *The Moment* and throughout the upbuilding discourses.¹ From the former text, Martens and Millay take Kierkegaard's claim that "the earnestness of the religious life" is directed

¹ Paul Martens and Tom Millay, "'The Changelessness of God' as Kierkegaard's Final Theodicy: God and the Gift of Suffering," *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, Volume 13, Number 2, (2011): 187.

towards the other life and other world—i.e. eternity—rather than in the temporal world.²

They treat Kierkegaard's discussion of time elsewhere in the signed authorship as an elaboration on this claim. For example, from the upbuilding discourses they glean Kierkegaard's insight that "faith consists in trusting that any situation, regardless of the character, comes from above and is a good gift that is beneficial in eternity."³ Thus, on Martens and Millay's account, our attitudes towards time should mirror the opposition between the temporal and the eternal. We should view events in time as producing value in eternity rather than in time.

George Pattison's reading of the pseudonymous authorship also emphasizes eternity over time, though his approach seeks to minimize the tension between the two. Like Martens and Millay, Pattison reads Kierkegaard's signed authorship as emphasizing eternity. However, unlike Martens and Millay, he does not view eternity as detracting from time. For example, he argues that "expectation serves not to distract the self from the present but to give it consistency in and through time."⁴ Pattison's account of expectation emphasizes our present temporal hopes for eternity. In the most comprehensive treatment of the anthropology set out in Kierkegaard's upbuilding or devotional writings, Pattison claims that our attitude towards time ought to be one of patient expectation. "Becoming patient is how we combine the temporal and the eternal in existence, humbling ourselves under the incompleteness of time by virtue of the power of the eternal." Patience allows us to resolve the tension between time and eternity. So

² Martens and Millay, 181. See Søren Kierkegaard, *The Moment and Late Writings*, Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998, 369.

³ Martens and Millay, 184.

⁴ George Pattison, *Eternal God/Saving Time*, 267.

we might think that Pattison's account allows us to affirm both time and eternity. But it does not. On Pattison's account, patience is "qualified by a future-directed orientation that [Kierkegaard] calls 'expectation.'" Although patience allows us to combine the temporal and the eternal, Pattison sees our expectation for eternity as more fundamental. For Kierkegaard "temporal beings such as we are will best relate to the eternal as it is revealed in our concern for what is to come, since it is in our concern for what we are to be or to become that we raise ourselves above the merely transient moment."⁵ Accordingly, we can view Pattison as, like Martens and Millay, emphasizing Kierkegaard's understanding of eternity.

A second group of readers views Kierkegaard's signed authorship as preserving the tension between time and eternity. By contrast with the first group of readers, this second group reads Kierkegaard as affirming both eternity and time (rather than emphasizing the former). The work of Christophe Bouton exemplifies this second approach. Bouton describes Kierkegaard's account of our attitudes towards time and eternity as conflicting with each other. Bouton initially casts Kierkegaard as unifying time and eternity: "only when we have conquered it [the future], only then are we able to return to the present, only then do our lives find meaning in it."⁶ Conquering the future requires faith in divine providence. However, faith is, as Kierkegaard reminds us elsewhere, the task of a lifetime. After providing an account of faith as connecting eternity with time, Bouton considers the question of whether "eternity retains a discrete

⁵ George Pattison, *Eternal God/Saving Time*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, 270.

⁶ Christophe Bouton, *Time and Freedom*, trans. Christopher Macann (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2014), 133.

primacy” in Kierkegaard’s account.⁷ If Kierkegaard actually emphasizes eternity over temporality, Bouton’s emphasis on the tension between time and eternity is misplaced. In light of this concern, Bouton proposes that readers of Kierkegaard should abandon his emphasis on eternity and instead rely on what Kierkegaard has to say about temporality alone.⁸ While this wholly immanent approach to Kierkegaard is gaining in momentum among some of Kierkegaard’s readers, it has little to offer our project of understanding what Kierkegaard has to say about time and eternity.⁹ So we should stick to Bouton’s initial approach, which seeks to preserve the tension between time and eternity in Kierkegaard’s account. It does not provide any resolution—wholly immanent or otherwise—for that tension.

Like Bouton, Anthony Rudd argues for retaining the tension between time and eternity. Rudd relies on Climacus’s exhortation that an individual should relate “absolutely to [the] absolute telos and relatively to the relative.”¹⁰ That is, an individual should approach her future life in eternity as supremely important, while viewing her present life in time as less important accordingly.¹¹ This requires the individual to be oriented towards both the future and the present. As in Bouton’s account, this dual

⁷ Bouton, 139.

⁸ Bouton, 140.

⁹ For other authors proffering wholly immanent readings of Kierkegaard’s authorship, see Alison Assiter, *Kierkegaard, Metaphysics, and Political Theory*, London: Continuum, 2009; Michael O’Neill Burns, *Kierkegaard and the Matter of Philosophy: A Fractured Dialectic*, London: Rowan and Littlefield, 2015; Mark Dooley, *The Politics of Exodus*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2001; and Steven Shakespeare, *Kierkegaard and the Refusal of Transcendence*, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

¹⁰ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996, 407, quoted in Rudd, Kierkegaard on Patience and the Self: The Virtues of a Being in Time,” *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 36.3: 491-509,502.

¹¹ Rudd, “Kierkegaard on Patience,” 503.

orientation results in a conflict: “My relation to the eternal is constituted by God’s continuing grace; but I need to struggle to remain constantly aware of and grateful for that grace.”¹² Rudd views this constant struggle between orientation towards temporality and eternity as necessary for coherent selfhood.

Another group of readers pursues a broadly ethical approach to Kierkegaard’s philosophy of time. Authors like Daniel Brinkerhoff, Roe Fremstedal, David Kangas, John Lippitt, and Robert Roberts highlight Kierkegaard’s account of hope and expectation, as disclosed by texts like *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*. Rather than working backwards from eternity like readers from the first two groups do, these authors work forward. They focus on how we should hope for the future rather than discussing the future as such. Since these authors emphasize the ethical implications of our understanding of time rather than that understanding itself, I will consider them in the next chapter, in which I propose a new reading of Kierkegaard’s view of hope.

In the remainder of this section, I will address the first two approaches to Kierkegaard’s philosophy of time in the signed authorship. I argue that key passages in the signed authorship suggest that we should not read that authorship as exclusively emphasizing eternity at the expense of time or the tension between time and eternity. Despite the benefits proffered by these approaches, neither fully captures Kierkegaard’s account of our attitudes towards time. If we focus on the eternal at the expense of the temporal, pace Martens and Millay, we must renounce both our occupation with the past event of the incarnation and our desire to live in the present. Martens and Millay anticipate this sort of objection by discussing criticisms of Kierkegaard aimed at his

¹² Rudd, “Kierkegaard on Patience,” 502.

rejection of worldly goods.¹³ However, my objection is different from these criticisms of Kierkegaard as anti-worldly. I argue that Martens's and Millay's account conflicts with temporal attitudes that Kierkegaard elsewhere is committed to affirming, e.g. the faithful Christian's eternal occupation with the events of the incarnation. Accordingly, we must find a way to reconcile Kierkegaard's emphasis on eternity—which Martens and Millay rightly recount—with his emphases on the present (as in *The Concept of Anxiety*) and past events (such as the past event of the incarnation).

Alternatively, if we follow Bouton and Rudd in emphasizing the irresolvable tension between time and eternity, this tension does not in itself direct our attitudes towards the past, present, and future. In fact, emphasizing the tension between time and eternity raises further questions about how we should relate to the past, present and future. How does the Christian's eternal occupation with the past event of the incarnation affect her religious expectations for eternity? Must we renounce our desires for the present moment in order to be properly expectant? Finally, how do our hopes for eternity affect our expectations of our proximate earthly futures? Bouton et al provide no answers to these questions. Appealing to the tension between time and eternity as the central contribution of the signed authorship to Kierkegaard's understanding of time thus does not solve the problems concerning our attitudes towards time that Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authorship raises.

4.2 *A Third Approach to our Temporal Attitudes*

We have seen that emphasizing eternity or retaining the tension between time and eternity have not resolved the problems about time that Kierkegaard's authorships

¹³ Martens and Millay 182-183.

consider. In this section, I will consider an alternative approach. Several authors have argued that for Kierkegaard, our attitudes towards time must affirm both our focus on the future and our desire to live in the present. Like me, they draw on Kierkegaard's signed authorship in general and the lily and the bird texts in particular. I will consider their readings of Kierkegaard before providing my own interpretation.

Louis Dupré's essay on time and eternity in Kierkegaard shows how considering Kierkegaard's discussion of the lily and the bird can provide a more harmonious account of our attitudes towards time. Dupré argues that at least some people can both focus on the future while striving to live in the present. On his reading, people focus on the future in order to contemplate the eternal. At this point we might think that Dupré affirms a reading of Kierkegaard that emphasizes the eternal and/or eschatological future. But based on his reading of Kierkegaard's discussion of the Lily and the Bird, Dupré shows that we need not focus on the future at the expense of the present. Dupré writes that "The eternal lies indeed, also in the future, but it can be attained only through an intensive consciousness of the present. It becomes most manifest in the lasting presentness which man experiences at the privileged moments of his existence."¹⁴ Though Dupré elsewhere claims that the eternal take precedence over the temporal, he thinks that the two need not conflict.¹⁵ In fact, the intensive consciousness of the present that Dupré describes produces joy in those who experience it. "Joy consists in being fully present to oneself, in truth 'being today.'"¹⁶ Dupré thus proffers a very different account of Kierkegaard's

¹⁴ Dupré, 171.

¹⁵ Dupré, 174.

¹⁶ Dupré, 171.

view of our attitudes towards time than both that of Parfit and those we have considered earlier in this chapter. Like Parfit, Dupré emphasizes living in the present. However, for Dupré we can most fully live in the present by focusing on the eternal as it is disclosed to us in the future.

Gregor Malantschuk's *Kierkegaard's Concept of Existence* also describes Kierkegaard as harmonizing temporality and eternity. Malantschuk claims that through a personal relationship with God, the individual is able to express the eternal within the temporal. He bases this reading primarily on Johannes de Silentio's account of the single individual in *Fear and Trembling*. On Malantschuk's reading, when someone becomes a single individual through faith, "the possibility of the eternal" in that person is what raises the individual "over the transitory being of the race." As we will see, Krishek and Furtak expand upon Malantschuk's account by emphasizing the work of the single individual rather than through faith becoming a single individual. But like Krishek and Furtak, Malantschuk thinks that human lives can, however imperfectly, incorporate the eternal in the temporal.¹⁷

Krishek and Furtak corroborate Dupré's harmonizing account of Kierkegaard's view of our attitudes towards time. They read Kierkegaard's discussion of the lily and the bird as showing how our worries prompt the apparent conflict between our focus on the future and our desire to live in the present. Kierkegaard describes the lily and the bird (specifically a wood dove, so as to distinguish the worried bird from the bird described in Matthew 6) as suffering horrific fates when their concern for the future detracts from

¹⁷ Gregor Malantschuk, *Kierkegaard's Concept of Existence* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2003), 192-193.

their present happiness.¹⁸ Based on these stories, Krishek and Furtak proffer a Kierkegaardian account of worry as temporally-oriented. They write: “Legitimate concern for the future begins to become a problematic worry only when it turns into a wrongheaded focus on a potential deficiency that comes at the expense of appreciating what one has in the present.”¹⁹ Krishek and Furtak turn to de Silentio’s knight of faith to develop a response to this sort of worry. The knight of faith simultaneously resigns and affirms temporal goods. This faithful double movement allows the person of faith to overcome worry, thus regaining her legitimate concern for the future and appreciation of the present.²⁰ As in Dupré’s account, the lily and bird enable Krishek and Furtak to present Kierkegaard’s view of our attitudes towards time as harmonious rather than in tension.

My account of Kierkegaard’s attitudes towards time is inspired by but differs from those of Dupré, Malantschuk, and Krishek and Furtak. My view is similar to their interpretations in that I also view Kierkegaard as seeking to harmonize our attitudes towards the future and the present. I differ from these authors in seeking to give these discourses interpretive primacy (rather than reading them alongside other texts like *Fear and Trembling*). We should give these discourses this sort of central role within Kierkegaard’s philosophy of time for several reasons. First, the subject matter of these discourses is significant for considering our attitudes towards time. Second,

¹⁸ Sharon Krishek and Rick Furtak, “A cure for worry? Kierkegaardian faith and the insecurity of human existence,” *International Journal of the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 72, (2012): 161.

¹⁹ Krishek and Rick Furtak, 161-162.

²⁰ Krishek and Furtak, 166.

Kierkegaard's repeated publication of lily and bird discourses shows that he found them important. I will discuss these points in turn.

The lily and bird discourses are Kierkegaard's philosophical reflections on Matthew 6:24-34. In this text, Jesus describes the lilies in the field and the birds of the air as being fed and clothed by God, despite not working for or worrying out their sustenance. But God cares more about humans than about the lily and the bird. So humans ought to worry even less than the woriless lily and bird. This passage concludes with "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow: tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."²¹ The conclusion of the biblical passage serves as a springboard for Kierkegaard's reflections on our attitudes towards time. He emphasizes the temporal nature of worry, writing that "the worry about making a living is not the actual pressing need of the day today, but is the idea of a future need."²² Worries about the future can afflict even those whose present needs have been satisfied. Kierkegaard writes that "The person of foresight on earth learns from time to use time, and when he has his barn full [of food] from a *past* time and is provided for in the *present* time, he still takes care to sow seed for a future harvest so that in turn he can have his barn full for a *future* time."²³ Thus, temporal themes are central to the lily and bird discourses, and we should consider these discourses when developing Kierkegaard's philosophy of time.

While their content shows that the lily and bird discourses contribute to Kierkegaard's philosophy of time, their role in both authorships suggests their importance

²¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Vol. VX. Kierkegaard's Writings. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993, 159-160.

²² Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, 178.

²³ Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, 172.

in Kierkegaard's thought. Kierkegaard wrote several lily and bird discourses. Stephen Dunning chronicles the way in which the history of Kierkegaard's translation into English has obscured the lily and bird discourses' significance. Douglas V. Steere and David and Lilian Swenson's translations of "An Occasional Discourse" and *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* introduced Anglophone readers to Kierkegaard's meditations on Matthew 6. However, these translations minimized the significance of the lily and the bird discourses by including them within other texts. Consulting a standard list of English titles of Kierkegaard's works might thus lead one to believe that Kierkegaard only wrote about the lily and the bird once, in the 1849 text "What we Learn from the Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air" which was published in English as the first part of *Without Authority*. But as Dunning notes, Kierkegaard wrote about the lily and bird in 1847 as well as 1849.²⁴ So the Matthew 6 text is one to which Kierkegaard returned repeatedly. In the current English translations of Kierkegaard's works, lily and bird discourses appear in *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, *Christian Discourses*, *Without Authority*, and *Judge for Yourself!*. Furthermore, references to Matthew 6's parables of the lily and the bird appear throughout Kierkegaard's works. In Chapter Three, we saw that one such reference to the lily and bird appears in *Philosophical Fragments*, in a crucial passage concerning our attitudes towards the event of the incarnation. We can conclude from both the frequency of their occurrence and their content that the lily and bird discourses play a critical role in Kierkegaard's thought. Given that Kierkegaard wrote about the lily and bird frequently and at length, we should

²⁴ Stephen Dunning, "Transformed by the Gospel: What we Learn about the Stages from the Lilies and the Birds," in *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, Ed. Robert L. Perkins, International Kierkegaard Commentary, Vol. 15, (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2005): 111-112.

read these discourses in search of insights into Kierkegaard's philosophy of time rather than only reading them alongside other texts like *Fear and Trembling* (as Krishek and Furtak do).

Before we develop Kierkegaard's view of our attitudes towards time from the lily and bird discourses, let us consider why readers have minimized these texts' importance for Kierkegaard's philosophy of time. Some readers minimize the texts' significance by overemphasizing their non-philosophical elements. Pattison exemplifies this approach by identifying the lily and the bird with the poetic strand in Kierkegaard's writings.²⁵ By contrast, authors like Dupré and Krishek and Furtak minimize the lily and bird discourses by only reading the discourses alongside other texts by Kierkegaard or his pseudonyms. Perhaps this lack of emphasis is due to Kierkegaard's own claims about the lily and bird discourses. He writes in a journal entry that the lily and bird discourse develop "the conflict between poetry and Christianity."²⁶ So readers like Pattison have some justification for viewing the discourses as part of a poetic—or perhaps anti-poetic—strand within Kierkegaard's writings. But, as we will see, the lily and bird discourses are not only poetic.

Other readers, e.g. Daniel Marrs, minimize the importance of the lily and the bird by contrasting them with Christ. Kierkegaard writes that imitating the lily and bird differs from the imitation of Christ. Imitating Christ requires suffering, but imitating the lily and bird does not. Kierkegaard further claims that imitating the lily and bird without

²⁵ Pattison, *Eternal God/Saving Time*, 286-287.

²⁶ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, Vol. II, 1942 (*Pap.* VIII A 643), cited in Supplement to *Without Authority*, Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, 197-198.

also imitating Christ would result in “Jewish piety” rather than Christianity.²⁷ Marrs claims that this division between the lily and the bird on the one hand and Jesus Christ on the other shows that Kierkegaard thinks we must ultimately abandon the former for the sake of the latter.²⁸ But, as I will now argue, the lily and bird and Christ are not two opposing masters that we are forced to choose between. In the chronologically-latest lily and bird discourse, the posthumously published 1855 *Judge For Yourself!*, Kierkegaard explains the significance of the lily and bird discourses. He writes that Jesus commanded humans to consider the lily and the bird because contemplating and imitating Jesus could “become all too earnest, deadly with anxiety.” Since the lily and the bird do not appear to be serious, humans are able to contemplate and imitate them without fear.²⁹ As Marrs and other readers emphasize, imitating the lily and the bird is not the same thing as imitating Christ. Even so, imitating the lily and bird can direct people towards the imitation of Christ and the suffering this sort of imitation requires. As Kierkegaard notes, the lily and the bird do not have any authority of their own. They do not proffer something separate from Jesus’s commands.³⁰ Rather, Jesus—rather than the poets—commands us to consider them. Accordingly, they are not a rival master that we might serve rather than serving and imitating Christ. The lily and bird teach us to follow Jesus’s commands in a manner that is not deadly earnest—without emphasizing the suffering that the imitation of Christ ultimately requires. Accordingly, readers of

²⁷ Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, 178. See also Kierkegaard, *Judge For Yourself!*, 187.

²⁸ Daniel Marrs, “To Become Transfigured: Reconstructing Søren Kierkegaard’s Christological Anthropology,” Dissertation, Baylor University, 2015, 184-186.

²⁹ Kierkegaard, *Judge For Yourself!*, 179.

³⁰ Kierkegaard, *Judge For Yourself!*, 187.

Kierkegaard should associate his discussions of the lily and the bird with the divine command to consider the lily and the bird.³¹ The lily and the bird direct those who consider them towards the incarnation, and thus need not be abandoned for the sake of the imitation of Christ. They are not opposed to Christ, and not merely poetic.

In this section, we have considered approaches to Kierkegaard's view of our attitudes towards time that harmonize our focus on the future and our desire to live in the present. While these approaches tend to cite the lily and bird discourses, they—like other readers of Kierkegaard's philosophy of time—tend to minimize the significance of these discourses. But we have several reasons to emphasize these dialogues: their frequent and pivotal roles in Kierkegaard's writings and their content, which Kierkegaard treats almost as seriously as he treats other divine commands. So instead of minimizing the lily and bird discourses, we should emphasize them, especially when considering Kierkegaard's philosophy of time. In the next section, I will show how reading the lily and bird discourses by their own lights produces an account of Kierkegaard's view of our attitudes towards time that allows us to affirm both the future and the present.

4.3 The Lily and the Bird as Affirming Both Future and Present

Kierkegaard's discussion of the Lily and the Bird in *Christian Discourses* is the best place to consider the lily and bird's contributions to his philosophy of time. *Christian Discourses* is the most fitting text for this purpose because unlike the other lily and bird discourses it is divided into several sections, each devoted to specific human cares. In each section, he compares the lily and the bird with the Christian, who can

³¹ For more on Kierkegaard as a divine command theorist, see C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's Ethic of Love: Divine Commands and Moral Obligations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 112-139.

respond to or avoid these cares, and contrasts the lily and the bird with the pagan, who suffers from these cares. The salient care for our purposes is the care of self-torment. Self-torment is “care about the next day.” In caring about the next day, the worrier “completely forgets today in his concern for and preoccupation with the next day.” Thus, caring about tomorrow—the future—causes self-torment because it causes those who worry to forget today—the present. Kierkegaard distinguishes care about the next day from care for today. Following Matthew 6, he thinks each day has troubles of its own. Accordingly, Kierkegaard writes “trouble and today correspond to each other; self-torment and the next day also go together.” When someone attends only to the troubles of today, she—like the lily and the bird—does not suffer from the care of self-torment. By contrast, when someone cares about tomorrow in addition to today, he causes himself to suffer from self-torment.³² Furthermore, those who suffer from self-torment might not be worried about the literal next day. Kierkegaard claims that most people are “several generations ahead of themselves.”³³ But all those who suffer from the care of self-torment are worried about the future.

At this point in *Christian Discourses*, Kierkegaard seems to be adopting Parfit’s view of our attitudes towards time by identifying self-torment as being caused by our bias towards the future. If worry about tomorrow is self-torment, why should we focus on the future? We could avoid self-torment by striving to live in the present, as Parfit on some occasion seems to suggest. On Kierkegaard’s view, we need not go so far. Kierkegaard

³² Søren Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses; The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Vol. XVII. Kierkegaard’s Writings. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 70.

³³ Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, 73-74.

does not think we should abandon our focus on the future as such. We need only to respond to the troubles of today rather than supplementing them by also caring about the next day. Our responses to the troubles we are given today can include preparing for the next day. Suppose that one of the tasks that I need to do today is preparing for the classes that I will teach tomorrow. In this case, preparing for the classes is only a trouble for me today. However, if I worry about the classes I will teach tomorrow, I am inflicting self-torment on myself. Thus, Kierkegaard's distinction between the troubles of today and care about the next day does not commit him to a view like Parfit's.

Kierkegaard's distinction between the troubles of today and care about the next day may remind us of Haufniensis's claim in *The Concept of Anxiety* that "An accurate and correct linguistic usage therefore associates anxiety and the future."³⁴ Kierkegaard thinks that care for the next day can torment us, like Haufniensis thinks anxiety does.³⁵ But in the *Christian Discourses*, Kierkegaard goes further than Haufniensis's response to anxiety. Haufniensis only explores anxiety and shows how it might lead to faith. Through the lily and the bird—and a series of metaphors that illustrate Kierkegaard's positive account of our attitudes towards time—Kierkegaard provides us with a way to avoid suffering from the self-torment we inflict on ourselves. The lily and the bird, who introduce this section of *Christian Discourses*, do not have the care of self-torment. Unlike a human, the bird has no self.³⁶ Since it has no self, it cannot torment itself by worrying about the future. The bird teaches us to avoid worrying about the next day by

³⁴ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 91.

³⁵ In fact, Kierkegaard closes "The Care of Self-Torment" by describing the bird—and the Christian who learns from the bird—as free from anxiety. See Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, 80.

³⁶ Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, 71.

helping us identify our worries about the next day as the source of our self-torment.

Once we have discovered the nature of our self-torment, we can respond to it.

After using the bird as an example of avoiding the care of self-torment, Kierkegaard uses several metaphors to show how humans might do likewise. The first of these metaphors is an actor who is blinded by the stage lighting and cannot see his audience. One might think that looking out and seeing only darkness might disturb the actor. But the opposite is the case. The illusion created by the lights supports the actor, whereas seeing some particular spectator in the audience would disturb him. After describing this actor, Kierkegaard writes: “So also with the next day. At times we lament and find it sad that the future lies so dark before us. Ah, the misfortune is precisely when it is not dark enough, when fear and presentiment and expectancy and earthly impatience catch a glimpse of the next day!”³⁷ The actor metaphor points us towards a response to the care of self-torment. Kierkegaard has already distinguished between the troubles of today and care about the next day. If, like the actor, we did not see—and thus, did not worry about—the next day, we could avoid the care of self-torment.

Kierkegaard’s second metaphor describes how we might refrain from caring about the next day. Upon reading the actor metaphor and Kierkegaard’s commentary on it, someone might reasonably respond by exclaiming that being like the actor is easier said than done. It is difficult to avoid seeing and caring about the worries of tomorrow in addition to the troubles we are given today. Kierkegaard’s second metaphor addresses this difficulty. He compares having an appropriate attitude towards time with the posture of a rower:

³⁷ Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, 73.

The one who rows a boat turns his back to the goal toward which he is working. So it is with the next day. When, with the help of the eternal, a person lives absorbed in today, he turns his back to the next day. The more he is eternally absorbed in today, the more decisively he turns his back to the next day; then he does not see it at all.³⁸

The rower aims his boat towards his destination—he is still working towards a future goal. However, he does not see that goal. Instead, he turns his back to it. Intensively focusing on rowing, his task in the present, allows him to progress towards his future goal. Thus, the rower exemplifies Kierkegaard's approach to our attitudes towards time—an approach that harmonizes the future and the present. Like the rower, we should progress towards the future by facing away from the future and focusing intensively on the present.

How is it possible for us to focus on today without worrying about tomorrow? Kierkegaard thinks that attending to the troubles of today is necessary to avoid the self-torment of worrying about tomorrow. The key is, following the Matthew 6 passage, to “let each day have trouble enough of its own.” Kierkegaard glosses this exhortation using the petitions of prayer that comprises Matthew 6:9-13—just a few lines before the Matthew 6 passage with which *Christian Discourses* begins. He writes “when the Christian works and when he prays, he speaks only of today: he prays for the daily bread *today*, for blessing upon his work *today*, to escape evil's snare *today*, to come closer to God's kingdom *today*.” In each case, the emphasis is on the present rather than the future.³⁹ Reorienting our attitudes towards time in this way thus requires changing the way in which we think and act so that we focus on our daily trouble rather than that we

³⁸ Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, 73.

³⁹ Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, 75.

will face in the future. People who are exclusively focused on the troubles of the present do not dwell on the future: “The Christian does not paint the devil on the wall, does not conjure up evil and temptation; he does not speak of the next day at all, but only of today.”⁴⁰ It is not enough to throw oneself into today’s work—one must do so without thinking of the work of tomorrow. But happily, since “each day has trouble enough of its own,” focusing on the present does not subject people to the care of self-torment like focusing on the future does.

Kierkegaard’s account of our attitudes towards time fits his metaphysical understanding of time. His exhortation to turn away from the future does not mean that the future lacks reality. As discussed in Chapter Two, Kierkegaard thinks that the future has reality but lacks existence until it is actualized in the present. We know from *The Concept of Anxiety* that Kierkegaard associates anxiety with the future, because the future has reality only as possibilities until it becomes actualized in the present.⁴¹ A person can avoid this anxiety—and the care of self-torment—by turning away from the future and focusing on the work she is given to do in the present. Importantly, not focusing on future troubles does not allow people to avoid those troubles. Future troubles must still be faced as they become present. But by avoiding anticipating future troubles, people can avoid the anxiety and self-torment that accompany this anticipation.

How is it possible for someone to live in the present without anticipating the future at all? The careful reader has noticed that my example of preparing for class involves at least some focus on the future. And often the work we do in the present

⁴⁰ Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, 75.

⁴¹ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 91.

involves the future, such as the farmer planting seeds that she will harvest later in the year. So what exactly does Kierkegaard's exhortation to turn away from the present mean? How might someone actually live this way?

A careful reading of the discourse on "The Care of Self-Torment" can help us understand how Kierkegaard's view is possible. Before introducing the rowboat metaphor, Kierkegaard describes two senses in which people can turn away from "the next day." The first sense is the literal senses that we have heretofore discussed. By turning away from the next day, a person can focus more intensely on today. A second sense of turning away follows from this first sense. Kierkegaard claims that someone who does not focus on the next day cares less about what that day will bring. "But if there is no next day for you, then all earthly care is annihilated, not only the care about livelihood, because everything earthly and worldly is desirable only for the sake of the next day—and insecure because of the next day."⁴² To the extent that someone does not focus on the next day, she also cares less about that day's particular troubles. For example, if I am not thinking about tomorrow at all—or at most thinking about the class I will teach tomorrow—I am not thinking about what I will eat or wear tomorrow. Each of these senses is important for Kierkegaard's exhortation to turn one's back on the future. By turning away from the future, one both avoids the care of self-torment and becomes less concerned with the particular troubles the next day will bring. Kierkegaard's distinction between the general care of self-torment and the particular troubles tomorrow may bring can help us understand how his view is possible. Turning away from the future frees us from the care of self-torment, as well as minimizing the extent to which

⁴² Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, 72.

we are concerned with the particular troubles tomorrow will bring. We may still be aware of those troubles, depending on the nature of the work we are given to do today. But this awareness need not distract us from that work.

At this point, some readers may object that Kierkegaard's account of our attitudes towards time amounts to so many clichés. We might be reminded of people who try to live 'one day at a time' or athletes who approach the season 'one game at a time.' Likewise, philosophers have argued that there is a sense in which we can live in the present while anticipating the future. For example, Seneca in *On The Shortness of Life* claims that philosophers' lives have wide scopes because they are able to embrace the past in memory, make use of the present, and anticipate the future. Thus, the philosopher 'combines all times into one.'⁴³ Since both clichés and philosophers proffer views similar to Kierkegaard's in that they emphasize how we relate to other times while living in the present, someone might wonder whether Kierkegaard's account offers readers anything distinctive. I respond to this worry in four ways. First, it is not inherently a problem if Kierkegaard's view seems platitudinous. It is better to seem platitudinous than to be wrong or logically contradictory. Furthermore, views that contradict platitudes might be in danger of being obviously wrong or logically contradictory. Second, as I noted in Chapter Three, Kierkegaard himself—at least when writing under his pseudonym Climacus—disavows any interest in originality.⁴⁴ So there is a sense in which

⁴³ Seneca, "On the Shortness of Life," in *Seneca: Dialogues and Essays*, Trans. John Davie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): 157. In her dissertation, Carol Jean White makes a similar claim about Kierkegaard. On her view, our faithful expectations for the future allow us to be open to our present experiences and to re-interpret our past. So, like Seneca, White claims that all times can be combined into one. As I will show with respect to Seneca, I do not read Kierkegaard as seeking to combine all times or tenses into one. See Carol Jean White, "Time and Temporality in the Existential Thought of Kierkegaard and Heidegger," Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1976, 261-262.

⁴⁴ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 35-36, 53-54.

Kierkegaard would be unconcerned with this criticism. Third, even if Kierkegaard's exhortation is platitudinous, it remains easier said than done. As Iben Damgaard notes, despite having the lily and the bird as teachers "we risk running ahead of ourselves in constant worries and anxieties for the future and we risk lagging behind ourselves in the experience of guilt...It is therefore a difficult task to be present to and contemporaneous with oneself."⁴⁵ So even if Kierkegaard's message is not novel, it can still challenge us. However, as I will show, there is a sense in which Kierkegaard's understanding of our attitudes towards time does contribute something new.

Kierkegaard's account of our attitudes towards time is distinctive that it directs us towards the present by facing away from the future. The clichés that recommend living or playing "one day at a time" implicitly refer to subsequent future days. To live one day at a time is to acknowledge the existence of multiple times at which one lives, and thus multiple days. So to 'live one day at a time' is to implicitly think about tomorrow, and thus to suffer from the care of self-torment. The implicit anticipation of the future is clearest in the ways in which athletes talk about playing "one game at a time." The context for this statement is often in response to questions about a big game that is some distance in the future, such as a rivalry game or a conference championship. The athlete responds with the cliché in order to indicate that she is thinking about the next game in addition to subsequent games of greater magnitude. Her response shows that she is thinking about future games in addition to the next game. Kierkegaard considers an

⁴⁵ Damgaard's account differs from my own in that she thinks being present requires concern for the past and future rather than turning away from the past and future in order to emphasize the present. Iben Damgaard, "The Danger of 'the Relentless Mentality of Comparison': Kierkegaard's Parables of the Lily and the Bird," *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook 2007*, eds. Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Hermann Deuser, K. Brian Söderquist, Berlin: Walter DeGruyter, 2007, 193-208, 203.

analogous case in his discussion of prayer. He writes that if a person were to pray “‘Save me, O God, from myself and from the next day,’ he is not praying Christianly, and the next day already has too much power over him. The Christian prays ‘Save me from evil today.’”⁴⁶ Kierkegaard thus shows how even the language we commonly use to refer to time invites us to think about the future as well as the present. It is easy for us to refer to both future even unintentionally, and to begin our self-torment anew. The same passage from *Christian Discourses* can provide a response to Seneca’s claim that the philosopher can ‘combine all times into one.’ By combining all times into one, Seneca and philosophers like him still anticipate the future, and torment themselves with the cares of the next day. Kierkegaard’s view is thus distinctive in retaining our progress towards the future while directing our attention away from that future. We can move towards the future—and do, at whatever rate time passes—while turning away from the future and thus avoiding the care of self-torment and minimizing our concerns about the future. Our lack of anticipation enables a fuller participation in our present projects, i.e. the troubles of today. We may, depending on the nature of our present work, need to aim at future goals. But as long as we do what we should in the present, we need not stop our present work in order to try to confirm that we are progressing towards those goals.

Kierkegaard’s rower metaphor harmonizes the future and the present in ways that differ from the way he has been interpreted by Dupré and Krishek and Furtak. Dupré interprets the rower metaphor passage as describing only certain privileged moments of existence.⁴⁷ But Kierkegaard’s intent is to exhort his readers to “get rid of” the next

⁴⁶ Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, 75.

⁴⁷ Dupré, 171.

day.⁴⁸ It is an exhortation meant for everyone, not just for some privileged individuals or temporal events. We can see that Kierkegaard addresses the metaphor in the way he switches from “one” to “you” in describing the rower. “It is always delaying and distracting impatiently to want to inspect the goal every moment, to search whether one is coming a little closer, and then again a little closer. No, be forever and earnestly resolute; then you turn wholeheartedly to the work—and your back to the goal.” The rower metaphor is meant for everyone, every day—not for only a few or on some days.

The rower metaphor approach to harmonizing the future and the present is also different from that of Krishek and Furtak (and by extension, the view of Malantschuk which their account resembles). These authors seek to eliminate worry while preserving care and concern, whereas I propose eliminating worrying about tomorrow while preserving worrying about the troubles of today.⁴⁹ My reading of Kierkegaard contains a temporal element that their views lack, and this temporal element shapes our interpretations of Kierkegaard’s texts. For example, Krishek and Furtak claim that worries about the future are only problematic when they detract from the present.⁵⁰ But Kierkegaard’s view here is stronger. As we have seen, He claims that all worries about the future should be avoided, lest they detract from the present. So there is no place for the worries about the future that do not detract from the present that Krishek and Furtak’s account permits. Perhaps we should ascribe the difference to Krishek and Furtak’s emphasis on the 1847 lily and bird discourse contained within *Upbuilding Discourses in*

⁴⁸ Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, 71, 74.

⁴⁹ Krishek and Furtak, 160.

⁵⁰ Krishek and Furtak, 162.

Various Spirits and my emphasis on the 1848 *Christian Discourses*. Regardless of the source of our interpretive differences, however, these differences are significant in that my interpretation has a temporal element that theirs seems to lack.

Kierkegaard's account of the relation of time to eternity provides a way to harmonize focusing on the future with living in the present. Contra readers like Martens and Millay and Pattison, Kierkegaard's Christian authorship does not *only* advocate focusing on the future. Turning our backs on the next day allows us to preserve our focus on our eternal future while also living, free from the care of self-torment, in the present. Martens and Millay are right to emphasize Kierkegaard's claim that "what we give up temporally, we gain eternally." But in light of the rower metaphor, we can read this passage as referring to the future. By giving up our anticipation of the future, we gain a richer life in the present. So our pursuit of eternal gains need not only extend to renouncing the pursuit of earthly goods in the present. We might also gain eternally (and live more free from worry in the present) by abandoning our focus on the future, even as we work—like the rowboat rower—towards it.

We can re-interpret other passages that seem to support Kierkegaard valuing eternity at the expense of temporality in the same way. For example, Bouton emphasizes Kierkegaard's claim that we need to conquer the future in order to return to the present. In light of the rower metaphor, we can read conquering the future as orienting ourselves away from the future and towards the present. In the metaphor that immediately follows the rowboat metaphor, Kierkegaard invokes "the language of the military" in order to explain how the person in the present need not worry about being attacked by the next

day. Since the next day does not exist for the rower, it has no power over him.⁵¹ Thus, turning away from the future and towards the present is a way of conquering the future. Contra readers like Bouton and Rudd, our focus on the future and our attention to the troubles of today need not conflict. We can progress towards the future without suffering from our worries about the future.

Finally, contra Parfit, Kierkegaard does not advocate *only* living in the present. He directs us not to worry about our merely proximate futures, but exhorts us to instead focus on our eternal, eschatological future. Kierkegaard thus retains the asymmetrical attitude towards time that Parfit rejects. Yet for Kierkegaard, we progress towards this eternal eschatological future by facing away from it, back towards the present. By doing so, we can avoid the sort of anxiety and worrying about the future that both Parfit and Kierkegaard emphasize. At that same time, Kierkegaard's exhortation to face backwards while progressing towards the future allows him to retain the concern for the eschatological future that many readers of Kierkegaard seek to preserve. We can have it both ways—we can focus on the future *by* living in the present. Since we need not abandon our asymmetrical attitude towards the future to escape the problems that accompany this attitude, Parfit's argument that it would be better for us to abandon our asymmetrical attitudes towards time is not decisive.

While the rower metaphor provides us with a way to harmonize our focus on the future and our desire to live in the present, what of the Christian's occupation with the past event of the incarnation? Kierkegaard's account of self-torment in *Christian Discourses* can also account for this element of Climacus's thought. In fact, Kierkegaard

⁵¹ Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, 76.

invokes Climacus's description of the Christian as learner while introducing one of the specifically Christian elements of his account of our attitudes towards time. He writes: "To live in this way, to fill up the day today with the eternal and not with the next day, the Christian has learned or is learning (for the Christian is always a learner) from the prototype."⁵² Kierkegaard's description of the Christian as a learner should remind us of Climacus's claim that Christ is the teacher and that followers—whether historically contemporaneous or otherwise—are learners.⁵³ The prototype from whom the Christian learns is Jesus. Reading Climacus's claim that the Christian is 'occupied with the incarnation' alongside *Christian Discourses*'s claim that the Christian is 'learning to live today rather than worrying about the next day' can help us understand how these claims are compatible. The Christian is occupied with the incarnation. Part of this occupation involves learning from the incarnation. One of the things the Christian learns from the incarnation is how to live today rather than worrying about the next day. As Climacus writes in *Philosophical Fragments*, being contemporary with the incarnation requires being known by him. Merely historical knowledge, such as being present during the historical life of Jesus, is insufficient.⁵⁴ Thus, being eternally occupied with the event of the incarnation cannot only be backwards-looking and focused on the past. Instead, those who have faith receive it from the teacher in each of their respective presents. So insofar as being occupied with the incarnation includes learning from the incarnation, being occupied with the incarnation includes learning how to live in the present. The Christian

⁵² Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, 75.

⁵³ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 34, 55-59.

⁵⁴ Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 66-68.

looks to the past event of the incarnation—and receives the gift of faith in the present—in order to learn how to live in the present by turning away from the future.

Is Kierkegaard's account of our attitudes towards time in *Christian Discourses* limited to Christian readers? Kierkegaard himself would likely say so. Throughout *Christian Discourses* he compares the Christian with the lily and the bird, and contrasts them with the pagan. For example, in the section about self-torment, he claims that the pagan has the care of self-torment because the pagan cannot cast all his care upon God. Furthermore, as we have seen, Kierkegaard's examples of embodying the rower's backwards direction and forward progress involve Christian work and prayer. So Kierkegaard seems to preclude non-Christians from adopting the attitude towards time he prescribes. However, Kierkegaard's rationale for the pagan's inability to escape the care of self-torment suggests that some non-Christians might adopt an analogous view. Kierkegaard writes that "since [the pagan] is without God, it cannot be God who lays any torment on him."⁵⁵ We might be taken aback by the language of God laying torment on people. But here Kierkegaard is hearkening back to his earlier claim that each day has enough troubles of its own. Kierkegaard seems to think that without God, we have no reason to believe that each day has enough troubles of its own (rather than excessive troubles or an absence of trouble). But some non-Christians can affirm this claim. Non-Christian theists could also affirm the claim that God or the gods make the world such that each day has enough troubles of its own. So while non-Christians cannot affirm Kierkegaard's view as such, they may be able to affirm certain key aspects of it.

⁵⁵ Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, 77.

It might even be possible for non-theists to affirm something similar to Kierkegaard's backwards-oriented account of our attitudes towards time. Again, the key feature of this account is the belief that each day has trouble enough of its own. Someone like Camus's Sisyphus could affirm this belief. In Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Sisyphus is described as happy. Each of his days contains exactly the same amount of trouble—he is always pushing the boulder up the hill and watching it back down. It's plausible that Sisyphus's attitude towards time is similar to the one Kierkegaard recommends: he does not think of every time he *will* push the boulder up the mountain but only thinks of this particular trip up and down. For Camus, we always face absurdity, and this fact trumps whatever particular troubles we might face, even if they are Sisyphean labors. Thus Camus claims that "Happiness and the absurd are two sons of the same earth. They are inseparable."⁵⁶ Accordingly, I think it is possible for some non-theists to adopt a view in which each day contains enough trouble. However, other elements of Kierkegaard's account might only be accessible to Christians. For example, Kierkegaard claims that we can only turn away from the future in order to face the present with the help of the eternal.⁵⁷ This appeal to "the help of the eternal" suggests that only those who receive divine help can adopt the attitude towards time Kierkegaard recommends. But distinguishing those who receive divine help from those who do not is beyond the scope of this inquiry.

⁵⁶ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Trans. Justin O'Brien (Vintage: New York, 1991), 121-123.

⁵⁷ Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, 73.

4.4 Conclusion

We have seen that Kierkegaard's account of our attitudes towards time harmonizes our focus on the future with our desire to live in the present by orienting us back towards the present. This account provides a response to Parfit's claim that we ought to renounce our focus on the future. The account also allows us to read Kierkegaard as affirming the goodness of temporality as well as eternity—something that Kierkegaard is often accused of neglecting.⁵⁸ Finally, this account may even help us to make sense of Kierkegaard's famous claim that 'life can only be understood backwards but must be lived forwards.'⁵⁹ If we should face the present rather the future, like the rower in the boat, we are in fact facing "backwards"—away from the future—while still living forwards—advancing towards both the proximate future and our eschatological eternal future. In light of the rower metaphor, perhaps we should view Kierkegaard as claiming that life can only be understood while we are attending to our work in the present rather than anticipating future troubles. For Kierkegaard, this work includes the works of love that Kierkegaard exhorts his readers to perform. I will conclude this inquiry by considering how the account of hope found in *Works of Love* can both provide us with an account of the work we are to do in the present. Turning to *Works of Love* will also allow me to respond to some questions that might be asked of my interpretation of Kierkegaard's account of our attitudes towards time. Such questions include: How, if we are to face away from the future, can we still talk meaningfully about our hopes for the

⁵⁸ See, for example, Louis Mackey, "The Loss of the World in Kierkegaard's Ethics," *Review of Metaphysics*, XV: 4, (1962): 602-620.

⁵⁹ Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers Vol. 1, A-E*, Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967, p. 451, Entry 1030, IV A 164 *n.d.*, 1843.

future? Does facing away from the future, like the rower, keep us from talking about or otherwise anticipating the future? I will address this next question in the concluding chapter to follow.

CHAPTER FIVE

Facing Backwards while Living Forwards

In Chapter Four, I argued that the rowboat metaphor—along with its accompanying images and the lily and the bird—can help us understand Kierkegaard's view of our attitudes towards time. One advantage of my proposed view is that it allows us to retain both our focus on the future and our desire to live in the present. By turning away from the future in order to focus on the present, we can affirm each of these apparently conflicting intuitions. However, one difficulty remains. According to the rowboat metaphor, we are to progress towards the future without reflecting on or otherwise attending to it. Given this implication of the rowboat metaphor, how are we to affirm Kierkegaard's view while still meaningfully thinking or talking about the future? Kierkegaard's oft-quoted remark that life can only be understood backwards but must be lived forwards further complicates our relationship to the future.¹ How can we make plans for the future if we cannot understand the future? Can we hope for the future while also attending to Kierkegaard's cautions against the self-torment that contemplating the future brings?

In this chapter, I will consider readers of Kierkegaard who address our hopes for the future. These readers can be divided into two groups: those who proffer positive accounts of Kierkegaard's understanding of such hopes, and those who argue that Kierkegaard thinks such hopes are impossible. We can refer to these groups as proffering

¹ Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers Vol. 1, A-E*, Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967, p. 451, Entry 1030, IV A 164 *n.d.*, 1843.

positive and eliminativist accounts of Kierkegaard's understanding of hope. After recounting these positions, I will argue that the rowboat metaphor from *Christian Discourses* does not fit neatly into either interpretive approach. In order to take the rowboat metaphor into account, we must supplement these understandings of Kierkegaard's view of hope, as well as his view of imaginative planning. I propose that we might fruitfully include the rowboat metaphor in our discussions of these considerations through reading it alongside Kierkegaard's discussions of forgetting in *Works of Love*. In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard exhorts the reader to forget the other's sins. This model of virtuous forgetting can help us to develop a Kierkegaardian account of how we can turn away from and "forget" the future in the sense of caring less about it even while still progressing towards it. By caring less about the future, we can emulate the rower through not focusing on future goods, even as we work in the present to move towards those goods. Furthermore, Kierkegaard's emphasis on doing our daily work in the present can also help those who wrongfully dwell in the past.

5.1 Standard Approaches to Kierkegaard's Understanding of Hope

In this section, I will consider the two prevailing approaches to Kierkegaard's understanding of hope. As Roe Fremstedal notes, many disciplines have only recently renewed their interest in studying hope. He claims that on account of this lack of disciplinary interest, readers of Kierkegaard have neglected the central role of hope in Kierkegaard's writings.² Whatever the reason, accounts of Kierkegaard's understanding of hope are rare. One explanation of this rarity is the comparative newness of readings of

² Roe Fremstedal, *Kierkegaard and Kant on Radical Evil and the Highest Good: Virtue, Happiness, and the Kingdom of God* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 177.

Kierkegaard as a virtue ethicist.³ As a result, there has not been much dialogue between advocates of a positive accounts of Kierkegaard's understanding of the virtue of hope and those criticizing such accounts. My survey of recent readings of Kierkegaard's understanding of hope for the future will stage such a dialogue, in addition to further explicating Kierkegaard's philosophy of time more broadly construed.

Robert Roberts proffers a positive account of Kierkegaard's virtue of hope as oriented towards the future. Kierkegaard notes in his *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* that "Even though we hear at times of someone who expects nothing at all, even though such a person is sometimes thought to have attained the proper assurance, because he craftily makes it impossible for himself to discern the loss, yet it is also admitted that this wisdom is of later origin and no one has it in early youth."⁴ If it takes a crafty person to expect nothing at all, we can conclude that regular people have expectations. On the basis of this passage, Roberts concludes that "Human nature demands that one be occupied with the future, and that one find the future to be good."⁵

In addition to this claim about humans being naturally future-oriented, Roberts specifies that the Christian has a special reason to be oriented towards the future. On Roberts's reading of Kierkegaard, there is a distinction between ordinary hopes and

³ For an example of a defense of Kierkegaard as a virtue theorist, see C. Stephen Evans and Robert C. Roberts, "Kierkegaard's Contributions to Ethics," *The Oxford Handbook of Kierkegaard*, Ed. John Lippitt and George Pattison, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 211-229 and Mark Tietjen, *Kierkegaard, Communication, and Virtue: Authorship as Edification*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013.

⁴ Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*. Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Vol. V. Kierkegaard's Writings. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) 220; Robert C. Roberts, "The Virtue of Hope in Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses," in *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, Ed. Robert L. Perkins, *International Kierkegaard Commentary*, Vol. 5 (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003): 190.

⁵ Roberts, "The Virtue of Hope," 190.

genuine hope. Ordinary hopes are for finite goods, like power, pleasure, wealth, etc. By contrast, the Christian has genuine hope, which is hope for the good. The good in this context means: “the resurrection of the dead, reunion with dead loved ones, a state of blessed understanding with God and with oneself.” Hope for the good cannot disappoint us. Unlike finite hopes, hope for the good is not limited by time. So we cannot be disappointed that our hope for the good has not yet been fulfilled.⁶ Likewise, genuine hope is qualitatively different from finite hopes. We *expect* that our hope for the good will be fulfilled, whereas we can at best calculate whether or not our finite hopes will be fulfilled.⁷ Thus, on Roberts’s reading of Kierkegaard, hope involves the future in two senses: first, hope arises out of our natural human orientation towards the future. Second, specifically Christian hope expectantly anticipates the goods promised to Christians in the eschatological future—the day of resurrection that will occur at the end of time.

John Lippitt complements Roberts’ account of Kierkegaardian hope by distinguishing hope for our eternal future and hope for our proximate futures. Lippitt writes that these forms of hope—which he refers to as eternal hope and earthly hope—are more closely connected than readers like Roberts suggest. Kierkegaard writes that earthly and eternal hope ‘grow up together and play together in childhood as peers.’⁸ Lippitt argues that since the virtue of hope is part of the virtue of love, there may be ‘works of hope’ parallel to the works of love that Kierkegaard advocates. These “works

⁶ Roberts, “The Virtue of Hope,” 193.

⁷ Roberts, “The Virtue of Hope,” 194.

⁸ Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, 113, quoted in John Lippitt, *Kierkegaard and the Problem of Self-Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 153.

of hope” may involve hoping for oneself as well as one’s neighbor. Lippitt writes that “expending mental energy on hopes and fears for one’s *own* well-being [is] constitutive of having self-worth, and ... such self-worth is a prerequisite for developing genuine self-respect.”⁹ Accordingly, the works of love that Kierkegaard claims we are called to perform may involve hoping for one’s own well-being, in both the eternal sense as well as the earthly sense.

Fremstedal’s account of hope expands on the connection between hope and the other two theological virtues. Like Roberts and Lippitt, Fremstedal reads Kierkegaard as affirming both eternal hope (which he terms heavenly hope) and earthly hope (which he also refers to as temporal hope). Fremstedal claims that “Kierkegaard’s main assertion is that it is only on Christian grounds that general hope can only be consistently sustained, since human (temporal) hopes are unstable and limited.”¹⁰ He agrees with Lippitt that from a Christian perspective, works of love demand “the work of hope.”¹¹ But unlike Lippitt, Fremstedal also links hope to faith. He writes “Although faith in God is distinct from hope, hope is not distinct from the faith that God makes good. The object of hope must be perceived as a *good*, something which is not necessarily the case with the objects or dogmas of faith.”¹² Accordingly, from the perspective of readers who proffer positive accounts of Kierkegaard’s understanding of hope, we can view hope as oriented towards both eternal and earthly goods, and specifically linked with each of the other two theological virtues.

⁹ Lippitt, 154.

¹⁰ Fremstedal, 178.

¹¹ Fremstedal, 195.

¹² Fremstedal, 198.

David Kangas proffers the most far-reaching criticism of interpretations of Kierkegaard's understanding of hope as a positive virtue. His criticism extends from his suspicion of readings of Kierkegaard that homogenize his views of emotions (and, by extension, the virtues corresponding to those emotions).¹³ While Kangas does not name Roberts specifically in his account of hope for the future, we can extend his criticism of Roberts's view of boredom to Roberts's view of hope. Kangas criticizes Roberts's interpretation of Kierkegaard's view of boredom for precisely this reason. Roberts describes Kierkegaard's boredom—an emotion that, like hope, is fundamentally related to our orientation towards time—as concerned with particular interests. On Robert's view, we are interested in being interested in particular activities: “Let us say that the defining proposition for boredom is, *It is very important for me to be interested, absorbed, to have my attention engaged, but everything I currently behold, and everything I currently might do, is uninteresting; may I soon be free from this state of mind.*”¹⁴ Kangas objects, arguing that “interest in interest” that Roberts describes is irreducible to one interest among others. He writes: “The essential difference between boredom (an interest in interests) and other interests is that the question of the possibility of fulfillment of the emotion's intentionality cannot properly be put. It is not that

¹³ Some readers may be suspicious of Kangas's insistence that we read Kierkegaard alongside his 18th and 19th century influences like Kant and Schelling. But the view that we ought not “level” or homogenize Kierkegaard's moral psychology need not rely on Kangas's historical or continental commitments. Other readers of Kierkegaard also seek to draw such distinctions within his moral psychology. For example, see M. Jamie Ferreira, “A Kierkegaardian View of Divine Hiddenness,” in *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, Ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul K. Moser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 164-180.

¹⁴ Robert C. Roberts *Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 248, quoted in David Kangas, “Kierkegaard,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, Ed. Peter Goldie, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 380-404, 389.

boredom is a vague interest, but that it is an interest *without* an object.”¹⁵ As we will see, Kangas contends that for Kierkegaard hope, like boredom, is without an object.

Kangas argues that the indeterminate nature of the future frustrates our attempts to represent the future to ourselves. He describes the self as caught between its attempts to plan for the future (“toward ends it has project for itself”) and “the suddenness of reality itself that comes as an interruption to the temporality of self-consciousness.”¹⁶ In response to the future’s resistance to our ability to represent it, Kangas claims that Kierkegaard advocates an affirmation of the future as open and undetermined. “Kierkegaard’s discourse presents the possibility for cultivating an attitude of expectation: the attitude of faith expects ‘victory’—not victory concerning this or that but victory as such (without any representable content).”¹⁷ Allowing the future to remain open and undetermined “liberates the relation to the present.”¹⁸ Kangas contends that those who properly expect the irreducibly open future are able to be present to themselves. They approach the future expecting victory as such, rather than hoping for or expecting some particular kinds of victories, state of affairs, ends, or purposes.¹⁹ Thus, on Kangas’s reading, Kierkegaard cannot affirm hope to be for particular goods or kinds

¹⁵ Kangas, “Kierkegaard,” 401 fn. 20.

¹⁶ He bases this interpretation of the future on passages like this one from EUD: “The future is not; it borrows its power from [the person] himself, and when it has tricked him out of that it presents itself externally as the enemy he has to conquer.” Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, 18, quoted in Kangas, “Kierkegaard,” 393.

¹⁷ Kangas, “Kierkegaard,” 394.

¹⁸ David Kangas and Martin Kavka, “Hearing Patiently: Time and Salvation in Kierkegaard and Levinas,” in *Kierkegaard and Levinas: Ethics, Politics, and Religion*, Ed. J. Aaron Simmons and David Wood, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008, 125-152, 130.

¹⁹ Kangas, “Kierkegaard,” 396.

of victories as Roberts describes.²⁰ Whereas Roberts views Kierkegaard as hoping for specific eternal or earthly goods, Kangas claims that truly embracing the future entails renouncing these sorts of particular hopes. As Kierkegaard says in *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* “‘the person who expects something particular or who bases his expectation on something particular’ does *not* have faith.”²¹ Furthermore, since Lippitt and Fremstedal’s accounts are built on that of Roberts, Kangas’s criticism extends to their views of hope also.

Whereas Kangas’s Kierkegaard thinks that the future is unrepresentable, Daniel W. Brinkerhoff Young claims that for Kierkegaard only certain aspects of the future—“the imaginative planning of projects that require ongoing effort over a period of time”—cannot be accurately represented.²² Young quotes Anti-Climacus’s *Practice in Christianity* to identify these aspects of the future as unrepresentable: “[the imagination] can splendidly depict perfection...but, on the other hand, the power of the imagination cannot depict suffering except in a perfect (idealized), that is, in a mitigated, toned-down, foreshortened depiction. In one sense the imagination’s image...is still nonactuality; with regard to adversities and sufferings, it lacks the actuality of time.”²³ So our imagination

²⁰ A defender of the Robertsian view of hope might respond to Kangas by calling attention to Roberts’s view of epistemic humility. Roberts writes that “The believer thus remains in a state of ‘uncertainty’ with respect to both his own and anybody else’s salvation. So there is a sense in which Roberts also affirms the unknowability of the future. However, since my project is to consider hope in the context of *Christian Discourses*’s rowboat metaphor rather than to stage a discussion of hope more broadly construed, I will not develop a Robertsian response to Kangas further. See Roberts, 195.

²¹ David Kangas and Martin Kavka, 130, quoting Kierkegaard, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, 27.

²² Daniel W. Brinkerhoff Young, “Kierkegaard, Time, and the Limits of Imaginative Planning,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 91, 3, (2015): 1.

²³ Søren Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Vol. XX. Kierkegaard’s Writings. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991, 187, quoted in Young, 4.

cannot represent at least some aspects of the future, e.g. suffering that occurs over time. Young calls this limitation on the imagination Kierkegaard's "timelessness claim."²⁴ While Young's focus is on the implications of the timelessness claim for Kierkegaard's moral psychology broadly construed, we can apply his argument to our discussion of Kierkegaard's view of hope.²⁵ If we are unable to accurately represent at least some aspects of the future, we cannot accurately hope for those aspects. Young's implicit criticism of readings of Kierkegaard proffering positive accounts of hope may seem to support my argument, since the rowboat metaphor would seem to have us abandon our hopes for the future. But as we will see, Kierkegaard's concerns about our hopes for the future are related to the power of the imagination as well as its limits.

With both the standard positive accounts of Kierkegaard's understanding of hope and criticisms of these accounts in hand, we are now in a position to evaluate both approaches in light of the rowboat metaphor. The metaphor's exhortation to turn away from the future conflicts with positive accounts of hope's focus on particular future goods. Each of these accounts requires focusing on the future, which is precisely what Kierkegaard cautions against. By focusing on future eternal or earthly goods, standard positive accounts of hope invite the care of self-torment that the lily and the bird are meant to teach us to escape. So we should not be surprised that these standard accounts—which only emphasize the future—only return us to the problems that arise from our bias towards the future, with which this dissertation began. A proponent of these standard accounts might argue that eternal goods—e.g. eternal life—for which the

²⁴ Young, 1.

²⁵ Young, 23-25.

faithful person hopes are so good that they overwhelm the care of self-torment. This approach is parallel to soul-making responses to the problem of evil, in which apparent evils lead to greater goods (of the sort that could not be realized apart from those apparent evils). But in *Christian Discourses* Kierkegaard explicitly condemns the person who focuses on the eternal at the expense of the present day: “One might think that the believer would be most distanced from the eternal, he who has completely turned his back and is living today, whereas the glimpser stands and looks for it. And yet the believer is closest of all to the eternal, whereas the apocalypst is most distanced from the eternal.”²⁶ In this passage, the believer who focuses on the present is contrasted with the “glimpser” or “apocalypst” who is directed towards the future through his or her pursuit of the eternal. Given this contrast, we can conclude that the understanding of hope in Kierkegaard’s *Christian Discourses* is very different from the one that Roberts describes. Roberts et al claim that Kierkegaardian hope allows our focus on our eternal future to help us remain hopeful for our proximate futures. By contrast, in light of the rowboat metaphor, hope involves progressing towards the future while looking away from it, in order to better focus on the present. Accordingly, we should seek to supplement Roberts’s understanding of hope as oriented towards the future with one that emphasizes how our hopes may be directed by our projects in the present. Attending to both the future-orientation and present-directed nature of hope will provide a new perspective on what hope is and how we can acquire it.

Kangas’s denial of any particular future also does not take into account *Christian Discourse’s* rowboat metaphor. Since the metaphor exhorts us to focus on the present,

²⁶ Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, 74.

we might expect Kangas's account of hope—which denies the future in order to make room for the present—to fit the metaphor well. But Kangas's negative account of hope for the future cannot account for the rowboat's progress towards a future goal.

Kierkegaard introduces the rowboat metaphor with precisely this teleological feature:

“The one who rows a boat turns his back to the goal toward which he is working.”²⁷

Since the rower is working towards a goal, he must have some sense of what that goal is, even though he may not know the way. He does not live in the present through his openness to the future, as Kangas recommends. Instead, the rower turns away from the future in order to focus on the work he is given to do in the present. So in addition to emphasizing the present, an understanding of hope that takes into account what we can learn from the lily and the bird must also include how our present projects influence our hopes for the future.

The rower's daily work is another significant difference between Kangas's account and Kierkegaard's approach to temporality in the *Christian Discourses*. Whereas Kierkegaard exhorts the rower to focus on the work he is given to do today, Kangas focuses on “the task of joy.” As Kangas specifies, learning joy is an infinite task. Since Kangas purports to encourage joy as “an infinite concentration on the present,” joy is never fully attained.²⁸ Since joy is never fully attained, we might wonder whether on Kangas's account we can ever be fully present even while we are focused on today. The rower from *Christian Discourses*, by contrast, focuses on the specific work he is given

²⁷ Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, 73.

²⁸ Kangas, “Kierkegaard,” 397-398.

today. As we will see, the specificity of this work enables him to be present to his daily work in a way that Kangas's joyful agent is not.

Like Kangas's wholly unknowable future, Young's "timelessness claim" also does not fit the rowboat metaphor's approach to our orientation towards time. Like Kangas, Young seeks to limit our imaginative hopes for the future in order to make room for action in the present. Yet unlike Kangas, Young emphasizes the daily work that Kierkegaard exhorts in his discussion of the rowboat metaphor. He quotes Kierkegaard's pseudonym Anti-Climacus's claim that "The earnestness of life is to *will* to be, to *will* to express the perfection (ideality) in the dailiness of actuality."²⁹ So Young's limitation of our hopes for the future seems closer to Kierkegaard's project as disclosed by the rowboat metaphor than Kangas's criticism of all particular hopes for the future. Yet this limitation fails to capture another key element of the metaphor. Young only describes the imagination as subordinate to the will. But he still retains some roles for imagination about the future and hope for the future. Young's limited account of the imagination thus still produces the care of self-torment that Kierkegaard's rowboat metaphor is meant to ward off. Limiting the imagination does not prevent the cares of self-torment to which we subject ourselves. To escape them, we must turn away from the future by changing *how* we anticipate it rather than merely limiting *how much* we speculate about it. Thus, even though Young emphasizes the daily work that Kierkegaard commends, his timelessness claim does not go far enough in orienting people away from the future and towards the present. We should combine this view of imaginative planning with an account of hope that explains the qualitative differences in how Kierkegaard would have

²⁹ Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, 190, quoted in Young, 24.

us anticipate future events. We will now turn to *Works of Love* in search of such an account.

5.2 Works of Love and Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Time

Since both the positive approach and the eliminativist understandings of hope do not account for key elements of the rowboat metaphor, we must supplement them with a Kierkegaardian understanding of hope that can. One way of pursuing such an account is to develop Kierkegaard's claim from the *Journals* that life can only be understood backwards but must be lived forwards. As we have seen, attempting to understand life "forwards"—to provide a positive account of our hopes for the future—subjects us to the care of self-torment that the rowboat metaphor is meant to help us avoid. Instead of seeking this understanding, we could consider what living forward entails. In the rowboat metaphor, progressing towards one's future goals involves facing away from the future and towards the present—specifically the work each individual is given to do today. To explore this notion of daily work, let us turn to Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*. I will first consider Arne Grøn's interpretation of the text's implications for our understanding of Kierkegaard's philosophy of time. Then I will propose my complementary interpretation.

Grøn argues that *Works of Love* intensifies the account of time and eternity that Kierkegaard's pseudonym Haufniensis develops in *The Concept of Anxiety*. As in *The Concept*, *Works of Love* describes a human as a synthesis of the temporal and the eternal. For Grøn, this synthesis implies the task of becoming oneself: "When, however, the eternal is in a human being, this eternal redoubles in him in such a way that every moment it is in him, it is in him in a double mode: in an outward direction and in an

inward direction back into himself.”³⁰ The outward direction of eternity in a person directs him or her to love the neighbor. The inward direction of eternity in a person helps that person become him or herself. Importantly, Grøn notes that this “motif of self-relation is not a subordinate one in the book.” Instead, one’s love of neighbor builds up or edifies one’s self. Thus, “*Works of Love* does not follow two separable tracks, one leading to the other as the neighbour, the other to oneself.”³¹

Grøn’s emphasis on the redoubling of eternity in *Works of Love* parallels the double movement of Kierkegaard’s rowboat metaphor. On Grøn’s account, love of neighbor orients a person outward. But love of neighbor has important implications for that person’s self-relation, so it is also oriented inward. Love of neighbor is thus a double movement: outward, towards the neighbor and inwards, towards the self. In the rowboat metaphor, the rower progresses forward, towards a future goal. This movement parallels love of neighbor’s outward orientation towards the neighbor. While progressing forward, the rower faces backwards—away from the future and towards the present. This orientation parallels the implications love of neighbor has on one’s self-relation—the inward orientation of eternity that Kierkegaard describes in *Works of Love*. Since love of neighbor and the rowboat metaphor share this doubled outward-while-inward structure, we can further develop the rowboat metaphor by considering what Kierkegaard has to say about love of neighbor. Specifically, understanding how love of neighbor is oriented towards both the neighbor and the self can clarify how the rowboat metaphor commends us to hope for the future while facing away from it.

³⁰ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 280, quoted in Arne Grøn, “Time and History,” 289.

³¹ Grøn, “Time and History,” 290.

Both the rowboat metaphor and Grøn's interpretation of *Works of Love* emphasize that love of neighbor must occur in the present. The rowboat metaphor stresses the work we are given to do *today*.³² Likewise, *Works of Love* decries delaying one's love of neighbor. Kierkegaard makes this point in the context of discussing the Pharisee who desiring to justify himself asked "Who is my neighbor?" prompting Jesus to tell the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Kierkegaard claims that the Pharisee's desire to justify himself was an attempt to pass time through deliberating: "he surely thought that it would develop into a very prolix inquiry, that it would perhaps take a very long time and then perhaps with the admission that it is impossible to determine with absolute accuracy the concept of *neighbor*—for this very reason he asked the question, in order to waste time."³³ By condemning the Pharisee's attempt to waste time, Kierkegaard emphasizes that we are called to love in the present. That is, we must love in such a way that does not allow time to slip by. "Asking questions about what love is and who one's neighbour is, takes time and is already a matter of ethics; we are to account for the time used."³⁴ We are called to love in the present rather than to spend time deliberating about love. Both *Works of Love* and *Christian Discourses* thus call the reader to action in the present rather than focusing on the future. In light of this focus on the present in *Christian Discourses* and *Works of Love*, it seems clear that Kierkegaard wants us to think about the future less than we often do. But, as we have seen, there is an important sense in which hope is necessarily future oriented. So there must be a sense in which we

³² Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses*, 75, emphasis in original.

³³ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 104.

³⁴ Grøn, "Time and History," 288-289.

can be turned away from the future, as in the rowboat metaphor, while still working towards the future and thus in some sense anticipating it. To determine how our focus on the future must change qualitatively, we must further consider *Works of Love* in order to explore how the command to love in the present can inform our hope for the future. Two sections of *Works of Love* are especially salient for considering temporality in general and our hopes for the future in particular: “Our Duty to Remain in Love’s Debt to One Another” and “Love Hopes All Things—and Yet Is Never Put to Shame.” I will consider each of these sections in turn.

5.3 Remaining in Love’s Debt to One Another

Although we are specifically commanded to love our neighbor in the present, *Works of Love* also describes love of neighbor as continuing from the present into the future. As Kierkegaard’s section title states: “Our Duty to Remain in Love’s Debt to One Another.”³⁵ Unlike other debts, the debt of love is never settled—it is different from taxes, fees, debts of honors, and other sorts of debts that can be paid.³⁶ When we, in the present, fulfill our duty to love the neighbor, our actions—our works of love—should continue into the future.³⁷ This duty suggests one way in which we can intelligibly hope for the future while facing away from it, as the rowboat metaphor commends. Instead of worrying about the future, we can anticipate and hope for further developing the relationships formed by our loving actions in the present. That is, we can hope for the

³⁵ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 175.

³⁶ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 177.

³⁷ C. Stephen Evans refers to this phenomenon as “the steadfastness of love.” C.f. C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard’s Ethic of Love*, 147-158.

future on the basis of the work we are given to do today. Often we think about daily work in the sense of discharging our obligation. But Kierkegaard calls us to continue our present relationships into the future. By preserving our obligations into the future, we can talk intelligibly about the future without subjecting us to the care of self-torment. Instead of only looking ahead to the future, we can hope to continue our present projects in the future. By basing our hopes on the present, we can eliminate at least some of the possibilities that make anticipating the future a source of anxiety.

An example may clarify how we can preserve the debt of love into the future without hoping for the future. As a teacher, I might hope in the abstract for my students to write excellent term papers. Doing so would be focusing on the future and subjecting myself to the care of self-torment, e.g. through worrying about those students papers. On the model that *Works of Love* commends, I should instead focus on the work I am given today. So instead of hoping abstractly about future papers, I should focus on helping the particular student writer with whom I spoke earlier today. Preserving the debt of love in this context might mean checking in with the student about her paper next week. Between now and next week (when I will see the student in class), I need not speculate about her writing process. My concern for the student is preserved as I move into the future. But I need not subject myself to the care of self-torment by hoping for or worrying about her paper-writing process in between meetings with her. Thus, I remain focused on the work I am given to do today (yesterday talking with my student about her paper, today writing this chapter, and talking with my student again in class on Monday). It is possible for me to think or talk about how on Monday I will talk with my student again without hoping for particular outcomes from Monday's conversation. Accordingly,

I talk intelligibly about future concerns without being oriented towards the future or, properly speaking, hope for particular future outcomes. By focusing on the work I am given to do today—e.g. the particular students with whom I meet or papers I grade—I can keep myself from using hoping for the future as a way to delay or evade loving others in the present.

Does remaining in the debt of love to one another enable us to hope for particular future goods for one another? If so, someone might object that hoping for others based on our present projects is reducible to the traditional understanding of hope as described by Roberts *et al.* To see how hoping for the future based on our present projects gives us a new perspective on hope, recall Chapter Four's discussion of the two senses in which Kierkegaard exhorts us to turn away from the future. The first sense involves literally reorienting ourselves towards the present, while the second sense involves caring less about the future. This second sense can, *mutatis mutandis*, help us understand how we can hope for particular future goods on the basis of our present projects. Kierkegaard is concerned with the self-torment and anxiety that accompany focusing on the future. By turning away from the future in the sense of caring less about the future, we can minimize the self-torment and anxiety caused by focusing on the future. However, we cannot completely cease to care about the future, especially given the command to lovingly hope for the good of the neighbor. So we need a way to care about some particular future outcomes that subject us to less self-torment and anxiety. Here the manner of our concern can help. Throughout both authorships, Kierkegaard cautions against a shrewd

calculating kind of reflection that prevents people from acting.³⁸ We can extend Kierkegaard's criticism of shrewd calculation to the way we hope. Instead of constantly checking on and measuring our progress towards our future goals, we can redouble our efforts to attain those goals, trusting that our present daily work will bear future fruit. This understanding of hope as trust is consistent with the rowboat metaphor. The rower faces away from her goal while working towards it. She does not constantly stop rowing to check a map or turn around to measure her progress.³⁹ We can understand Kierkegaard as advocating a similar understanding of hope: oriented towards the works of love we are given today for the sake of the neighbor while preserving our love for the neighbor into the future. On this approach, we "turn away" from the future in two senses. Quantitatively, we simply think about the future less frequently. Qualitatively and more importantly, our hopes are grounded in our present projects such that they present us with fewer possibilities and corresponding less anxiety and self-torment. Our primary concern is with the present, and we think about the future in the light of that immediate task, rather than making the future our primary object of reflection.

While it is a less central theme than Kierkegaard's concerns about our attitudes towards the future, we can also read "Our Duty to Remain in Love's Debt to One

³⁸ Mark A. Tietjen, "Aristotle, Aquinas, and Kierkegaard on Prudence," *Christian Discourses and The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, Ed. Robert L. Perkins, International Kierkegaard Commentary, Vol. 17 (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007): 177-184.

³⁹ We might fruitfully compare the rower to Johannes de Silentio's description of the knight of faith in *Fear and Trembling*. This knight looks just like a bourgeois tax collector who hopes that his wife will prepare roast lamb's head with vegetables for him. When she does not, "he is just the same." The knight is unconcerned with the absence of his special meal. He does not feel the need to stop to reflect on or calculate how his life is going. Instead, he remains fully committed to whatever he is doing. See Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling: Repetition*, Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Vol. VI. Kierkegaard's Writings. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 39-41. The knight of faith's congruence with the rowboat metaphor shows that the latter image is not an isolated instance in Kierkegaard's thought, but appears in various forms across both of his authorships.

Another” as also cautioning against attitudes towards time that emphasize the past. Kierkegaard writes that “*there must be eternal vigilance, early and late, so that love never begins to dwell on itself or to compare itself with love in other people, or to compare itself with the deeds that it has accomplished.*”⁴⁰ Here Kierkegaard emphasizes that comparisons with one’s past self can distract and detract from action in the present. Such comparisons “lose the moment, the moment that ought to have been filled with an expression of love’s life.”⁴¹ Perhaps the best example of this phenomenon from the Kierkegaard corpus is that of the merman from *Fear and Trembling*. The merman cannot marry Agnes because of his guilt over having been a seducer heretofore. Instead of loving Agnes in the present, he constantly compares himself to the deeds of seduction that he has accomplished in the past. “He cannot give himself faithfully to any girl, because he is indeed only a merman.”⁴² The only way for the merman to be saved is to marry Agnes. However, Kierkegaard’s pseudonym de Silentio is careful to note that this marriage cannot be understood as Agnes’s love saving him from becoming a seducer in the future.⁴³ That is, we ought not understand the merman’s change as only a change of situation. Instead, the merman’s attitudes towards time, and specifically his own history, must be changed. He must renounce his seductive history—his past—before he can live with Agnes in the present. Having done so, his present marriage to Agnes—and the works of love that marriage requires—keep him from returning to his old seductive ways.

⁴⁰ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 179, emphasis original.

⁴¹ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 183.

⁴² Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 95.

⁴³ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 98.

This renunciation requires the virtue of the absurd, i.e. faith.⁴⁴ As in *Works of Love*, faithfully and lovingly moving forward requires present action, not dwelling on the past.

In addition to emphasizing the works of love we are called to do in the present, “Our Duty to Remain in Love’s Debt to One Another” also echoes the rowboat metaphor’s focus on the direction of vision. In the rowboat metaphor, Kierkegaard describes a rower facing backwards while rowing his boat forwards. In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard describes the way in which we warn passengers on swift-moving ships about looking into the waves and becoming dizzy. In the same way, comparing one’s efforts in the present to the efforts of others can cause us to become dizzy, and thus neglect the works of love we are called to do. Instead of looking around and comparing our works to the works of others, Kierkegaard cautions the reader to “greet no one,” and to “listen to no cry or shout that wants to trick you out of your enthusiasm [to will the good of the neighbor] and trick its power into working on the treadmill of comparison.”⁴⁵ Here, as in the rowboat metaphor, Kierkegaard seeks to reorient our attention to the present and action in the present rather than to the past or the future.

“Our Duty to Remain in Love’s Debt to One Another” provides a new way of considering our hopes for the future. Standard positive accounts of our hopes for the future tend to move from the future backwards to the present. Recall, for example, Lippitt’s argument that eternal hope can enable us to better cultivate earthly hopes. By contrast, *Works of Love* describes a way of hoping for the future that remains focused on the present. We can move into the future while remaining oriented towards the present

⁴⁴ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 99.

⁴⁵ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 185.

and to preserving or remaining in love's debt to one another. The direction of our hoping is reversed, moving from present to future instead of future to present. As Kierkegaard claims, life must be lived forwards. Emphasizing remaining in one another's debt rather than hoping for one another encourages us to carry our present projects—and our love for the particular neighbors we are called to love—forwards. This approach also keeps us from attempting the impossible, e.g. trying to understand life ahead of time.⁴⁶

An additional advantage of letting our present inform our hopes for our proximate futures is that doing so helps to specify what we ought to hope for in our proximate futures. One of the standard criticisms of virtue ethics is that it does not provide sufficient action guidance.⁴⁷ This criticism may apply to approaches that move from future hopes to present action. Letting eternity shape the objects of our hopes gives us little sense of what specifically we should hope for in the proximate future. By contrast, our present concerns can shape our hopes for the future. For example, Kierkegaard thinks that our love for our neighbors in the present should continue into the future. In the teaching example above, looking over my student's paper on Friday does not free me from my obligations to her. On Monday, I will remain in her debt by continuing to help her refine her thinking and writing. My emphasis is on my student and her good rather than any particular outcomes. All of my knowledge of my student can be brought to bear, and this knowledge is less abstract (even if less certain) than our knowledge of or

⁴⁶ Since life can only be understood backwards. C.f. Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers Vol. 1, A-E*, Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967, Entry 1030.

⁴⁷ Ramon Das, "Virtue Ethics and Right Action," in *The Routledge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, Ed. Loraine Besser-Jones and Michael Slote (Routledge: New York, 2015): 332.

expectations for future goods like eternal life.⁴⁸ Focusing on persons—the ones with whom we engage in the present—rather than on unknown and ultimately unknowable outcomes might thus be a fruitful approach to Kierkegaard’s understanding of the virtues, insofar as doing so will render those virtues more capable of providing action guidance and prompting moral action.

I am not the only reader of Kierkegaard to appeal to love of neighbor as the solution to problems within Kierkegaard’s philosophy of time. In addition to Grøn’s reading of *Works of Love* as contributing to Kierkegaard’s philosophy of time, Robert C. Reed also relates neighbor love to Kierkegaard’s understanding of time consciousness. Drawing on Kangas’s reading of Kierkegaard and Levinas’s understanding of temporality, Reed proposes that having faith entails both having a God-relation and choosing one’s vulnerability to other human beings through unconditional neighbor love. He claims that this double movement is similar to the structure of time consciousness, which “is vulnerability to an excess introduced by the other, in deference to which the old is relinquished in favor of the new.”⁴⁹ Despite our similar emphasis on love of neighbor, my account differs from that of Reed. Against Reed’s emphasis on the new, I argue that for Kierkegaard love of neighbor is a love that remains. In the love of neighbor, the old neighbor is not relinquished in favor of the new. The way I act in embodying my love of neighbor may change, but my love for my neighbor—in all of my vulnerability and in all

⁴⁸ Miles claims that Kierkegaard and also Nietzsche can contribute to contemporary ethics by encouraging us to focus on particular persons rather than on agents qua human beings. Miles, 250.

⁴⁹ Robert C. Reed, “The Binding of Isaac: Levinas’s Moment in Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*,” (*Sophia*, 2016): 14.

of her excess—remains. So we should not understand love of neighbor as preference for the new, and certainly not as a focus on the future as such.

5.4 Hoping All Things for Others as an Escape from Self-torment

Someone might object that preserving love's debt to one another is not, precisely speaking, a species of hope. On my view, preserving the debt of love can serve as a replacement for standard accounts of hope that would subject us to the care of self-torment. Furthermore, my reading of "Our Duty to Remain in Love's Debt to One Another" preserves and fruitfully supplements the orientation towards time that Kierkegaard recommends in *Christian Discourses*. But I grant to the critic that this proposal requires expanding our understanding of the virtue of hope as it is traditionally understood. In order to understand Kierkegaard's project as supplementing rather than surmounting the traditional view of hope, however, it is important for my account to present an account of hope that includes a positive role of expectation towards the future. To that end, let us consider Kierkegaard's account of hope in "Love Hopes All Things—and Yet is Never Put to Shame." There are two aspects of this account of hope especially salient for our current project. First, I will discuss the parallels between *Works of Love's* portrayal of hope and *Christian Discourse's* rowboat metaphor. Doing so will demonstrate that the metaphor—and the orientation towards time that it commends—are compatible with the virtue of hope. Second, I will discuss Kierkegaard's emphasis on hoping for others and its implications for avoiding the care of self-torment.

"Love Hopes All Things—and Yet is Never Put to Shame" presents a view of time and eternity largely consistent with the rowboat metaphor. In this section of *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard compares eternity's relationship to time to that of a teacher helping

a young child with a big task. The teacher “does not set out the whole task at one time, because then the child despairs and gives up hope.” The child in this metaphor ought not try to grasp time as a whole, because that would cause her to despair. Similarly, in the rowboat metaphor, the rower faces away from the future because thinking about the future causes the care of self-torment. Instead, a teacher “assigns a small part at a time, but always enough so that the child at no point stops as if it were finished, but not so much that the child cannot manage it.” The child attends to small parts of time in turn rather than contemplating time as a whole. Likewise, the rower focuses on the work he has been given to do today each day. Kierkegaard later explains that in the metaphor, the teacher represents eternity and the child represents the human being in relation to eternity. Eternity teaches “temporality’s child” to hope, “provided that [the child] does not arbitrarily choose to be severely disheartened by fear or brazenly choose to despair—that is, to withdraw from the upbringing by possibility.” As in the rowboat metaphor, the human must choose to accept the education he has been given. The rower chooses to face the present and his daily work, while temporality’s child chooses to attend to his assigned time. Neither of them choose to face the future or time as a whole. In both cases, the human being who chooses rightly is “in motion forward toward the eternal.” Kierkegaard concludes that “hope is itself the instruction, the relation to the eternal.” On the basis of the instruction metaphor, we can understand hope as choosing to attend to small parts of time.⁵⁰ The hopeful person relates “expectantly to the possibility of the good” in each day—one day at a time.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 252-253.

⁵¹ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 249.

As is apropos given his title, Kierkegaard supplements his understanding of hoping all things with an account of what it means to lovingly hope all things. Lovingly hoping all things “signifies the relationship of the loving one to other people, so in relation to them, hoping for them, he continually holds possibility open with an infinite partiality for the possibility of the good.”⁵² We are not only called to attend to the possibility of the good in each day. We are called to attend to this possibility for each neighbor. Jamie Ferreira notes that hoping for oneself and for the neighbor are not two distinct projects. “Kierkegaard explains that to hope all things for oneself and to lovingly hope all things for others are ‘indeed one and the same’; it ‘follows . . . from what love is’ that they are ‘altogether one and the same.’”⁵³ Her example of this double movement is holding the door open for a colleague. If I open the door for you, I am also able to walk through it myself.⁵⁴ The unity of hope for self and hope for neighbor suggests another way in which the account of hope in *Works of Love* can supplement the rowboat metaphor’s solution for the care of self-torment. Self-torment is specifically about the self and one’s concern for oneself. By contrast, hope for the others involves those others. Doing so might allow us to hope for the future goods of others without subjecting ourselves to the care of self-torment. After all, since “hope relates essentially and eternally to the good,” one cannot be put to shame through hoping.⁵⁵ We can conclude that Kierkegaard encourages us to lovingly hope for the possibility of good in each day

⁵² Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 253.

⁵³ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 259, cited in M. Jamie Ferreira, *Love’s Grateful Striving: A Commentary on Kierkegaard’s Works of Love*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 149.

⁵⁴ Ferreira, *Love’s Grateful Striving*, 149-150.

⁵⁵ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 261.

for oneself together with one's neighbors. Perhaps we can worry about the neighbor's future without anxiously subjecting ourselves to the care of self-torment.

5.5 Conclusion

We have considered two ways in which Kierkegaard's account of hope in *Works of Love* can respond to our questions and concerns about the rowboat metaphor prohibiting meaningful hopes for the future. Instead of focusing on the future (or the past), we can retain present goods, like the debt of love we owe one another. Instead of hoping for the future as such, we can hope to continue our present work into the future. I have argued that each of these elements of *Works of Love* complement the orientation towards time Kierkegaard commends to us in the rowboat metaphor. By focusing on the present rather than past or future, and consequently caring less about the past and future, we can live, more free from worry, in the present.

Kierkegaard's understanding of our attitudes towards time also fruitfully supplements our understanding of the virtue of hope. Approaching our hopes for others in terms of our hopes for particular neighbors rather than through more abstract account of the human might allow us to make richer moral judgments. Many virtue ethicists develop their theories by appealing to some account of the human. For example, Philippa Foot's project in *Natural Goodness* is to "set the evaluation of human action in the wider contexts not only of the evaluation of other features of human life but also of evaluative judgments of the characteristics and operations of other living things."⁵⁶ She evaluates human actions based on a normative understanding of how living things function. Some

⁵⁶ Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 18.

critics contend that approaches like Foot's are too abstract. For example, Robert C. Roberts argues that moral concepts emerge from irreducibly distinct moral traditions. To attend to the tradition-bound nature of moral concepts, Roberts proposes pursuing ethics as a descriptive project of conceptual analysis.⁵⁷ Kierkegaard's emphasis on the particularity of the neighbor challenges each of these approaches. In "Our Duty to Remain in Love's Debt to One Another," he writes that "Christianity never dwells on conditions or describing them; it always hastens to the task or to assigning the task."⁵⁸ On Kierkegaard's view, both Foot and Roberts's approaches are too abstract. Instead of dwelling on the conditions of well-functioning living things or describing them through conceptual analysis, Kierkegaard exhorts his readers to pursue their daily work more virtuously. The virtues emerge out of our relationships to our particular neighbors. In order to understand and cultivate the virtues, we must consider them in light of these relationships. Emphasizing the particularity of the neighbor can reconnect virtue ethics to particular other persons and the debts of love we owe and continue to owe to one another.

Attending to our relationships to particular others—as is central to Kierkegaard's understanding of hope—can be seen as a move towards greater holism in our study of ethics. One of the chief achievements of recent work on the virtues e.g. that of Foot and Roberts, is that each of these authors expands the scope of ethics from particular isolated actions or choices to include additional elements, such as broader character traits. Focusing on relationships like Kierkegaard does expands our understanding of virtue

⁵⁷ Robert C. Roberts, "Kierkegaard and Ethical Theory," in *Ethics, Love, and Faith in Kierkegaard*, Ed. Edward F. Mooney (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008): 91-92.

⁵⁸ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 177.

ethics even further so that it includes these relationships. As Thomas P. Miles discusses, we might see Kierkegaard as anticipating philosophers “like Martha Nussbaum, Bernard Williams, and Harry Frankfurt who look beyond character traits to the broader context of the agent’s life.”⁵⁹ According to Miles, Kierkegaard can help the study of virtue ethics become even more holistic by incorporating discussions of entire “ways of life,” e.g. those portrayed in *Either/Or*.⁶⁰ My project expands this holism even further. By showing how our orientation towards time is a central concern of Kierkegaard’s writings and providing a new perspective on Kierkegaard’s philosophy of time, we can see how this orientation towards time is an important element in evaluating competing ways of life. By considering an agent’s orientation towards time, we can evaluate her character traits in light of this orientation. For example, we can consider whether someone’s hope for the future is characterized by continual calculation and worry about the future or a trust that each day will bring troubles of its own. Recognizing the temporal elements of virtues like hope thus both shapes our understanding of those virtues and helps us to avoid abstracting away from the particularities of moral agents.

Finally, we have seen that Kierkegaard’s understanding of hoping or relating expectantly to possibilities is oriented towards each day—the present—rather than towards the past, the future, or time as a whole. We are also called to hope for others as well as ourselves. The virtue of hope is thus necessarily communal. Recognizing this social aspect of our hopes for the future can enrich our understanding of the virtue. This

⁵⁹ Miles, 238.

⁶⁰ Miles, 240-241.

understanding of the virtue of hope may also help to defend Kierkegaard from readers who criticize him for focusing on the individual at the expense of the community.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusions

We have reached the end of our inquiry into Kierkegaard's philosophy of time. This inquiry has taken us from metaphysical questions about the nature of time to ethical questions arising from our understanding of it.

We began in Chapter One with Derek Parfit's arguments in favor of temporal neutrality. Parfit claims that temporal neutrality—being oriented towards neither the past, present, or future—is both psychologically possible and desirable. These claims are particularly challenging for Kierkegaard, who is philosophically distinctive in emphasizing the future throughout his philosophy, especially in his anthropology and the task of becoming a self. Readers of Kierkegaard have directly or indirectly responded to these challenges through defending our focus on the future (Rudd and Stokes), or by instead affirming the present (Kangas). But their responses ought not satisfy either readers of Kierkegaard or partisans of Parfit.

In Chapter Two, we read *The Concept of Anxiety* in search of a response to Parfit's claim that temporal neutrality is psychologically possible. We found a response in Kierkegaard's metaphysical understanding of time. For Kierkegaard, eternity is static, as the B-theorists contend. However, humans only experience time as dynamic. Our inability to experience time from the perspective of eternity is not a flaw, but is instead a feature. We should live as though the A-theory were true and take tense seriously. Since we experience time as dynamic—moving from the present to the future—it is not

psychologically possible for us to be temporally neutral. In order for us to experience time as static, we would need to view time *sub specie aeterni*—under the aspect of eternity. Such thinking “disregards the concrete, the temporal, the beginning of existence, and the difficult situation of the existing person.”¹ In order to approach time under the aspect of eternity, we would need to view time as God does. Since we cannot—because none of us are God—we cannot be temporally neutral. Approaching time as human rather than trying to view it *sub specie aeterni* is the central message of Kierkegaard’s philosophy of time. We ought not approach time as if we were God. While this may seem like a simple claim, it is easier said than done. We needed to read further across the Kierkegaardian corpus to work out its implications. One such implication is that as humans, we necessarily experience time as dynamic, and must focus on the future. This orientation towards the future provides Kierkegaard with a response to Parfit’s claim that temporal neutrality is psychologically possible. But we must still respond to Parfit’s claim that temporal neutrality is desirable and would be superior to focusing on the future.

In order to respond to Parfit’s claim that temporal neutrality is desirable, we must consider the ethical implications of Kierkegaard’s metaphysical understanding of time. To transition from *The Concept of Anxiety*’s metaphysics of time to the ethical account of time found in the signed authorship, Chapter Three considered *Philosophical Fragments*. In this text, Kierkegaard fleshes out his understanding of how God and humans relate to time. While God relates to time from the perspective of eternity, the Incarnation relates to time from within time. Furthermore, the Incarnate God is also the teacher who enables

¹ Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 301.

humans to have faith. Having faith involves being eternally occupied with the event of the incarnation. This understanding of faith complicates our understanding of Kierkegaard's philosophy of time. *The Concept of Anxiety* states that humans are necessarily focused towards the future, but *Philosophical Fragments* specifies that at least some humans—Christians—are focused on the past event of the incarnation. So it seems that Kierkegaard advocates both focusing on the future and an intensive consciousness of the past. To understand how this might be possible, we turned to Kierkegaard's signed authorship in general and his lily and bird discourses in particular.

In Chapter Four, we considered how the lily and the bird can teach us to stop trying to approach time *sub specie aeterni*. The lily and bird model a relationship to temporality that is free from the care of self-torment. This relationship involves adopting an appropriate relationship to the future that enables us to live, more free from worry, in the present. Kierkegaard describes this relationship towards the future using the metaphor of a rowboat. Just as a rower turns backwards in order to progress forwards towards her goal, so too must we turn away from the future in order to better focus on the present. By turning away from the future—while still progressing towards it—we can focus more intently on the work we are given to do in the present. We thus do not need to choose between focusing on the future and living in the present. We can, in a sense, have both. Kierkegaard's account of our attitudes towards time allows us to develop a response to Parfit's claim that temporal neutrality is desirable. The attitude towards time that Kierkegaard recommends attends to our human finitude by facing away from the future (or in some cases, the past) and towards the present. But despite facing away from the future, we still progress towards it, like the rower faces backwards while progressing

forwards. So we can preserve our asymmetrical attitudes towards time and progress towards the future without subjecting ourselves to the anxiety and self-torment that accompany focusing on the future. The key is learning—from the lily, the bird, and the other metaphors that Kierkegaard uses to exhort his readers—to approach time from a human perspective rather than *sub specie aeterni*. Taking tense seriously mean attending to all three tenses—the past, the present, and the future—in order to reorient ourselves towards the present and the work we are given to do today.

Turning away from the future and towards the present does not mean we must abandon our hopes for the future. We need only change our approach to those hopes. *Works of Love* details two ways that the work we are given to do in the present can transform our approach to the future. Instead of hoping abstractly and occasionally, we should remain in love's debt to one another and hope all things for our neighbors. Remaining in love's debt to one another involves preserving our present projects into the future. By continuing our present work into the future, we can pursue future goods without hoping for particular future goods or outcomes. For example, I can wish for my students to succeed without hoping that they succeed in some particular endeavor. Alternatively, I can help my students to pursue some particular good in the present and wish that they achieve that particular good in the future. Neither case subjects me to the care of self-torment that Kierkegaard describes because in neither case am I merely speculating about possible futures. Instead, I am preserving a present project into the future. By caring less about the future in this way, I can progress towards it more free from worry. Furthermore, Kierkegaard's emphasis on our present projects can also help those who are stuck on or tormented by past events. Finally, Kierkegaard exhorts his

reader to lovingly hope all things for the neighbor. Hoping for the neighbor and willing the good for them allows us to escape the care of self-torment, which is always reflective and thus inflicted on oneself. By preserving our debt of love to one another, and hoping all things for one another, we can—with the neighbor—progress towards a shared future, each of us focusing on the work we are given to do today. As a reader of Kierkegaard myself, I remain indebted to him, to my readers, and to the prompters and others who have willed the good for me throughout this study.

Since dissertations, like life, must be written forward and can only be understood backwards, let us now review what we have learned. First, we provided more robust Kierkegaardian responses to Parfit's claims that temporal neutrality is possible and desirable. Second, we developed an account of Kierkegaard's philosophy of time that allows his writings to better contribute to contemporary debates within that field. While many commentators have discussed Kierkegaard's emphasis on the future, few have read him as contributing to our understanding of time more broadly construed. As I have argued, Kierkegaard's metaphysics of time requires us to consider eternity (as the realm of possibilities) and its implications for understanding our experience of time. On Kierkegaard's view, time as we experience it is dynamic and changing but eternity—as God experiences it—is static. So Kierkegaard's view resembles elements of both the A-theory and the B-theory of time. Third, in addition to affirming the A-theory as guiding human practice and the B-theory as metaphysically true, Kierkegaard's metaphysics of time has important implications for ethical issues that arise from that orientation. Since from a human perspective, the future does not exist, we must turn away from the future and the anxiety and self-torment that accompany focusing on it. By instead facing the

work we are given to do in the present—like the lily and the bird, which have no future whatsoever—we can avoid anxiety and self-torment. Doing so does not keep us from still progressing towards the future. Like a rower in a rowboat, we can progress forwards while facing backwards. Indeed, doing so is the only way to understand life, which can only be understood backwards but must be lived forwards.² On the basis of this new orientation towards time, Kierkegaard contributes to our understanding of the virtue of hope by redirecting it from an emphasis on future goods to a focus on present goods that continue into the future, including, from a Christian perspective, our future life in eternity. This new perspective on our understanding of how we hope provides another way that Kierkegaard's writings can continue to contribute to our contemporary concerns.

Finally, our journey through Kierkegaard's (often implicit) metaphysics and its ethical implications has provided an occasion for reading texts from both the pseudonymous and signed authorships. We focused most on the texts from each authorship that develop Kierkegaard's philosophy of time—*The Concept of Anxiety*, *Philosophical Fragments*, *Christian Discourses* (and its discussion of the lily and the bird as teachers), and *Works of Love*. But we also turned to other Kierkegaardian texts, such as *The Concept of Irony* and *Fear and Trembling*, to clarify and support our interpretation. Finally, our project read Kierkegaard alongside both familiar and unexpected interlocutors from within various philosophical communities. Kierkegaard writes in *Works of Love* that the neighbor is the first person you see.³ In light of this claim, I find it fitting to read Kierkegaard alongside all sorts of other readers. It is only

² Kierkegaard, *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers Vol. 1, A-E*, Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967, p. 451, Entry 1030, IV A 164 *n.d.*, 1843.

³ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 51.

appropriate to do so given that each of us must orient ourselves towards time. I hope future readers of Kierkegaard can continue to cross disciplinary boundaries in order to collaborate with one another—and will the good for one another—in search of a deeper understanding of these questions and their edifying ethical implications.

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