The Sickness unto Death

SØREN KIERKEGAARD

1813–1855

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Sygdommen til Døden

Translated from the Danish with AI (Claude) and edited



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The Sickness unto Death · Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855)

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INTRODUCTION

The Sickness unto Death appeared in Copenhagen in July 1849, under a new pseudonym, Anti-Climacus, with Kierkegaard's own name as editor. Its subtitle calls it "a Christian psychological exposition for upbuilding and awakening." The title comes from the story of Lazarus: "This sickness is not unto death." For the Christian, Kierkegaard says, death itself is not the worst thing; the sickness unto death is despair.

The book opens with a famously dense definition: a human being is spirit, spirit is the self, and the self is "a relation that relates itself to itself." Despair is a disorder in that relation, and it takes many forms: the person who loses himself in the infinite or in the finite, in endless possibility or in grim necessity; the person who does not even know he is in despair; the one who in weakness does not want to be himself; and the one who in defiance insists on being himself on his own terms.

The second part turns psychology into theology. Despair before God is sin, and the opposite of sin is not virtue but faith. Anti-Climacus argues with the Socratic idea that sin is ignorance, then traces how sin deepens: despairing over one's sin, despairing of forgiveness, and finally declaring Christianity untrue.

Preface

Forord
Why a Christian treatise must be both rigorous and upbuilding, like a physician's lecture at the sickbed.

116 Herr! gieb uns blöde Augen
für Dinge, die nichts taugen,
und Augen voller Klarheit
in alle deine Wahrheit. [Lord, give us eyes that are dim to things that are worth nothing, and eyes full of clarity into all your truth.]

117 Many may find the form of this "exposition" strange. It will seem to them too rigorous to be upbuilding, and too upbuilding to be rigorously scholarly. As for the latter, I have no opinion on that. As for the former, that is not my opinion of it; and if it were the case that it was too rigorous to be upbuilding, then by my notion that would be a fault. It is one thing whether it cannot be upbuilding for everyone, because not everyone has the prerequisites for following it; it is another whether it has the character of the upbuilding. For in Christian terms everything, everything, ought to serve for upbuilding. The kind of scholarship that is not, in the end, upbuilding is for that very reason unchristian.[1] Everything Christian must, in its presentation, resemble a physician's lecture at the sickbed. Even if only someone versed in medicine understands it, it must never be forgotten that it is given at the sickbed. This relation of the

1 "Upbuilding" renders *opbyggelig* / *Opbyggelse*, the Danish for "edifying" / "edification", whose root sense is building up.

Christian to life (in contrast to a scholarly distance from life), or this ethical side of the Christian, is precisely the upbuilding. And this kind of presentation, however rigorous it may otherwise be, is altogether different, qualitatively different, from the kind of scholarship that is "indifferent." In Christian terms, the lofty heroism of that scholarship is so far from being heroism that it is a kind of inhuman curiosity. Christian heroism, and truly it is perhaps seen rarely enough, is to venture wholly to become oneself, a single human being, this particular single human being, alone before God, alone in this enormous exertion and this enormous responsibility. But it is not Christian heroism to be taken in by "pure humanity," or to play wondergames with world history. All Christian knowing, however rigorous its form may otherwise be, ought to be concerned; but this concern is precisely the upbuilding. Concern is the relation to life, to the actuality of personality, and so, in Christian terms, it is earnestness. The loftiness of indifferent [118] knowledge is, in Christian terms, far from being more earnest; in Christian terms it is jest and vanity. But earnestness, again, is the upbuilding.

In one sense, therefore, this little book is such that a student at a teachers' college could write it; in another sense, though, it is perhaps such that not every professor could write it.[2]

But that the treatise is dressed the way it is has at least been well considered, and is surely also psychologically correct. There is a more solemn style that is so solemn it is not very expressive, and which, because one is only too used to it, easily ends up saying nothing.

Otherwise just one remark, no doubt superfluous, but one I will nonetheless allow myself. I wish to point out once and for all that throughout this whole book despair, as the title indeed says, is understood as the sickness, not as the cure. For despair is dialectical in just this way. In the same way, in Christian terminology death is the expression for the greatest spiritual

2 The Danish *Seminarist* is a student at a seminary for training schoolteachers, not a theological seminary.

wretchedness, and yet the cure is precisely to die, to die away. / In 1848.[3]

3 "Despair" renders *Fortvivlelse*, built on *tvivl* ("doubt") with an intensifying prefix.

Introduction

Indgang
"This sickness is not unto death": Lazarus, and what Christianity means by the sickness unto death.

123 "This sickness is not unto death" (John 11:4). And yet Lazarus died. When the disciples misunderstood what Christ added later, "Lazarus our friend has fallen asleep, but I am going to wake him from sleep" (11:11), he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead" (11:14). So Lazarus is dead, and yet this sickness was not unto death. He was dead, and yet this sickness is not unto death.[1] We know well enough that Christ was thinking of the miracle that would let his contemporaries, "if they could believe, see the glory of God" (11:40). This was the miracle by which he raised Lazarus from the dead, so that "this sickness" was not only not unto death but, as Christ foretold, "for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it" (11:4). Oh, but even if Christ had not raised Lazarus, would it not be just as true that this sickness, death itself, is not unto death? When Christ steps up to the grave and cries with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" (11:43), it is certain enough that "this" sickness is not unto death. But even if Christ had not said this, does not the mere fact that he, who is "the resurrection and the life" (11:25), steps up to the grave mean that this sickness is not unto death? Does not the fact that Christ exists mean that *this* sickness is not unto death! And what would it have helped Lazarus to be raised from the dead, when it must still end in the end

1 John 11 tells how Jesus raised his friend Lazarus of Bethany from the dead. The book's title, *Sygdommen til Døden*, comes from this verse.

with his dying? What would it have helped Lazarus, if he did not exist, he who is the resurrection and the life for everyone [124] who believes in him! No, it is not because Lazarus was raised from the dead that one can say *this* sickness is not unto death. It is because he exists that this sickness is not unto death. For, humanly speaking, death is the last thing of all, and, humanly speaking, there is hope only as long as there is life. But understood in a Christian way, death is by no means the last thing of all; it too is only a small event within what is everything, an eternal life. And understood in a Christian way, there is infinitely more hope in death than there is, merely humanly speaking, when there is not only life but this life in the fullest health and strength.

So, understood in a Christian way, not even death is "the sickness unto death." Still less, then, is everything that goes by the name of earthly and temporal suffering: want, sickness, wretchedness, affliction, adversity, torment, mental suffering, sorrow, grief. And even if such things are so heavy and painful that we human beings, or at any rate the sufferer, say "this is worse than death," all such things, which, insofar as they are not sickness, can be compared to a sickness, are still, understood in a Christian way, not the sickness unto death.

So magnanimously has Christianity taught the Christian to think about everything earthly and worldly, death included. It is almost as if the Christian must grow haughty over this proud elevation above everything that human beings otherwise call misfortune, above what human beings otherwise call the greatest evil. But then Christianity has in turn discovered a wretchedness that the human being as such does not know exists; this wretchedness is the sickness unto death. What the natural human being lists as horrifying, when he has listed everything and can name nothing more, is to the Christian like a jest. Such is the relation between the natural human being and the Christian. It is like the relation between a child and a man: what the child shudders at, the man regards as nothing. The child does not know what the terrible is; the man knows it, and

shudders at that. The child's imperfection is, first, not knowing the terrible, and then, as this implies, shuddering at [125] what is not terrible. So too with the natural human being. He is ignorant of what is truly terrible, yet this does not exempt him from shuddering. No, he shudders at what is not the terrible. It is just like the pagan's relation to God: he does not know the true God, and, as if that were not enough, he worships an idol as God.

Only the Christian knows what is meant by the sickness unto death. As a Christian he gained a courage that the natural human being does not know, and he gained this courage by learning to fear what is still more terrible. That is how a person always gains courage. When one fears a greater danger, one always has the courage to walk into a lesser one; when one infinitely fears one danger, it is as if the others did not exist at all. But the terrible thing that the Christian learned to know is "the sickness unto death."

Despair Is the Sickness unto Death

Første Afsnit, A
The self as a relation that relates itself to itself; the possibility and actuality of despair; despair as the inability to die.

A. FORTVIVLELSE ER EN SYGDOM I AANDEN, I SELVET, OG KAN SAALEDES VÆRE ET TREDOBBELT: FORTVIVLET IKKE AT VÆRE SIG BEVIDST AT HAVE ET SELV (UEGENTLIG FORTVIVLELSE); FORTVIVLET IKKE AT VILLE VÆRE SIG SELV; FORTVIVLET AT VILLE VÆRE SIG SELV.

129 A human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation that relates itself to itself, or it is, in the relation, the relation's relating itself to itself; the self is not the relation but the relation's relating itself to itself. A human being is a synthesis of infinitude and finitude, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between two. Considered in this way, a human being is not yet a self.[1]

In a relation between two, the relation is the third as a negative unity, and the two relate themselves to the relation, and in the relation to the relation. Thus, under the qualification of soul, the relation between soul and body is a relation. If, however, the relation relates itself to itself, then this relation is the positive third, and this is the self.

Such a relation that relates itself to itself, a self, must either have established itself or have been established by another.

If the relation that relates itself to itself has been established by another, then the relation is indeed the third, but this rela-

tion, the third, is then in turn a relation: it relates itself to that which established the whole relation.

130 Such a derived, established relation is the human self: a relation that relates itself to itself, and in relating itself to itself relates itself to another. That is why there can be two forms of despair properly so called. Had the human self established itself, there could be question of only one form: not wanting to be oneself, wanting to be rid of oneself. But there could be no question of in despair wanting to be oneself. For this formula is the expression for the dependence of the whole relation (the self). It expresses the fact that the self cannot by itself arrive at or remain in equilibrium and rest, but only by relating itself, in relating itself to itself, to that which has established the whole relation. Indeed, this second form of despair (in despair wanting to be oneself) is so far from designating merely a particular kind of despair that, on the contrary, all despair can in the end be resolved into it and traced back to it. Suppose a person in despair is, as he believes, aware of his despair, and does not speak senselessly of it as of something that happens to him (rather as someone who suffers from dizziness, through a nervous delusion, speaks of a weight on his head, or says it is as if something were falling down on him, and so on, although this weight and this pressure are nothing external but an inverted reflection of what is internal). Suppose he now wants, with all his might, by himself and by himself alone, to lift the despair. Then he is still in despair, and with all his supposed working he only works himself all the deeper into a deeper despair. The misrelation of despair is not a simple misrelation but a misrelation in a relation that relates itself to itself and has been established by another. So the misrelation in that relation which is for itself also reflects itself infinitely in the relation to the power that established it.

For this is the formula that describes the state of the self when despair is completely rooted out: in relating itself to itself

1 Key terms: *Aand* (spirit), *Selv* (self), *Forhold* (relation), *Synthese* (synthesis).

and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it.

B. THE POSSIBILITY AND ACTUALITY OF DESPAIR

Being able to despair is humanity's advantage; being in despair is its ruin, renewed at every moment.

Is despair an advantage or a defect? Purely dialectically, it is both. If one were to hold on to the abstract thought of despair, without thinking of anyone in despair, one would have to say: it is an enormous [131] advantage. The possibility of this sickness is the human being's advantage over the animal, and this advantage distinguishes him in quite another way than walking upright, for it points to the infinite uprightness or loftiness of his being spirit. The possibility of this sickness is the human being's advantage over the animal; to be aware of this sickness is the Christian's advantage over the natural human being; to be cured of this sickness is the Christian's blessedness.

So it is an infinite advantage to be able to despair; and yet to be in despair is not only the greatest misfortune and wretchedness. No, it is perdition. Otherwise the relation between possibility and actuality is not like this. If it is an advantage to be able to be this or that, then it is an even greater advantage to be it; that is, being is related to being able to be as an ascent. With despair, by contrast, being is related to being able to be as a fall; as infinite as the advantage of the possibility is, so deep is the fall. So with respect to despair, the ascent is not to be in despair. Yet this qualification is in turn ambiguous.[2] Not being in despair is not like not being lame, blind, and the like. If not being in despair means neither more nor less than not being it, then it is precisely being it. Not being in despair must mean the annihilated possibility of being able to be it. If it is to be true that a person is not in despair, he must annihilate the possibility at every moment. Otherwise the relation between possibility and actuality is not like this. For the thinkers do say that actuality is anni-

2 "Actuality" renders *Virkelighed* (also "reality").

hilated possibility, but that is not quite true: it is fulfilled, active possibility. Here, by contrast, actuality (not being in despair), which is therefore also a negation, is impotent, annihilated possibility. Otherwise actuality in relation to possibility is a confirmation; here it is a denial.

Despair is the misrelation in the relation of a synthesis that relates itself to itself. But the synthesis is not the misrelation; it is merely the possibility, or, in the synthesis lies the possibility of the misrelation. If the synthesis were the misrelation, then despair would not exist at all. Despair would then be something that lay in human nature as such, that is, it would not be despair. It would be something that happened to a person, something he suffered, like a sickness a person falls into, or like death, [132] which is everyone's lot. No, despairing lies in the human being himself. But if he were not a synthesis, he could not despair at all; and if the synthesis were not originally in the right relation from the hand of God, he could not despair either.

Where, then, does despair come from? From the relation in which the synthesis relates itself to itself, in that God, who made the human being into the relation, as it were lets it go from his hand; that is, in that the relation relates itself to itself. And in the fact that the relation is spirit, is the self, lies the responsibility under which all despair stands, and stands at every moment it exists. This holds however much, and however ingeniously deceiving himself and others, the person in despair speaks of his despair as a misfortune, through a confusion like the one in the case of dizziness mentioned above. Despair, though qualitatively different, has much in common with dizziness, since dizziness is, under the qualification of soul, what despair is under the qualification of spirit, and it is pregnant with analogies to despair.

Once the misrelation, despair, has set in, does it follow of itself that it continues? No, it does not follow of itself. If the misrelation continues, this follows not from the misrelation but from the relation that relates itself to itself. That is to say, every time the misrelation shows itself, and at every moment it exists,

one must go back to the relation. Look, we say that a person contracts an illness, for example through carelessness. Then the illness sets in, and from that moment it asserts itself and is now an *actuality*, whose origin becomes more and more *past*. It would be both cruel and inhuman to keep saying over and over, "At this moment you, the sick person, are contracting this illness," that is, to want at every moment to dissolve the actuality of the illness into its possibility. It is true that he contracted the illness, but he did so only once. The continuation of the illness is a simple consequence of his having once contracted it, and its progress is not at every moment to be traced back to him as its cause. He contracted it, but one cannot say that he *is contracting* it. It is otherwise with despairing. Every actual moment of despair is to be traced back to possibility; every moment he is in despair, he *is contracting* it. It is continually the present tense; nothing becomes a past left behind in relation to actuality. In every actual moment of despair the person in despair carries all [133] that went before in possibility as something present. This is because despairing is a qualification of spirit, and is related to the eternal in the human being. But the eternal he cannot get rid of, no, not in all eternity. He cannot throw it away once and for all; nothing is more impossible. At every moment when he does not have it, he must have thrown it away or be throwing it away, but it comes back; that is, every moment he is in despair he is contracting despair. For despair follows not from the misrelation but from the relation that relates itself to itself. And a person can no more get rid of the relation to himself than of his self, which is in any case one and the same thing, since the self is the relation to itself.

C. DESPAIR IS "THE SICKNESS UNTO DEATH"

The torment of despair is not being able to die: the self cannot consume itself.

This concept, the sickness unto death, must however be taken in a special way. Literally it means a sickness whose end, whose

outcome, is death. Thus one speaks of a fatal illness as synonymous with a sickness unto death. In that sense despair cannot be called the sickness unto death. But understood in a Christian way, death is itself a passage into life. To that extent, in Christian terms, no earthly, bodily sickness is unto death. For death is indeed the last stage of the sickness, but death is not the last thing. If there is to be talk, in the strictest sense, of a sickness unto death, it must be one in which the last thing is death, and death is the last thing. And this is precisely despair.

Yet in another sense despair is still more definitely the sickness unto death. For it is as far as possible from being the case that one literally dies of this sickness, or that this sickness ends in bodily death. On the contrary, the torment of despair is precisely not being able to die. So it has more in common with the condition of someone mortally ill, who lies struggling with death and cannot die. Thus to be sick *unto* death is not to be able to die, yet not as if there were hope of life. No, the hopelessness is that even the last hope, death, is not there. When death is the greatest danger, one hopes for life; but when one comes to know the even more terrible danger, one hopes for death. [134] When the danger is so great that death has become the hope, then despair is the hopelessness of not even being able to die.

In this last sense, then, despair is the sickness unto death: this tormenting contradiction, this sickness in the self, eternally to die, to die and yet not to die, to die death. For to die means that it is over, but to die death means to live through dying; and if this can be lived through for a single moment, then it is thereby lived through eternally. If a person were to die of despair as one dies of a sickness, then the eternal in him, the self, would have to be able to die in the same sense as the body dies of the sickness. But this is an impossibility; the dying of despair continually turns into a living. The person in despair cannot die. "No more than the dagger can kill thoughts" can despair consume the eternal, the self, which lies at the root of despair, whose worm does not die and whose fire is not quenched. Yet despair is precisely a *self*-consuming, but an impotent self-con-

suming that cannot do what it itself wants. What it itself wants, though, is to consume itself, which it cannot do; and this impotence is a new form of self-consuming, in which despair once again cannot do what it wants, namely consume itself. This is an intensification, or the law of intensification. This is what inflames it, or it is the cold burning in despair, this gnawing, whose movement is constantly inward, deeper and deeper into impotent self-consuming.[3] It is so far from being any consolation to the person in despair that despair does not consume him that it is just the opposite. This consolation is precisely the torment; it is precisely what keeps the gnawing alive and keeps life in the gnawing. For it is precisely over this that he—not despaired, but—despairs: that he cannot consume himself, cannot get rid of himself, cannot become nothing. This is the intensified formula for despair, the rising of the fever in this sickness of the self.

A person in despair despairs over *something*. So it seems for a moment, but only for a moment; in that same moment true despair shows itself, or despair shows itself in its truth. In despairing over *something*, he was really despairing over *himself*, and now he wants to be rid of himself. So when the power-hungry man, whose watchword is "either Caesar or nothing," does not become Caesar, he despairs over it. But this means something else: that precisely because he did not become Caesar, he now cannot bear to be himself. So what he really despairs over is not that he did not become [135] Caesar, but over himself, that he did not become Caesar.[4] This self which, had it become Caesar, would have been his whole delight (though in another sense just as much in despair), this self is now the most unbearable thing of all to him. In a deeper sense, what is unbearable to him is not that he did not become Caesar; it is this self that did not become Caesar that is unbearable to him. Or, more correctly still, what is

3 "Whose worm does not die…" echoes Mark 9:48 (cf. Isaiah 66:24). "Intensification" renders *Potentsation*. *Den kolde Brand*, literally "the cold burning," is the Danish word for gangrene.

4 "Either Caesar or nothing" (Latin *aut Caesar aut nihil*) was the motto of Cesare Borgia (1475–1507).

unbearable to him is that he cannot get rid of himself. Had he become Caesar, he would in despair have got rid of himself; but now he did not become Caesar, and in despair he cannot get rid of himself. Essentially he is equally in despair, for he does not have his self, he is not himself. By becoming Caesar he would not have become himself but have got rid of himself; and by not becoming Caesar he despairs over not being able to get rid of himself. It is therefore a superficial view (one that has presumably never seen anyone in despair, not even itself) when people say of someone in despair, as if this were his punishment, "He is consuming himself." For that is precisely what he, in despair, wants, and precisely what, to his torment, he cannot do, since in despair fire has caught in something that cannot burn, or cannot burn up: in the self.

To despair over something is therefore not yet despair proper. It is the beginning, or it is as when the physician says of an illness that it has not yet declared itself. The next stage is declared despair: despairing over oneself. A young girl despairs because of love; that is, she despairs over the loss of her beloved, that he died or was unfaithful to her. This is not declared despair. No, she despairs over herself. This self of hers, which she would have got rid of, or lost, in the most blissful way had it become "his" beloved, this self is now a torment to her when it has to be a self without "him." This self, which would have become her wealth (though in another sense just as much in despair), has now become a loathsome emptiness to her, since "he" is dead, or it has become repugnant to her, since it reminds her that she was deceived. Try it now: say to such a girl, "You are consuming yourself," and you will hear her answer, "Oh no, the torment is precisely that I cannot."

To despair over oneself, in despair wanting to be rid of oneself, is the formula for all despair. So the second form of despair, in despair wanting to be oneself, can be traced back to the first, in despair not wanting to [136] be oneself, just as we earlier resolved the form in despair not wanting to be oneself into the form in despair wanting to be oneself (cf. A.). A person in des-

pair wants in despair to be himself. But if he wants in despair to be himself, then surely he does not want to be rid of himself. Yes, so it seems; but if one looks more closely, one sees that the contradiction is the same. The self that he in despair wants to be is a self he is not (for to want to be the self one truly is, is precisely the opposite of despair); that is, he wants to tear his self loose from the power that established it. But in spite of all his despairing he cannot do this; in spite of all the exertion of despair, that power is the stronger and compels him to be the self he does not want to be. But in this way he does, after all, want to be rid of himself, rid of the self he is, in order to be the self he himself has thought up. To be a self as he wants it would be his whole delight, though in another sense it would be just as much in despair. But to be compelled to be a self as he does not want to be it, that is his torment: that he cannot get rid of himself.

Socrates proved the immortality of the soul from the fact that the sickness of the soul (sin) does not consume it as the sickness of the body consumes the body. In the same way one can also prove the eternal in a human being from the fact that despair cannot consume his self, that this is precisely the torment of contradiction in despair. If there were nothing eternal in a human being, he could not despair at all; but if despair could consume his self, then there would be no despair after all.[5]

Thus despair, this sickness in the self, is the sickness unto death. The person in despair is mortally ill. In a quite different sense than can be said of any illness, the sickness has attacked the noblest parts; and yet he cannot die. Death is not the last stage of the sickness, but death is continually the last. To be saved from this sickness by death is an impossibility, for the sickness and its torment—and death—are precisely not being able to die.

This is the condition in despair. However completely it escapes the person in despair, however completely the person in despair succeeds (and this must hold above all of the kind of

5 Socrates (469–399 BC), the Athenian philosopher. The argument is in Plato's *Republic*, Book 10 (608d–611a).

despair that is ignorance of being despair) in having lost his self, and lost it in such a way that it is not noticed in the least, eternity will nevertheless make it manifest that his condition was despair. It will nail him fast to his self, so that the torment still remains that he cannot get rid of his self, [137] and it becomes manifest that his having succeeded was an illusion. And eternity must do this, because having a self, being a self, is the greatest, the infinite, concession that has been made to the human being, but at the same time it is eternity's claim upon him.

The Universality of This Sickness

Første Afsnit, B
There is not a single human being who is not in some way in despair.

138 A physician might well say that perhaps not one single human being alive is completely healthy. In the same way, if one really knew the human being, one would have to say that not one single human being is alive who is not, after all, a little in despair; in whose innermost depths there does not, after all, dwell an unrest, a discord, a disharmony, an anxiety about an unknown something, or about a something he does not even dare to become acquainted with, an anxiety about a possibility of existence or an anxiety about himself. As the physician speaks of going about with an illness in the body, so he goes about with a sickness, walks about carrying a sickness of the spirit, which now and then, in a flash, through and with an anxiety he cannot explain to himself, lets it be felt that it is there inside.[1] And in any case no human being has lived, and no human being lives, outside Christendom who is not in despair; and within Christendom no one, insofar as he is not a true Christian; and insofar as he is not wholly that, he is still somewhat in despair.

This view will no doubt seem to many a paradox, an exaggeration, and a gloomy and depressing outlook besides. Yet it is none of these. It is not gloomy; on the contrary, it seeks to shed light on what is usually left standing in a certain obscurity. It is

1 "Anxiety" renders *Angest*, Kierkegaard's technical term, as in *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844).

not depressing but, on the contrary, uplifting, since it considers every human being under the qualification of the highest demand upon him, that of being spirit. Nor is it a paradox; on the contrary, it is a consistently worked-out fundamental view, and to that extent no exaggeration either.

[139] The ordinary view of despair, by contrast, stops at appearances, and is thus a superficial view, that is, no view at all. It assumes that every human being must surely know best for himself whether he is in despair or not. Whoever says that he is in despair is regarded as in despair, but whoever thinks he is not is for that reason not regarded as such either. As a consequence, despair becomes a rather rare phenomenon instead of the utterly common thing it is. It is not rare that someone is in despair. No, what is rare, very rare indeed, is that someone is truly not in despair.

But the popular view understands despair very poorly. Among other things (to mention just this one, which, rightly understood, brings thousands upon thousands, and millions, under the qualification of despair), it completely overlooks the fact that not being in despair, not being conscious that one is in despair, is precisely a form of despair. When it comes to understanding despair, the popular view fares, in a far deeper sense, as it sometimes fares when it comes to deciding whether a person is sick or not. In a far deeper sense, for the popular view understands even far less about what spirit is (and without that one cannot understand despair either) than about sickness and health. Generally it is assumed that a person is well if he does not himself say that he is sick, all the more so if he himself says that he is well. The physician, however, views sickness differently. And why? Because the physician has a definite and developed idea of what it is to be healthy, and by this he examines a person's condition. The physician knows that just as there is a sickness that is merely imagined, so too there is such a health; in the latter case, therefore, he first applies remedies to make the sickness come out into the open. In general the physician, precisely because he is a physician (the one with insight),

does not have unconditional confidence in a person's own statement about how he is. If it were the case that whatever anyone said about how he is—whether he is healthy or sick, where it hurts, and so on—could be unconditionally relied on, then being a physician would be an illusion. For a physician has not only to prescribe remedies but first and foremost to recognize the sickness, and so, again, first and foremost to know whether the supposedly sick person is really sick, or whether the supposedly healthy person is perhaps really sick. So too with the relation of the expert on the soul [140] to despair. He knows what despair is, he is acquainted with it, and therefore he is not content with a person's statement either that he is not in despair or that he is. For it must be noted that, in a certain sense, not even those who say they are in despair are always in despair. One can, after all, affect despair; and one can be mistaken and confuse despair, which is a qualification of spirit, with all sorts of passing low spirits and inner turmoil, which pass off again without coming to despair. The expert on the soul, however, does regard these too as forms of despair. He sees very well that it is affectation, but precisely this affectation is despair. He sees very well that these low spirits, and so on, do not mean much, but precisely this, that they do not mean much and do not come to mean much, is despair.

The popular view further overlooks the fact that despair, compared with a sickness, is dialectical in a different way from what is otherwise called sickness, because it is a sickness of the spirit. And this dialectic, rightly understood, again brings thousands under the qualification of despair. Suppose a physician has made sure at a given moment that such-and-such a person is healthy, and the person falls ill at a later moment. Then the physician may be right that this person *was* healthy then but now *is* sick. Not so with despair. As soon as despair shows itself, it shows that the person was in despair. To that extent one can at no moment decide anything about a person who has not been saved by having been in despair. For when whatever brings him to despair occurs, it becomes manifest in that same moment

that he has been in despair throughout his entire previous life. On the other hand, one can by no means say, when someone gets a fever, that it now becomes manifest that he has had a fever throughout his entire life. But despair is a qualification of spirit, is related to the eternal, and therefore has something of the eternal in its dialectic.

Despair is not only dialectical in a different way from a sickness; with despair all the symptoms are dialectical, and that is why the superficial view is so easily deceived in deciding whether despair is present or not. For not being in despair can mean precisely being in despair, and it can mean having been saved from being in despair. Security and tranquility can mean being in despair; precisely this security, this tranquility, can be the despair. And it can mean [141] having overcome despair and gained peace. Not being in despair is not like not being sick. For not being sick cannot be being sick, but not being in despair can be precisely being in despair. It is not with despair as with a sickness, where feeling unwell is the sickness. By no means. The feeling unwell is itself dialectical. Never to have felt this unwellness is precisely to be in despair.

This means, and has its ground in the fact, that viewed as spirit (and if one is to speak of despair, one must view the human being under the qualification of spirit), the human condition is always critical. With sickness one speaks of a crisis, but not with health. And why not? Because bodily health is an immediate qualification, which first becomes dialectical in the state of sickness, where there is then talk of the crisis. But spiritually, or when the human being is viewed as spirit, both health and sickness are critical; there is no immediate health of the spirit.

As soon as one does not view the human being under the qualification of spirit (and if not, one cannot speak of despair either) but only as a synthesis of soul and body, health is an immediate qualification, and sickness of soul or body is only then the dialectical qualification. But despair is precisely that the human being is not conscious of being qualified as spirit.

Even what is, humanly speaking, the loveliest and most lovable thing of all, a young woman's youthfulness, which is sheer peace and harmony and joy—that too is despair. For this is happiness, but happiness is not a qualification of spirit; and far, far within, in the innermost depths of happiness's most hidden recesses, there dwells anxiety too, which is despair. It would so much like to be allowed to stay in there, for despair's dearest, most choice place to dwell is in the innermost depths of happiness. All immediacy, despite its illusory security and calm, is anxiety, and therefore, quite consistently, it is most anxious about nothing. One does not make immediacy as anxious by the most harrowing description of the most terrible something as by a halfword about something indefinite, tossed off slyly, almost carelessly, yet with the surely calculated aim of reflection. Indeed, one makes immediacy most anxious of all by cunningly insinuating that it surely knows itself what one is talking about. For immediacy certainly does not know; [142] but reflection never catches so surely as when it makes its snare out of nothing, and reflection is never so much itself as when it is—nothing.[2] It takes an eminent reflection, or rather it takes a great faith, to be able to endure the reflection of nothing, that is, infinite reflection. So even the loveliest and most lovable thing of all, a young woman's youthfulness, is nevertheless despair, is happiness. Therefore one will hardly succeed in slipping through life on this immediacy. And if this happiness does succeed in slipping through, well, that helps but little, for it is despair. For despair, precisely because it is wholly dialectical, is the sickness of which it holds true that the greatest misfortune is never to have had it. It is a true godsend to get it, even though it is the most dangerous sickness of all if one does not want to be cured of it. Otherwise one can speak only of its being fortunate to be cured of a sickness; the sickness itself is the misfortune.

So the popular view is as wrong as it could possibly be when it assumes that despair is something rare; on the contrary, despair is quite common. The popular view is as wrong as it could

2 "Immediacy" renders *Umiddelbarhed*: life as simply given, before reflection.

possibly be when it assumes that whoever does not think or feel that he is in despair is not in despair, and that only the one who says he is, is. On the contrary, the one who says without affectation that he is in despair is still a little nearer, one dialectical step nearer, to being cured than all those who are not regarded, and do not regard themselves, as being in despair. But precisely this is the common case, as the expert on the soul will surely grant me: most people live without ever really becoming conscious of being qualified as spirit. From this comes all the so-called security, contentment with life, etc., etc., which is precisely despair. Those, on the other hand, who say they are in despair are ordinarily either people with a nature so much deeper that they must become conscious of themselves as spirit, or people whom hard events and terrible decisions have helped to become conscious of themselves as spirit. It is either the one or the other, for the person who is truly not in despair is very rare indeed.

Oh, there is so much talk about human need and misery. I try to understand it, and I have known a good deal of it at close range. There is so much talk about wasting a life. But only that person's life was wasted who went on living, deceived by life's joys or its [143] sorrows, in such a way that he never became eternally and decisively conscious of himself as spirit, as self—or, what is the same, never became aware, and in the deepest sense never gained the impression, that there is a God, and that "he," he himself, his self, exists before this God. This gain of infinitude is never reached except through despair. Alas, and this misery: that so many live on like this, cheated of the most blessed of all thoughts. This misery: that people busy themselves—or, where the human crowd is concerned, keep the crowd busy—with everything else, use them to make up the cast in the drama of life, but never remind them of this blessedness. That people are heaped together—and deceived—instead of being split apart, so that each single individual might gain the highest, the only thing worth living for, and enough to live in for an eternity. It seems to me I could weep for an eternity that this

misery exists! Oh, and in my view this is one more expression of the horror of this most terrible of all sicknesses and miseries: its hiddenness. Not only that the one who suffers from it may wish to hide it and be able to, so that it can dwell in a person in such a way that no one, no one discovers it. No—that it can be so hidden in a person that he himself does not know it! Oh, and when at last the hourglass has run out, the hourglass of temporality; when the noise of worldliness has fallen silent, and the restless or idle busyness has come to an end; when everything is still around you, as it is in eternity—whether you were man or woman, rich or poor, dependent or independent, fortunate or unfortunate; whether you bore the splendor of the crown in high station, or in humble obscurity only the toil and heat of the day; whether your name will be remembered as long as the world stands, and so will have been remembered as long as it stood, or you, without a name, ran along nameless in the countless crowd;[3] whether the glory that surrounded you surpassed all human description, or the harshest and most disgraceful human judgment befell you: eternity asks you, and each individual among these millions upon millions, about one thing only—whether you have lived in despair or not. Whether in such despair that you did not know you were in despair; or in such a way that you carried this sickness hidden in your innermost being, as your gnawing secret, as the fruit of a sinful love beneath your heart; or in such a way that you, a horror to others, raged in despair. And if so—if you have lived in despair, then, whatever else you [144] won or lost, for you everything is lost. Eternity does not acknowledge you; it never knew you—or, more terrible still, it knows you as you are known; it binds you fast to your self in despair![4]

3 "The toil and heat of the day" echoes the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:12).

4 Echoes Matthew 7:23 ("I never knew you") and 1 Corinthians 13:12 ("as I have been fully known").

The Forms of Despair: Finitude and Infinitude, Possibility and Necessity

Første Afsnit, C.A

Despair considered in the constituents of the synthesis: lacking finitude or infinitude, possibility or necessity.

145 It must be possible to discover the forms of despair abstractly by reflecting on the constituents of which the self, as a synthesis, consists. The self is formed of infinitude and finitude. But this synthesis is a relation, and a relation that, although derived, relates itself to itself, which is freedom. The self is freedom. But freedom is the dialectical element in the qualifications of possibility and necessity.[1]

Principally, however, despair must be viewed under the qualification of consciousness. Whether despair is conscious or not is what makes the qualitative difference between one despair and another. All despair, viewed in its concept, is of course conscious; but it does not follow that the person in whom it is, the one who must rightly, by the concept, be called in despair, is conscious of it. Consciousness, then, is the decisive factor. In general, consciousness—that is, self-consciousness—is decisive with regard to the self. The more consciousness, the more self; the more consciousness, the more will; the more will, the more self. A person who has no will at all is no self; but the more will he has, the more self-consciousness he has, too.[2]

1 "Infinitude" and "finitude" render *Uendelighed* and *Endelighed*; "possibility" and "necessity," *Mulighed* and *Nødvendighed*.

2 "Consciousness" renders *Bevidsthed*.

A) DESPAIR UNDER FINITUDE AND INFINITUDE

Becoming a self means becoming concrete, moving away from oneself infinitely and returning to oneself.

146 The self is the conscious synthesis of infinitude and finitude that relates itself to itself, whose task is to become itself, which can be done only through the relation to God. But to become oneself is to become concrete. And to become concrete is neither to become finite nor to become infinite, for what is to become concrete is, after all, a synthesis. The development must therefore consist in infinitely moving away from oneself in the infinitizing of the self, and in infinitely coming back to oneself in the finitizing. If, on the other hand, the self does not become itself, it is in despair, whether it knows it or not. Yet a self, in every moment that it exists, is in a process of becoming, for the self κατα δυναμιν [potentially] does not actually exist; it is only that which is to come into existence. Insofar, then, as the self does not become itself, it is not itself; but not to be oneself is precisely despair.

A) THE DESPAIR OF INFINITUDE

Feeling, knowing and willing turn fantastic, and the self evaporates into abstraction.

That this is so lies in the dialectical fact that the self is a synthesis, and therefore each term is constantly its opposite. No form of despair can be defined directly (that is, undialectically), but only by reflecting on its opposite. One can describe the condition of the person in despair directly, as a poet does, by giving him lines to speak. But despair can be defined only through its opposite; and if the lines are to have poetic value, the coloring of their expression must contain the reflection of the dialectical opposite. Thus every human existence that supposedly has become infinite, or merely wants to be infinite—indeed, every moment in which a human existence has become, or merely wants to be, infinite—is despair. For the self is the synthesis in

which the finite is the limiting factor and the infinite the expanding factor. The despair of infinitude is therefore the fantastic, the limitless; for the self is healthy and free from despair only when, precisely by having despaired, it grounds itself transparently in God.

The fantastic is, of course, most closely related to imagination; but imagination in turn is related to feeling, knowing, and willing, so that a human [147] being can have a fantastic feeling, knowing, and willing. Imagination is in general the medium of the infinitizing process. It is not one capacity like the others; if one wants to speak that way, it is the capacity instar omnium [that stands for all the others]. What feeling, knowing, and willing a person has depends in the last resort on what imagination he has, that is, on how these are reflected—that is, on imagination. Imagination is the infinitizing reflection, which is why the elder Fichte quite rightly assumed, even with regard to knowing, that imagination is the origin of the categories. The self is reflection, and imagination is reflection; it is the rendering of the self, which is the self's possibility.[3] Imagination is the possibility of all reflection; and the intensity of this medium is the possibility of the self's intensity.

The fantastic is in general that which carries a person out into the infinite in such a way that it only carries him away from himself and thereby prevents him from coming back to himself.

When feeling becomes fantastic in this way, the self simply evaporates more and more. In the end it becomes a kind of abstract sentimentality which, inhumanly, belongs to no human being, but which, inhumanly, participates sentimentally, so to speak, in the fate of some abstraction or other, for example humanity in abstracto [in the abstract]. The rheumatic is not master of his bodily sensations; they are at the mercy of wind and weather, so that he involuntarily feels it in himself when there is a change in the air, etc. So it is with the one whose feel-

3 Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), German idealist philosopher, called "the elder" to distinguish him from his son, the philosopher Immanuel Hermann Fichte.

ing has become fantastic: he becomes in a way infinitized, but not in such a way that he becomes more and more himself, for he loses himself more and more.

Likewise with knowing, when it becomes fantastic. The law for the self's development with regard to knowing, insofar as it is to be true that the self becomes itself, is that the rising degree of knowledge corresponds to the degree of self-knowledge: the more the self knows, the more it knows itself. If this does not happen, then the more knowing increases, the more it becomes a kind of inhuman knowing, in the production of which the human self is squandered—rather as human beings were squandered on building pyramids, or as, in that Russian horn music, human beings were squandered on being one single beat, neither more nor less.[4]

When the will becomes fantastic, the self likewise evaporates more and more. The will then does not continually become concrete to the same degree that it is abstract, [148] which would mean this: the more it is infinitized in purpose and resolution, the more fully present and contemporary with itself it becomes in the small part of the task that can be carried out right now; in being infinitized it comes back to itself in the strictest sense; *farthest away* from itself (when it is most infinitized in purpose and resolution), it is at the same moment *closest* to itself in carrying out the infinitely small part of the work that can be done this very day, this very hour, this very moment.

And when feeling or knowing or willing has become fantastic, in the end the whole self can become so—whether in a more active form, in which the person plunges into the fantastic, or in a more passive form, in which he is carried away; but in both cases he is responsible. The self then leads a fantastic existence in abstract infinitizing or in abstract isolation, continually lacking its self, from which it only moves farther and farther away. Take, for example, the religious sphere. The God-relationship is an infinitizing; but this infinitizing can carry a

4 In Russian horn bands of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, each musician (often a serf) blew a horn that sounded only one note.

person away so fantastically that it becomes mere intoxication. It can seem to a person as if it were unbearable to exist before God, because he cannot come back to himself, cannot become himself. Such a fantastic religious person would say (to characterize him by giving him a line to speak): "That a sparrow can live is understandable; it does not know that it exists before God. But to know that one exists before God, and then not go mad or come to nothing that very moment!"[5]

LOSING ONESELF QUIETLY

The greatest danger, losing one's self, can pass unnoticed while a person marries, works and is esteemed.

But although a person has become fantastic in this way, and therefore in despair, he can nevertheless—though it usually becomes evident—live on quite well, be a human being to all appearances, occupied with temporal things, marry, have children, be honored and esteemed; and perhaps no one notices that in a deeper sense he lacks a self. The world makes no great fuss about such things; for a self is the thing the world asks about least, and the thing it is most dangerous of all to let on that one has. The greatest danger, losing oneself, can happen very quietly in the world, as if it were nothing at all. No other loss can happen so quietly; every other loss—an arm, a leg, five rix-dollars, a wife, etc.—is at least noticed.[6]

B) THE DESPAIR OF FINITUDE

Worldly people let themselves be ground smooth like pebbles, becoming numbers instead of selves.

149 That this is so lies, as was shown under α, in the dialectical fact that the self is a synthesis, and therefore each term is its opposite.

5 Perhaps an echo of Matthew 10:29, where not one sparrow falls to the ground apart from God.

6 Rbd. (*rigsbankdaler*, rix-dollars) was the Danish currency of the time; five was a modest sum.

To lack infinitude is despairing limitedness, narrow-mindedness. Here, of course, only narrow-mindedness and limitation in the ethical sense are meant. The world really talks only about intellectual or aesthetic limitation, or about things of no importance, which are always what the world talks about most; for worldliness is precisely to ascribe infinite value to what is of no importance. The worldly view always clings to the differences between one person and another, and, naturally enough (for to have it is spirituality), has no understanding of the one thing needful. It therefore has no understanding of the limitation and narrow-mindedness that consists in having lost oneself—not by evaporating into the infinite but by being entirely finitized; by having become, instead of a self, a number, one more human being, one more repetition of this everlasting Einerlei [sameness].[7]

Despairing narrow-mindedness is to lack primitivity, or to have robbed oneself of one's primitivity, to have, spiritually speaking, emasculated oneself. For every human being is primitively constituted as a self, destined to become himself. Certainly every self as such has sharp edges; but from this it only follows that it is to be honed, not ground down—not that out of fear of people it should give up being itself altogether, or even merely that out of fear of people it should not dare to be itself in its more essential contingency (which is precisely what must not be ground down), in which one is, after all, oneself for oneself.[8] But while one kind of despair runs wild into the infinite and loses itself, another kind of despair lets itself be, as it were, cheated out of its self by "the others." By seeing the multitude of people around him, by getting busy with all sorts of worldly affairs, by becoming wise to how things go in the world, such a person forgets himself, forgets what his name is, divinely understood. He does not dare to believe in himself, finds it too risky to be himself, far easier and safer to be like the others, to become

7 "The one thing needful": Jesus' words to Martha in Luke 10:42.
8 *Primitivitet*: one's original, underived individuality, not anything crude.

an imitation, to become numerus [a mere number], one of the crowd.

This form of despair goes almost entirely unnoticed in the world. Precisely by thus [150] losing himself, such a person has gained the perfectibility to get along splendidly in business and society, indeed to make a success of himself in the world. Here there is no holdup, no difficulty with his self and its infinitizing; he is ground as smooth as a pebble, as current as a coin in circulation. So far from anyone regarding him as in despair, he is exactly what a human being ought to be. In general the world, naturally enough, has no understanding of what is truly terrible. The despair that not only causes one no inconvenience in life but makes life comfortable and easy is, naturally, in no way regarded as despair. That this is the world's view can be seen, among other things, in almost all proverbs, which are merely rules of prudence. Thus it is said that one regrets having spoken ten times for every once one regrets having kept silent. And why? Because having spoken, being an external fact, can involve one in unpleasantness, since it is an actuality. But having kept silent! And yet that is the most dangerous thing of all. For by keeping silent a person is left entirely to himself; here actuality does not come to his aid by punishing him, by bringing the consequences of his speech down upon him. No, in that respect keeping silent is easy. But this is exactly why the one who knows what the terrible is fears most of all every misstep, every sin, that takes an inward direction and leaves no outward trace. Likewise, in the eyes of the world it is dangerous to venture. And why? Because one may lose. But not to venture—that is prudent. And yet by not venturing one can so terribly easily lose what one would hardly lose by venturing, however much else one lost—and in any case never lose in this way, so easily, so completely, as if it were nothing at all: oneself. For if I have ventured wrongly, well then, life helps me with its punishment. But if I have not ventured at all, who helps me then? And what if, on top of that, by not venturing at all in the highest sense (and to ven-

ture in the highest sense is precisely to become aware of oneself), I cowardly gain every earthly advantage—and lose myself![9]

And that is precisely how it is with the despair of finitude. Because a person is in despair in this way, he can very well—indeed, really all the better—live on in temporality, be a human being to all appearances, be praised by others, honored and esteemed, occupied with all the aims of temporal life. Indeed, what is called worldliness consists of nothing but such people, who, if one may put it this way, sign themselves over to the world. They use their abilities, amass money, carry out worldly exploits, [151] calculate shrewdly, etc., etc., and perhaps get mentioned in history; but themselves they are not. Spiritually understood, they have no self, no self for whose sake they could venture everything, no self before God—however selfish they may otherwise be.

B) DESPAIR UNDER POSSIBILITY AND NECESSITY

The self needs both possibility and necessity in order to become itself freely.

For becoming (and the self is, after all, to become itself freely), possibility and necessity are equally essential. Just as infinitude and finitude (απειρον – περας [the unlimited – the limit]) belong to the self, so do possibility and necessity. A self that has no possibility is in despair, and so is a self that has no necessity.[10]

A) THE DESPAIR OF POSSIBILITY

A self that runs wild in possibility never becomes actual and loses its way.

That this is so lies, as has been shown, in the dialectic.

Just as finitude is the limiting factor in relation to infinitude, so necessity is the restraining factor in relation to possibility.

9 Echoes Matthew 16:26: what does it profit a person to gain the whole world and lose his soul?

10 *Apeiron* and *peras,* the unlimited and the limit, are paired principles in Pythagorean thought and in Plato's *Philebus.*

When the self, as a synthesis of finitude and infinitude, is established, is κατα δυναμιν [potentially], then in order to become it reflects itself in the medium of imagination, and in this way infinite possibility appears. The self κατα δυναμιν [potentially] is just as much possible as necessary; for it is indeed itself, but it is to become itself. Insofar as it is itself, it is the necessary; and insofar as it is to become itself, it is a possibility.

Now if possibility overruns necessity, so that the self runs away from itself into possibility, so that it has nothing necessary to return to, then this is the despair of possibility. This self becomes an abstract possibility; it thrashes about in possibility until it is exhausted, but it neither moves from the place nor arrives at any place, for the necessary is precisely the place. To become oneself is precisely a movement in place. To become is a movement away from the place, but to become oneself is a movement in place.

Possibility then seems to the self greater and greater; more and more becomes possible, because nothing becomes actual. In the end it is as if everything were possible—but that is precisely the moment the abyss has swallowed the self. Every little possibility [152] would need some time to become actuality. But in the end the time that ought to be used for actuality becomes shorter and shorter; everything becomes more and more momentary. Possibility becomes more and more intense—but in the sense of possibility, not in the sense of actuality; for in the sense of actuality, intensity means that at least something of what is possible becomes actual. One moment something appears possible, and then a new possibility appears; in the end these phantasmagorias follow one another so rapidly that it is as if everything were possible. And that is precisely the last moment, when the individual has himself become entirely a mirage.

What the self now lacks is, of course, actuality; that is how people would ordinarily put it, just as they say that a person has become unreal. But on closer inspection it is really necessity he lacks. For it is not the case, as the philosophers explain, that

necessity is the unity of possibility and actuality. No, actuality is the unity of possibility and necessity. Nor is it merely a lack of strength when a self goes astray in possibility in this way—at least not in the sense in which that is usually understood. What is really missing is the strength to obey, to submit to what is necessary in one's self, what may be called one's limit.[11] The misfortune, therefore, is not that such a self did not amount to anything in the world. No, the misfortune is that he did not become aware of himself—aware that the self he is is a quite definite something, and thus the necessary. Instead, he lost himself because this self reflected itself fantastically in possibility. Even to see one's *self* in a mirror one must know oneself; for if one does not, one does not see one's *self*, but merely a human being. But the mirror of possibility is no ordinary mirror; it must be used with the utmost caution. For of this mirror it is true in the highest sense that it lies. That a self looks such and such in the possibility of itself is only half the truth; for in the possibility of itself the self is still far from being itself, or is only half itself. What matters, then, is how the necessity of this self determines it more precisely. Possibility is like inviting a child to some treat or other: the child is willing at once, but now the question is whether the parents will allow it—and as it is with the parents, so it is with necessity.

153 Yet in possibility everything is possible. So in possibility one can go astray in every possible way, but essentially in two. The one form is wishful and yearning; the other is melancholy and fantastic (hope—fear or anxiety). Fairy tales and folk legends so often tell of a knight who suddenly catches sight of a rare bird and keeps chasing it, because at first it seems he is very close to it—but then it flies off again, until night has fallen and he has lost his companions and cannot find his way in the wilderness where he now finds himself. So it is with the possibility of wishing. Instead of taking possibility back into necessity, he chases after possibility—and in the end he cannot find his

11 "The philosophers": chiefly Hegel and his followers; in Hegel's *Logic*, necessity is the unity of possibility and actuality.

way back to himself.—In melancholy the opposite happens in the same way. The individual pursues, with melancholy love, a possibility of anxiety, which in the end leads him away from himself, so that he perishes in anxiety, or perishes in the very thing he was anxious about perishing in.

B) THE DESPAIR OF NECESSITY

Lacking possibility is like being mute; only belief that for God everything is possible saves.

If one were to compare going astray in possibility to a child's vowel sounds, then lacking possibility is like being mute. The necessary is like pure consonants, but to pronounce them there must be possibility. When this is lacking, when a human existence has been brought to the point of lacking possibility, it is in despair, and it is so in every moment that it lacks possibility.

Now people commonly think that there is a certain age that is especially rich in hope, or they say that at a certain time, at a particular moment of one's life, one is or was so rich in hope and possibility. All this, however, is merely human talk that does not get at the truth; all this hoping and all this despairing are not yet either true hoping or true despairing.

FOR GOD EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE

Faced with certain ruin, the believer fights for possibility and trusts that God can help.

The decisive thing is: for God everything is possible. This is eternally true, and therefore true in every moment. People do say it, of course, in everyday use, and in everyday use they say it just like that; but the decision comes only when a person has been brought to the extremity, so that, humanly speaking, there is no possibility. Then the question is whether he will believe that for God everything is possible—that is, whether he will *believe*. But this is exactly the formula for losing one's understanding; [154] to believe is precisely to lose one's understanding in order to gain God. Let it happen like this. Imagine a person who,

with all the shudder of a terrified imagination, has pictured some horror or other as absolutely unendurable.[12] Now it happens to him—precisely this horror happens to him. Humanly speaking, his ruin is the most certain thing of all. And in despair his soul's despair fights for permission to despair, for, if you will, the peace to despair, for the consent of his whole personality to despairing and in despairing, so that he would curse nothing and no one more than whoever tried to prevent him from despairing, and the attempt itself—as the poet of poets so superbly, so incomparably puts it (Richard II: Verwünscht sei Vetter, der mich abgelenkt Von dem bequemen Wege zur Verzweiflung [Cursed be you, cousin, who turned me aside from the easy road to despair]. Act 3, scene 3). So, humanly speaking, salvation is the most impossible thing of all; but for God everything is possible![13] This is the fight of *faith*, which fights, if you will, madly for possibility. For possibility is the only thing that saves. When someone faints, people shout for water, eau de Cologne, Hoffmann's drops; but when someone is about to despair, the cry is: get possibility, get possibility, possibility is the only thing that saves! A possibility—and the person in despair breathes again, he revives; for without possibility a person cannot, as it were, draw breath. Sometimes the inventiveness of human imagination can manage to procure possibility; but in the end—that is, when it comes to *believing*—only this helps: that for God everything is possible.[14]

That is how the fight is fought. Whether the one who fights in this way will perish depends solely and entirely on whether he will procure possibility, that is, whether he will believe. And yet he understands that, humanly speaking, his ruin is the most certain thing of all. This is the dialectic of believing. Ordinarily a person knows nothing more than that this or that will, hope-

12 Cf. Matthew 19:26 and Mark 10:27. In Danish "believe" (*troe*) and "faith" (*Tro*) are the same word.

13 Shakespeare, *Richard II*, quoted in the German translation of Schlegel and Tieck; the lines are in fact in Act 3, scene 2.

14 Hoffmann's drops: a mixture of ether and alcohol, a common restorative for fainting.

fully, presumably, etc., not happen to him. If it does happen to him, he perishes. The foolhardy person rushes into a danger whose possibility may likewise be this or that; and if it happens to him, he despairs and perishes. The *believer* sees and understands his ruin, humanly speaking (in what has happened to him, or in what he has ventured), but he believes. Therefore he does not perish. He leaves it entirely to God how he is to be helped, but he believes that for God everything is possible. To *believe* one's ruin is impossible. To understand that humanly it is his ruin, and yet to believe in possibility—that is to believe. Then [155] God helps him too, perhaps by letting him escape the horror, perhaps through the horror itself, so that here, unexpectedly, miraculously, divinely, help appears. Miraculously—for it is a strange prudishness to suppose that only 1,800 years ago did it happen that a person was helped miraculously. Whether a person has been helped miraculously depends essentially on the passion of understanding with which he has understood that help was impossible, and then on how honest he is toward the power that nevertheless helped him. But as a rule people do neither the one nor the other. They cry out that help is impossible without ever having strained their understanding to find help, and afterward they ungratefully lie.

The believer possesses the eternally sure antidote to despair: possibility; for God everything is possible in every moment. This is the health of faith, which resolves contradictions. The contradiction here is that, humanly speaking, ruin is certain, and that there is nevertheless possibility. Health in general is being able to resolve contradictions. So it is bodily or physically: a draft is a contradiction, for a draft is cold and warmth together disparately, or undialectically; but a healthy body resolves this contradiction and does not notice the draft. So it is also with faith.

To lack possibility means either that everything has become necessary for one, or that everything has become triviality.

The determinist, the fatalist, is in despair, and as one in despair has lost his self, because for him everything is necessity. He

fares like that king who died of hunger because all his food turned to gold. The personality is a synthesis of possibility and necessity. Its continuance is therefore like breathing (*re*spiration), which is an inhaling and an exhaling. The determinist's self cannot breathe, for it is impossible to breathe necessity alone, which simply suffocates the human self.—The fatalist is in despair, has lost God and thus his self; for whoever has no God has no self either.[15] But the fatalist has no God, or, what is the same, his God is necessity. For since for God everything is possible, God is this: that everything is possible. The fatalist's worship is therefore at most an interjection; essentially it is muteness, mute submission. He cannot pray. To pray is also to breathe, and possibility is to the self what oxygen is to breathing. But just as a person cannot breathe oxygen [156] alone or nitrogen alone, so possibility alone or necessity alone cannot sustain the breathing of prayer. In order to pray there must be a God, a self—and possibility; or a self and possibility in the pregnant sense, for God is this, that everything is possible, or that everything is possible is God. And only the one whose being was so shaken that he became spirit by understanding that everything is possible—only he has had dealings with God. That God's will is the possible is what makes it possible for me to pray; if it is merely the necessary, a human being is essentially as speechless as an animal.

PHILISTINISM

The philistine, content with the probable, has neither imagination nor possibility, and so loses God and self.

With philistinism, triviality, which also essentially lacks possibility, the situation is somewhat different. Philistinism is spiritlessness; determinism and fatalism are despair of spirit; but spiritlessness is also despair. Philistinism lacks every qualification of spirit and is entirely absorbed in the probable, within

15 King Midas of Greek legend, whose wish that everything he touched might turn to gold was granted.

which the possible finds its little bit of room; it thus lacks the possibility of becoming aware of God. Lacking imagination, as the philistine always does, it lives within a certain trivial compendium of experiences about how things go, what is possible, what usually happens—whether the philistine is otherwise a tapster or a prime minister. In this way the philistine has lost his self and God.[16] For in order to become aware of his self and of God, a person must be lifted by imagination higher than the haze of the probable; imagination must tear him out of it and, by making possible what exceeds the qvantum satis [sufficient measure] of all experience, teach him to hope and to fear, or to fear and to hope. But imagination the philistine does not have, does not want, abhors. So here there is no help. And if existence sometimes helps with horrors that exceed the parrot-wisdom of trivial experience, then philistinism despairs—that is, it then becomes evident that it was despair. It then lacks faith's possibility of being able, through God, to rescue a self from certain ruin.

Fatalism and determinism, however, have imagination enough to despair of possibility, possibility enough to discover impossibility; philistinism reassures itself with the trivial, equally in despair whether things go well or badly. Fatalism and determinism lack possibility for relaxing and softening, for tempering necessity—that is, possibility as mitigation. Philistinism lacks possibility as awakening from spiritlessness. For philistinism thinks it has control of [157] possibility, thinks it has lured this enormous elasticity into the trap, or the mental institution, of the probable, thinks it holds it captive. It parades possibility around, captive in the cage of probability, puts it on display, imagines itself to be the master—and does not notice that precisely by doing so it has taken itself captive, to be the slave of spiritlessness and the most wretched thing of all.[17] For the one who went astray in possibility soars with the boldness of despair; the one for whom everything became necessary strains

16 "Philistinism" renders *Spidsborgerlighed* (roughly, petty-bourgeois narrowness); "spiritlessness," *Aandløshed*.

17 "Awakening" renders *Opvækkelse*, also the Danish word for a religious revival.

himself to the breaking point against existence, clenched in despair; but philistinism triumphs spiritlessly.

The Forms of Despair: Consciousness

Første Afsnit, C.B
Despair unaware of being despair; the despair of weakness, not willing to be oneself; the despair of defiance, willing to be oneself.

The degree of consciousness, as it rises, or in proportion as it rises, is the constantly rising intensification in despair: the more consciousness, the more intense the despair. This can be seen everywhere, most clearly at despair's maximum and minimum. The devil's despair is the most intense despair, for the devil is pure spirit, and to that extent absolute consciousness and transparency. In the devil there is no obscurity that could serve as a mitigating excuse; his despair is therefore the most absolute defiance. This is despair's maximum. Despair's minimum is a state that—yes, humanly speaking one could be tempted to put it this way—in a kind of innocence does not even know that it is despair.[1] When, then, unconsciousness is at its maximum, despair is least; it is almost a dialectical question whether one is justified in calling such a state despair at all.

A. DESPAIR THAT DOES NOT KNOW IT IS DESPAIR

Most people live in unaware despair, preferring the basement of their own house.

That this state is nevertheless despair, and is rightly called so, is an expression of what, in a good sense, must be called truth's insistence on being right. Veritas est index sui et falsi [Truth is

1 "Defiance" renders *Trods*.

the criterion both of itself and of the false]. But this insistence of truth on being right is certainly not respected—just as people in [158] general are far from regarding the relation to the true, relating themselves to the true, as the highest good; very far indeed from regarding, like Socrates, being in error as the greatest misfortune. The sensate in them usually far outweighs their intellectuality.[2] So when a person is supposedly happy, imagines himself to be happy, although in the light of truth he is unhappy, he is usually very far from wishing to be torn out of this error. On the contrary, he becomes indignant; he regards whoever does it as his worst enemy; he regards it as an assault, almost a murder—in the sense in which people speak of murdering someone's happiness. And why? Because the sensate and the sensate-psychical completely dominate him; because he lives in the categories of the sensate, the pleasant and the unpleasant, and gives spirit, truth, and the like short shrift; because he is too sensate to have the courage to venture and to endure being spirit. However vain and conceited people may be, they usually have a very meager conception of themselves; that is, they have no conception of being spirit, the absolute that a human being can be. But vain and conceited they are—by comparison. Imagine a house with a basement, a ground floor, and an upper floor, occupied, or laid out, in such a way that there was, or was meant to be, a difference of social rank between the occupants of each floor; and compare being a human being with such a house. Then, sadly, this is the pitiful and ludicrous case with most people: in their own house they prefer to live in the basement. Every human being is the soul-body synthesis, designed to be spirit; that is the building. But he prefers to live in the basement, that is, in the qualifications of the sensate. And he does not merely prefer to live in the basement; no, he loves it so much that he becomes indignant if anyone suggests that he move into the Belle-Etage [the grand main floor], which stands vacant at his disposal—for it is, after all, his own house he lives in.

2 Spinoza, *Ethics* II, proposition 43, scholium.

No, being in error is, quite un-Socratically, what people fear least. One can see astonishing examples of this, which illustrate it on an enormous scale. A thinker erects an enormous building, a system, a system embracing the whole of existence and world history, etc.—and if one looks at his personal life, one discovers [159] to one's astonishment the terrible and ludicrous fact that he himself does not personally live in this enormous, high-vaulted palace, but in a shed beside it, or a doghouse, or at most in the porter's lodge. If one ventured to call attention to this contradiction with a single word, he would be offended.[3] For he is not afraid of being in error, as long as he gets the system finished—with the help of being in error.

So the fact that the person in despair is himself ignorant that his condition is despair makes no difference; he is in despair all the same. If despair is going astray, then being ignorant of it is simply an addition: being in error as well. Ignorance stands in the same relation to despair as it does to anxiety (cf. *The Concept of Anxiety* by Vigilius Haufniensis): the anxiety of spiritlessness is recognized precisely by its spiritless security. Yet the anxiety is there underneath nonetheless; so too the despair is there underneath, and when the spell of sensory illusion is broken, when existence begins to totter, then despair too immediately shows itself as what was there underneath all along.[4]

Compared with the one who is conscious of it, the person in despair who is ignorant that he is in despair is merely one negative step farther from the truth and from salvation. Despair itself is a negativity; ignorance of it is a new negativity. But to reach the truth one must pass through every negativity. Here the folk legend about breaking a certain spell holds true: the piece must be played all the way through backward, otherwise the spell is not broken. Yet it is only in one sense, a purely dialectical sense, that the one who is ignorant of his despair is farther from the truth and from what saves than the one who knows it and still

3 The system-building thinker alludes chiefly to Hegel.

4 *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844), which Kierkegaard published under the pseudonym Vigilius Haufniensis.

remains in despair. In another sense, the ethical-dialectical, the person who consciously remains in despair is farther from salvation, since his despair is more intensive.[5] But ignorance is so far from canceling despair, or from turning despair into nondespair, that on the contrary it can be the most dangerous form of despair. In his ignorance the person in despair is in a way secured against becoming aware, though to his own ruin. That is, he is quite securely in the power of despair.

In ignorance of being in despair a human being is farthest from being conscious of himself as spirit. But precisely not being conscious of oneself as spirit [160] is despair, which is spiritlessness. The condition may otherwise be a complete deadness, a merely vegetative life, or an intensified life whose secret is nevertheless despair. In the latter case the person in despair fares as someone does who suffers from consumption: he feels at his best, considers himself in the soundest health, perhaps seems to others to be blooming with health, precisely when the sickness is most dangerous.

This form of despair (ignorance of it) is the most common in the world. Indeed, what is called the world, or more precisely what Christianity calls the world, is precisely this kind of despair: paganism and the natural human being in Christendom, paganism as it historically was and is, and paganism within Christendom. It is despair but does not know it. It is true that paganism, like the natural human being, also makes a distinction between being in despair and not being in despair; that is, it talks about despair as if only some individuals were in despair. But this distinction is just as deceptive as the one paganism and the natural human being make between love and self-love, as if all this love were not essentially self-love. Yet paganism, together with the natural human being, could not possibly get further than this deceptive distinction, and cannot possibly do so now. For what is specific to despair is precisely this: to be ignorant that it is despair.

5 The legend is the folk belief that a spell cast by music can be broken only by playing the piece backward from end to beginning.

From this one easily sees that the aesthetic concept of spiritlessness by no means provides the standard for judging what is despair and what is not. That is, incidentally, quite in order. Since what spirit truly is cannot be determined aesthetically, how could the aesthetic answer a question that does not exist for it at all! It would of course also be enormously stupid to deny that pagan nations en masse, as well as individual pagans, have accomplished astonishing feats that have inspired poets and will go on inspiring them. It would be just as stupid to deny that paganism offers examples of what, aesthetically, can never be admired enough. It would also be foolish to deny that in paganism a life rich in the greatest aesthetic enjoyment has been led, and can be led by the natural human being. Such a life makes use of every advantage granted to it in the most tasteful way, and even lets art and learning serve to heighten, beautify and ennoble the enjoyment. No, it is not the aesthetic definition of spiritlessness that provides [161] the standard for what is despair and what is not. The definition that must be used is the ethical-religious one: spirit, or, negatively, lack of spirit, spiritlessness. Every human existence that is not conscious of itself as spirit, or not personally conscious of itself as spirit before God; every human existence that does not in this way rest transparently in God but dimly reposes in and is absorbed into some abstract universal (state, nation, etc.); or that, in the dark about its self, takes its capacities merely as powers to be put to work, without becoming conscious in a deeper sense of why it has them, and takes its self, if it were to be understood inwardly, as an inexplicable something—every such existence, whatever it accomplishes, be it the most astonishing, whatever it explains, be it the whole of existence, however intensely it enjoys life aesthetically: every such existence is nevertheless despair. This is what the old teachers of the Church meant when they said that the virtues of the pagans are splendid vices. They meant that the pagan's innermost being was despair, that the pagan was not conscious of himself before God as spirit. That is also why the pagan judged suicide so remarkably lightly, indeed praised it (I

cite this as an example, though it also has a deeper relation to this entire inquiry). Yet for spirit, breaking out of existence in this way is the most decisive sin, rebellion against God. The pagan lacked the spirit's definition of a self, and that is why he judged *self*-murder as he did. And the very same pagan judged theft, sexual immorality and the like with moral strictness.[6] He lacked the standpoint for judging suicide; he lacked the God-relationship and the self. Thought of in purely pagan terms, suicide is a matter of indifference, something anyone may do as he pleases because it is nobody else's business. If suicide were to be warned against from paganism's standpoint, it would have to be by the long detour of showing that one was breaking one's relation of duty to other people. The point of suicide, that it is precisely a crime against God, entirely escapes the pagan. So one cannot say that the suicide was despair; that would be a thoughtless hysteron proteron. One must say that the pagan's judging suicide as he did was despair.[7]

Nevertheless there is and remains a difference, and a qualitative one, between paganism in the stricter sense and paganism within Christendom. It is the difference that Vigilius Haufniensis, with respect to anxiety, has pointed [162] out: paganism does lack spirit, but it is still oriented in the direction toward spirit, whereas paganism within Christendom lacks spirit in the direction away from it, or by a falling away, and is therefore spiritlessness in the strictest sense.

B. DESPAIR THAT IS CONSCIOUS OF BEING DESPAIR

Conscious despair requires a true idea of despair and clarity about one's own state.

Here, of course, a distinction must be made as to whether the one who is conscious of his despair has the true conception of

6 The idea goes back to Augustine (*City of God* XIX.25); the phrase "splendid vices" (*splendida vitia*) was coined later on his behalf.

7 *Hysteron proteron* (Greek, "the later first"): a figure that puts first what logically comes second.

what despair is. Someone may well be right, according to the conception he has, to call himself in despair; he may also be right that he is in despair. And yet that does not mean he has the true conception of despair. It may be that, looking at his life under that true conception, one must say: At bottom you are far more in despair than you know; the despair lies much deeper still. So it was (to recall what was said earlier) with the pagan. When, comparing himself with other pagans, he considered himself in despair, he was certainly right that he was in despair, but wrong that the others were not. That is, he did not have the true conception of despair.

Conscious despair therefore requires, on the one hand, the true conception of what despair is. On the other hand it requires clarity about oneself, that is, insofar as clarity and despair can be thought together. Can complete clarity about oneself, about the fact that one is in despair, be combined with being in despair? That is, might not this clarity of knowledge and self-knowledge precisely tear a person out of despair, make him so terrified of himself that he ceased to be in despair? We will not decide this here; we will not even attempt it, since later on we will find a place for this whole inquiry. But without pursuing the thought to this dialectical extreme, we will here merely point out the following. Just as the degree of consciousness of what despair is can vary greatly, so too can the degree of consciousness regarding one's own state, that it is despair. [163] Actual life is too multifarious to display merely such abstract opposites as that between a despair that is completely ignorant of being despair and one that is completely conscious of being so. Most often, no doubt, the state of the person in despair is a half-obscurity about his own state, and this too is shaded in many ways. He knows it well enough in himself, up to a point, that he is in despair. He notices it in himself, as someone notices that he is carrying an illness in his body, but he will not quite admit what the illness is. At one moment it has almost become clear to him that he is in despair; but then the next moment it seems to him after all that his malaise has another cause, as if it lay in

something external, in something outside him, and if that were changed, he would not be in despair. Or perhaps, by diversions and in other ways, for example by work and busyness as a means of diversion, he tries to keep himself in obscurity about his state. Yet again he does it in such a way that it does not become quite clear to him that this is why he does it, that he does what he does in order to produce obscurity. Or perhaps he is even conscious that he is working in this way to sink his soul in obscurity, and does it with a certain acumen and shrewd calculation, with psychological insight, yet is not clearly conscious in a deeper sense of what he is doing, of how despairing his way of going about it is, and so on. For in all obscurity and ignorance there is a dialectical interplay of knowing and willing, and in understanding a person one can go wrong by emphasizing only the knowing, or by emphasizing only the willing.

But, as noted earlier, the degree of consciousness intensifies despair. The truer a person's conception of despair, while he still remains in it, and the more clearly he is conscious of being in despair, while he still remains in despair, the more intensive the despair is. The one who commits suicide conscious that suicide is despair, and to that extent with the true conception of what despair is, is in more intensive despair than the one who commits suicide without having the true conception that suicide is despair. The latter's untrue conception of suicide, on the other hand, is the less intensive despair. On the other hand, the clearer the consciousness of himself (self-consciousness) with which a person commits suicide, the more intensive is his [164] despair compared with that of one whose soul, compared with his, is in a confused and obscure state.

In what follows I shall go through the two forms of conscious despair in such a way that an ascent is shown at the same time: in the consciousness of what despair is, and in the consciousness that one's state is despair—or, what is the same thing and what is decisive, an ascent in consciousness of the self. But the opposite of being in despair is having faith. Therefore it is also quite correct that the formula set out earlier to describe a state

in which there is no despair at all is also the formula for faith: in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it. (Cf. A, A.)

A) THE DESPAIR OF WEAKNESS

In despair not wanting to be oneself; a footnote contrasts feminine and masculine despair.

When this form of despair is called the despair of weakness, that already contains a reflection on the other form (β), in despair wanting to be oneself. So these are only relative opposites. No despair is entirely without defiance; indeed, defiance lies in the very expression: not wanting to be. On the other hand, even despair's highest defiance is never without some weakness. So the

difference is only relative. The one form is, so to speak, the des-

pair of femininity, the other that of masculinity[8].[9]

1) DESPAIR OVER THE EARTHLY

The immediate person, struck by misfortune, wishes to be someone else, like the peasant who disowns his legs.

165 This is pure immediacy, or immediacy with a quantitative reflection in it.—Here there is no infinite consciousness of the self, of what despair is, or of the state's being despair. The despair is merely a suffering, a succumbing to the pressure of externality; it in no way comes from within as an act. It is by what one might call an innocent misuse of language, a play with words, as when children play soldiers, that such words as "the self" and "despair" occur in the language of immediacy.

The *immediate* person (insofar as immediacy can in actuality occur entirely without any reflection) is determined merely as soul. His self, and he himself, is a something included within the scope of the temporal and the worldly, 166 in immediate connection with the other (το ετερον [to heteron: the other]), and has only an illusory appearance of there being something eternal in it. Thus the self hangs together immediately with the other, wishing, desiring, enjoying, and so on, but passively; even when desiring, this self is a dative, like the child's "me." Its dialectic is:

the pleasant and the unpleasant; its concepts: good fortune, mis-

8 KIERKEGAARD'S NOTE. And if one looks around psychologically in actual life, one will sometimes have occasion to confirm that what is correct in thought, and therefore should and must hold, does in fact hold, and that this division covers the whole actuality of despair. For with regard to the child one does not speak of despair, only of bad temper, because one is only entitled to presuppose that the eternal is present in the child κατα δυναμιν [potentially]. One is not entitled to demand it of the child as one is entitled to demand it of the older person, of whom it holds that he ought to have it. However, I would by no means deny that forms of masculine despair can occur in women and, conversely, forms of feminine despair in men; but these are the exceptions. And of course the ideal is also only rare, and it is only in purely ideal terms that this distinction between the despair of masculinity and that of femininity is entirely true. Woman has neither the selfishly developed conception of the self nor intellectuality in the decisive sense, however much more tender and delicate in feeling she may be than man. On the other hand, woman's nature is devotion, self-giving; and it is unwomanly if it is not so. Strangely enough, no one can be so coy (and the language has coined this very word for woman), so almost cruelly fastidious as a woman—and yet her nature is devotion; and yet (this is precisely the wonderful thing) all this is really the expression of the fact that her nature is devotion. For precisely because she bears the whole of feminine devotion in her nature, nature has lovingly equipped her with an instinct compared with whose delicacy the most eminently developed masculine reflection is as nothing. This devotion of a woman, this—to speak Greek—divine gift and treasure, is too great a good to be flung away blindly. And yet no clear-sighted human reflection would be able to see sharply enough to bestow it rightly. Therefore nature has taken care of her: instinctively, blindly, she sees more clearly than the most clear-sighted reflection; instinctively she sees where she is to admire, what it is to which she is to give herself. Devotion is the only thing woman has; that is why nature took it upon itself to be her guardian. That is also why femininity first comes into being through a metamorphosis: it comes into being when the infinite coyness is transfigured into feminine devotion. But that devotion is woman's nature comes back again in despair; it is again despair's mode. In self-giving she has lost herself, and only so is she happy, only so is she herself. A woman who is happy without self-giving, that is, without giving her self away, no matter to what she gives it, is altogether unwomanly. A man also gives himself, and he is a poor sort of man who does not; but his self is not self-giving (this is the expression for feminine substantial devotion), nor does he gain his self through self-giving, as woman in another sense does. He has himself. He gives himself, but his self still remains behind as a sober consciousness of the self-giving, whereas woman, in a genuinely feminine way, throws herself, throws her self, into that to which she gives herself. If this is now taken away, then her self is gone too, and her despair is: not wanting to be herself.—Man does not give himself in this way; but the other form of despair also expresses the masculine: in despair wanting to be oneself. So much for the relation between the despair of masculinity and that of femininity. It must be remembered, however, that this is not about self-giving to God, or about the God-relationship, which will not be discussed until Part Two. In the relationship to God, where such a distinction as man–woman vanishes, it holds for the man as for the woman that self-giving is the self, and that through self-giving the self is gained. This holds equally for man and woman, even though in actuality the woman most often relates to God only through the man.

9 "Weakness" renders *Svaghed*.

fortune, fate.[10]

Now something *happens*, something *befalls* (literally, strikes against) this immediate self that brings it to despair. It cannot happen here in any other way: since the self has no reflection in it, what brings it to despair must come from outside, and the despair is merely a suffering. That in which the immediate person has his life—or, insofar as he does have a tiny bit of reflection in him, the part of it to which he especially clings—is taken from him "by a stroke of fate." In short, he becomes, as he calls [167] it, unhappy; that is, the immediacy in him receives such a blow that it cannot reproduce itself: he despairs. Or—and this is seen more rarely in actual life, but is dialectically quite in order—this despairing of immediacy sets in through what the immediate person calls an all too great good fortune. For immediacy as such is enormously fragile, and every quid nimis [too much] that demands reflection of it brings it to despair.

So he despairs; that is, by a strange reversal and in complete mystification about himself, he calls it despairing. But to despair is to lose the eternal—and of this loss he does not speak, does not dream. To lose the earthly is not as such despairing, and yet that is what he speaks of, and that is what he calls despairing. What he says is in a certain sense true, only not true in the way he understands it. He is positioned back to front, and what he says must be understood back to front: he stands pointing at what is not despairing, declaring that he is in despair, and meanwhile despair is indeed taking place behind him, without his knowing it. It is as if someone stood with his back to the City Hall and Courthouse, pointed straight ahead and said: There is the City Hall and Courthouse. The man is right, it is there—when he turns around. He is not in despair, that is not true, and yet he is right when he says it. But he calls himself in despair; he regards himself as dead, as a shadow of himself. Yet dead he is not; there is, if you like, still life in the person. If everything were suddenly to change, all the externals, and the wish were fulfilled, then life

10 Small Danish children often say *mig* ("me") where adults say *jeg* ("I"): the self appears only as the one to whom things are given.

comes back into him, immediacy rises again, and he begins to live afresh.[11] But this is the only way immediacy knows how to fight, the only thing it knows: to despair and to faint—and yet it knows least of all what despair is. It despairs and faints, and then lies quite still as if it were dead, a trick like "at ligge todt" [playing dead]. Immediacy is like certain lower species of animals that have no weapon or means of defense but to lie quite still and pretend to be dead.

Meanwhile time passes. If help comes from outside, then life comes back into the person in despair as well; he begins where he left off. A self he was not, and a self he did not become, but he now lives [168] on, determined merely by immediacy. If help from outside does not come, then in actuality something else usually happens. Life comes back into the person all the same, but "he will never be himself again," he says. He now acquires a little understanding of life; he learns to imitate other people, how they go about living—and so now he lives that way too. In Christendom he is a Christian as well. He goes to church every Sunday, hears and understands the pastor—indeed, they understand each other. He dies; the pastor introduces him into eternity for ten rix-dollars—but a self he was not, and a self he did not become.[12]

This form of despair is: in despair not wanting to be oneself; or lower still: in despair not wanting to be a self; or lowest of all: in despair wanting to be someone other than oneself, wishing for a new self. Immediacy really has no self; it does not know itself, and so it cannot recognize itself either. That is why it tends to end up in the fabulous. When immediacy despairs, it does not even have self enough to wish or dream that it had become what it did not become. The immediate person then helps himself in another way: he wishes to be someone else. One can easily confirm this by observing immediate people: in the moment of despair no wish lies so close to them as that of hav-

11 Copenhagen's combined City Hall and Courthouse on Nytorv, completed in 1815.

12 The sum is the pastor's fee for a funeral address.

ing become someone else, or of becoming someone else. In any case one can never help smiling at such a person in despair, who, humanly speaking, though in despair, is so very innocent. As a rule such a person in despair is infinitely comic. Imagine a self (and next to God there is nothing so eternal as a self), and then imagine that a self hits on the idea of whether it might not be possible for it to become someone else—than itself. And yet such a person in despair, whose only wish is this maddest of all mad transformations, loves the fancy that the change could be made as easily as putting on a different coat. For the immediate person does not know himself; quite literally he knows himself only by his coat. He knows (and here again is the infinitely comic) having a self by externals. There is hardly a more ludicrous confusion, for a self is precisely infinitely different from externality. So when all the externals changed for the immediate person and he despaired, he goes a step further; he thinks something like this, and it becomes his wish: What if I became someone else, got myself a new self? Yes, what if he [169] became someone else—would he then recognize himself? There is a story about a peasant who had come barefoot to the capital and had come by enough coins there to buy himself a pair of stockings and shoes and still have enough left over to get drunk. The story goes that as he tried, drunk, to find his way home, he lay down in the middle of the highway and fell asleep. Then a carriage came along, and the driver shouted at him to move, or he would drive over his legs. The drunken peasant woke up and looked at his legs, and since he did not recognize them because of the stockings and shoes, he said: "Go ahead and drive, they aren't my legs." So it is with the immediate person when he despairs: it is impossible to present him truthfully except as comic. It is already—if I may say so myself—a kind of feat to talk in that jargon about a self and about despair.

If immediacy is assumed to have some reflection in itself, despair is somewhat modified. There comes to be somewhat more consciousness of the self, and thereby in turn of what despair is, and of one's state being despair; there is some meaning in such a

person's talking about being in despair. But the despair is essentially that of weakness, a suffering; its form: in despair not wanting to be oneself.

The advance over pure immediacy shows itself at once in the fact that despair does not always arise from a blow, from something happening, but can be occasioned by the reflection in itself. So when this is the case, despair is not merely a suffering and a succumbing to externality but to a certain degree self-activity, action. Here, after all, there is a certain degree of reflection in itself, and thus a certain degree of heedfulness of one's self. With this certain degree of reflection in itself begins the act of separation in which the self becomes aware of itself as essentially different from its surroundings and from externality and its effect on it. But only to a certain degree. Now when the self, with a certain degree of reflection in itself, sets about taking over the self, it perhaps runs into some difficulty or other in the self's makeup, in the self's necessity. For just as no human body is perfect, neither is any self. This difficulty, whatever it may be, he shrinks back from in horror. Or something happens to him that breaks with the immediacy in him more deeply than he has done by reflection in himself; or his [170] imagination discovers a possibility that, if it came about, would in this way become the break with immediacy.

Then he despairs. His despair is that of weakness, a suffering of the self, in contrast to the despair of self-assertion. But with the help of the relative reflection in himself that he has, he tries to protect his self, and in this again he differs from the purely immediate person. He understands that letting go of the self is no simple transaction; he is not struck apoplectic by the blow the way the immediate person is. With the help of reflection he understands that there is much he can lose without losing the self. He makes concessions; he is capable of that. And why? Because he has to some degree separated his self from externality, because he has a dim notion that there must even be something eternal in the self. But he struggles in vain in this way. The difficulty he has run into demands a break with the whole of

immediacy, and for that he has neither self-reflection nor ethical reflection. He has no consciousness of a self that is gained by the infinite abstraction from everything external—this naked, abstract self, in contrast to the clothed self of immediacy, which is the first form of the infinite self and the driving force in the whole process by which a self infinitely takes over its actual self with its difficulties and its advantages.

So he despairs, and his despair is: not wanting to be himself. On the other hand, the ridiculous idea of wanting to be someone else certainly does not occur to him. He maintains the relation to his self; reflection has bound him to the self that far. It then goes with him in relation to the self as it can go with a man in relation to his dwelling (the comic thing is that the self certainly does not stand in anything like so casual a relation to itself as a man does to his dwelling). It becomes repugnant to him because there is smoke, or for whatever reason. So he leaves it, but he does not move out, he does not rent a new dwelling; he goes on regarding the old one as his dwelling; he counts on the trouble passing. So it is with the despairing person. As long as this difficulty lasts, he dares not, as the expression has it with particular pregnancy, come to himself; he does not want to be himself. But surely it will pass, perhaps it will change, surely the dark possibility will be forgotten. So meanwhile he only now and then pays himself a visit, so to speak, to see whether the change has not occurred. And as [171] soon as it has occurred, he moves home again, "is himself again," as he says. Yet this only means that he begins where he left off: he was, up to a point, a self of sorts, and he did not become any more than that.

But if no change occurs, he helps himself in another way. He turns right away from the inward direction, the path along which he should have gone forward in order truly to become a self. The whole question of the self in a deeper sense becomes a kind of blind door at the back of his soul, behind which there is nothing. He takes over what in his language he calls his self, that is, whatever capacities, whatever talents, etc. may have been given him. All this he takes over, but in the outward direction,

toward life, as it is called, real life, active life. He treats the little bit of reflection in himself that he has very cautiously; he is afraid it might come up again, the thing at the back. Then little by little he manages to forget it. Over the years he comes to find it almost ridiculous, especially when he is in good company with other capable and active men who have a sense and a talent for real life. Charming! He has now, as the novels say, been happily married for several years, an active and enterprising man, father and citizen, perhaps even a great man. At home in his house the servants call him "Himself"; in town he is among the notables (*honoratiores*). His bearing shows respect of persons, or the look of a person; that is, to judge by all appearances, he is a person. In Christendom he is a Christian (in exactly the same sense as in paganism he would be a pagan, and in Holland a Dutchman), one of the cultivated Christians.[13] The question of immortality has often occupied him, and more than once he has asked the pastor whether there really was such an immortality, whether one would really recognize oneself again. This must indeed be of quite special interest to him, since he has no self.

It is impossible to present this kind of despair truthfully without a certain admixture of the satirical. The comic thing is that he wants to talk about having been in despair; the terrible thing is that his state, after he has, as he thinks, overcome despair, is precisely despair. It is infinitely comic that at the bottom of the worldly wisdom so much praised in the world—at the bottom of all that devilish lot of good advice and clever turns of phrase, and waiting-and-seeing, and resigning oneself to one's fate, and writing things in the book of forgetting—there lies, understood ideally, a complete stupidity [172] about where the danger really lies, what the danger really is. But this ethical stupidity is in turn the terrible thing.

Despair over the earthly or over something earthly is the most common kind of despair, especially in the second form, as

13 Servants in Danish households spoke of the master as *Han Selv*, "Himself." The sentence plays on *Anseelse* (regard, standing, appearance); *Persons-Anseelse* is the biblical "respect of persons," i.e. partiality.

immediacy with a quantitative reflection in itself. The more thoroughly reflected the despair becomes, the more rarely it is seen or occurs in the world. But this proves that most people have not even gone very deep in despairing—by no means that they are not in despair. There are very few people who live even approximately under the qualification of spirit; indeed, there are not even many who so much as attempt this life, and of those who do, most soon drop out. They have not learned to fear, not learned to have to—regardless, infinitely regardless of whatever else may happen. That is why they cannot endure what already strikes them as a contradiction, and what appears far, far more glaring as reflected in the world around them: that caring for one's soul and wanting to be spirit looks in the world like a waste of time. Indeed, it looks like an indefensible waste of time, which if possible ought to be punished by civil law, and in any case is punished with contempt and ridicule as a kind of treason against humanity, as a defiant madness that insanely fills up time with nothing. Then there is a moment in their lives —alas, it is their best time—when they do begin to take the inward direction. They get about as far as the first difficulties; there they swerve off. It seems to them as if this road led to a desolate desert—und rings umher liegt schöne grüne Weide [and all around lies lovely green pasture]. So off they go there, and soon forget that best time of theirs, alas, and forget it as if it had been childishness. They are Christians as well—reassured by the pastors about the matter of their salvation. As I said, this despair is the most common. It is so common that it alone can explain the rather common opinion in everyday life that despair is something belonging to youth, which occurs only in the young years but is not found in the settled man who has reached the years of discretion.[14] This is a despairing error, or more correctly a despairing mistake, which overlooks—yes, and what is even worse, it overlooks that what it overlooks is nevertheless almost the best that can be said of people, since far worse often

14 Goethe, *Faust* I, spoken by Mephistopheles: a man who speculates is like a beast led round in circles on a barren heath, while all around lies green pasture.

happens—that most people, essentially regarded, never really in their whole lives get further than [173] being what they were in childhood and youth: immediacy with the addition of a small dose of reflection in itself. No, despair is truly not something that occurs only in the young, something one simply outgrows —"as one outgrows illusion." But one does not do that either, even if one is foolish enough to think so. On the contrary, one can often enough come across men and women and old people who have childish illusions to rival any youth. But it is overlooked that illusion essentially has two forms: that of hope and that of recollection. Youth has the illusion of hope, the older person that of recollection. But precisely because he is in illusion, he also has the entirely one-sided notion of illusion that it is only the illusion of hope. And of course the older person is not troubled by the illusion of hope; he is, however, troubled among other things by this odd one: looking down, from a supposedly higher standpoint free of illusion, on the illusion of the young. The young person is in illusion; he hopes for the extraordinary from life and from himself. In return one often finds in the older person illusion about how he remembers his youth. An older woman who has now supposedly given up all illusion is often found to be, as much as any young girl, fantastically in illusion about how she remembers herself as a young girl: how happy she was then, how beautiful, and so on. This fuimus [we have been], so often heard from an older person, is just as great an illusion as the young person's future tense; they both lie, or make things up.[15]

But quite differently despairing is the mistake that despair belongs only to youth. It is in general a great foolishness to think that faith and wisdom come so easily that they really do simply arrive with the years, like teeth, beard and the like. It is precisely a lack of understanding of what spirit is, and moreover a failure to recognize that a human being is spirit, not merely an animal creature. No, whatever a person may arrive at as a mat-

15 *Fuimus* echoes Virgil, *Aeneid* 2.325, *fuimus Troes* ("we have been Trojans"), i.e. that glory is past.

ter of course, and whatever may come as a matter of course, one thing certainly does not: faith and wisdom. The point is this: spiritually understood, a human being does not arrive at anything as a matter of course with the years; this category is precisely the arch-opposite of spirit. On the other hand, it is very easy, as a matter of course, with the years to depart from something. And with the years one perhaps departs from the little passion, feeling, imagination, the little inwardness one had, and passes as a matter of course (for such things happen as a matter of course) under triviality's category of an understanding of life. This—improved state, which has indeed come with [174] the years, he now in despair regards as a good. He easily assures himself (and in a certain satirical sense nothing is surer) that it could now never occur to him to despair. No, he has made himself secure; he is in despair, spiritlessly in despair. For why did Socrates love young men, unless because he knew human beings![16]

And if it does not happen that a person sinks with the years into the most trivial kind of despair, it by no means follows that despair belongs only to youth. If a person really develops with the years, matures in essential consciousness of the self, then he may perhaps despair in a higher form. And suppose he does not develop essentially with the years, yet does not sink entirely into triviality either; that is, he more or less goes on being a young person, a youth, though a man, a father and gray-haired, and so still keeps something of what is good in the youth. Then he will of course also be liable to despair as a youth does, over the earthly or over something earthly.

A difference may well arise between the despair of such an older person and that of a youth, but not an essential one, only a purely accidental one. The youth despairs over the future, as a præsens in futuro [a present in the future]. There is something in the future he does not want to take upon himself, and with it he does not want to be himself. The older person despairs over the past, as a præsens in præterito [a present in the past] that

16 "Passion" renders *Lidenskab*.

refuses to become more and more past, for he is not so far gone in despair that he has managed to forget it entirely. This past may even be something that repentance really ought to take hold of. But if repentance were to come forward, there would first have to be despair in earnest, despair to the very end, and then the life of the spirit would have to break through from the ground up. But in despair as he is, he dares not let it come to such a decision. So there he stays, and time passes. That is, unless he manages, still more in despair, to heal it over by means of forgetting, so that instead of becoming a penitent he becomes his own fence. But essentially the despair of such a youth and of such an older person remains the same. It never comes to a metamorphosis in which the consciousness of the eternal in the self breaks through, so that the struggle could begin that either intensifies despair into a still higher form or leads to faith.[17]

But is there not, after all, an essential difference between the two expressions used so far as if they were identical: to despair over the earthly (the qualification [175] of totality) and to despair over something earthly (the particular)? Yes, there is. When the self in imagination despairs with infinite passion over something earthly, the infinite passion turns this particular thing, this something, into the earthly in toto [as a whole]. That is, the qualification of totality lies in, and belongs to, the one who despairs. The earthly and the temporal as such are precisely what falls apart into something, into the particular. It is impossible actually to lose, or be deprived of, everything earthly, for the qualification of totality is a qualification of thought. So the self first infinitely magnifies the actual loss, and then it despairs over the earthly in toto. But as soon as this difference (between despairing over the earthly and despairing over something earthly) is to be made essentially valid, an essential advance in consciousness of the self has also been made. This formula, to

17 Danish *hele* means both "to heal" and "to receive stolen goods"; a *Hæler* is a fence.

despair over the earthly, is then a dialectical first expression for the next form of despair.

2) DESPAIR OF THE ETERNAL, OR OVER ONESELF

Despair over one's own weakness turns into inclosing reserve behind a carefully locked door.

Despair over the earthly or over something earthly is, after all, really also despair of the eternal and over oneself, insofar as it is despair at all, for that is indeed the formula for all despair[18]. But the person in despair, as he was depicted in the preceding, did not notice [176] what is going on, so to speak, behind his back. He thinks he is despairing over something earthly and keeps talking about what it is he is despairing over, and yet he is despairing of the eternal. For to ascribe such great value to the earthly, or, to carry it further, to ascribe such great value to something earthly, or first to turn something earthly into everything earthly and then ascribe such great value to the earthly, is precisely to despair of the eternal.

This despair is a significant advance. If the preceding was the despair of *weakness,* this is *despair over one's weakness,* while still

18 KIERKEGAARD'S NOTE. And therefore it is linguistically correct to say: to despair *over* the earthly (the occasion), *of* the eternal, but *over* oneself. This last is in turn another expression for the occasion of the despair, which in its concept is always *of* the eternal, whereas what one despairs *over* can be the most diverse things. One despairs *over* what holds one fast in despair: over one's misfortune, over the earthly, over the loss of one's fortune, etc. But one despairs *of* what, rightly understood, releases one from despair: of the eternal, of one's salvation, of one's own strength, etc. With respect to the self one says both: to despair *over* oneself and *of* oneself, because the self is doubly dialectical. And this is the obscurity found especially in all the lower forms of despair, and in almost everyone in despair: he sees and knows with such passionate clarity what it is he despairs *over*, but what he despairs *of* escapes him. The condition for healing is always this conversion, this turning to the *of*. And purely philosophically it could become a subtle question whether it is possible for someone to be in despair with full consciousness of what it is he despairs of.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Danish distinguishes *fortvivle over* (the occasion of despair) from *fortvivle om* (its object); we render these "despair over" and "despair of."

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Danish *Omvendelse*, "conversion," literally "turning about," begins with *om*, the "of" in "despairing of."

remaining within the essential qualification of the despair of weakness, as distinct from β (defiance). So there is only a relative difference. It is this: the preceding form has the consciousness of weakness as its final consciousness, whereas here consciousness does not stop there but intensifies itself into a new consciousness, the consciousness of its weakness. The person in despair himself understands that it is weakness to take the earthly so much to heart, that it is weakness to despair. But instead of now turning properly away from despair toward faith, humbling himself before God under his weakness, he sinks deeper into despair and despairs over his weakness. With that the whole point of view turns around. He now becomes more clearly conscious of his despair: that he despairs of the eternal. He despairs over himself, that he could be weak enough to attribute such great significance to the earthly, and this now becomes for him, in his despair, the expression of his having lost the eternal and himself.

Here is the ascent. First, in consciousness of the self. For to despair of the eternal is impossible without having a conception of the self, of there being something eternal in it, or of its having had something eternal in it. And if one is to despair over oneself, one must of course also be conscious of having a self. Yet it is over this that he despairs: not over the earthly or something earthly, but over himself. Furthermore, there is greater consciousness here of what despair is, for despair is quite rightly to have lost the eternal and oneself. Naturally there is also greater consciousness that one's condition is despair. Further, despair here is not merely something suffered but an act. For when the earthly is taken from the self and he despairs, it is as if the despair came from outside, though it always comes from the self. But when the self despairs over this despair of its own, this new despair comes from the self, indirectly-directly from the self, as a counterpressure (reaction). In this it differs from defiance, which comes [177] directly from the self. Finally, there is here also, though in another sense, a further advance. For precisely because this despair is more intense, it is in a certain sense

closer to salvation. Such despair is hard to forget; it is too deep. But at every moment that despair is kept open, there is also the possibility of salvation.

Nevertheless this despair still falls under the form: in despair not wanting to be oneself. As a father disinherits a son, so the self will not acknowledge itself after having been so weak. In despair it cannot forget this weakness; in a way it hates itself. It will not humble itself in faith under its weakness in order thereby to regain itself. No, in despair it wants, so to speak, to hear nothing of itself, to know nothing of itself. But there can be no question of being helped by forgetting, either, nor of slipping, with the help of forgetting, under the qualification of spiritlessness and then being a man and a Christian like other men and Christians. No, for that the self is too much a self. As must often have happened to the father who disinherited his son: the external fact helped him but little, it did not rid him of the son, at least not of the thought of him. As so often happens with a lover's curse upon the hated one (that is, upon the beloved): it does not help much, it almost binds all the more. So it goes with the despairing self in relation to itself.

INCLOSING RESERVE

The inclosed man lives a respectable outward life while guarding his self in solitude.

This despair is one quality deeper than the preceding, and it belongs to the despair that occurs more rarely in the world. That blind door spoken of earlier, behind which there was nothing, is here a real door, though a carefully locked one, and behind it the self sits, as it were, keeping watch over itself, occupied with, or filling up the time with, not wanting to be itself, and yet self enough to love itself. This is called *inclosing reserve.* And from now on we shall be dealing with inclosing reserve, which is the

exact opposite of immediacy and, among other things, also has a great contempt for it where thinking is concerned.[19]

But then does such a self not exist in actuality? Has he fled outside actuality, into the desert, into the monastery, into a mental institution? Is he not an actual human being, dressed like others, or like others wearing the usual overcoat? Why, of course he is, why not! But this business of the self he lets no one into, not a soul. He feels no need to, or he has learned to master the need. Just listen to him talk about it himself. "After all, [178] it is only the purely immediate people—who in the qualification of spirit stand at roughly the same point as the child in the earliest period of infancy, when with a thoroughly endearing lack of embarrassment it lets everything go from itself—it is only the purely immediate people who cannot hold anything in at all. It is this kind of immediacy that often, with great pretension, calls itself 'truth, being true, a true human being, and just as one is.' Which is exactly as true as it is untruth when a grown person does not give way the moment he feels a bodily need. Every self that is even the least bit reflective does, after all, have some notion of restraining the self." And our man in despair is inclosed enough to be able to keep every outsider, and therefore everyone, away from this business of the self, while outwardly he is entirely "an actual human being." He is a university man, a husband, a father, even an unusually capable civil servant, a respectable father, pleasant company, very gentle with his wife, solicitude itself toward his children. And a Christian? —well, yes, he is that too, after a fashion. He prefers, however, to avoid talking about it, though he likes to see, with a certain wistful joy, that his wife occupies herself with religious things for her upbuilding. He goes to church very seldom, because it seems to him that most pastors don't really know what they are talking about. He makes an exception for one particular pastor, of whom he admits that he does know what he is talking about; but

19 "Inclosing reserve" renders *Indesluttethed*: shutting oneself up in oneself. The "blind door," a sham door with nothing behind it, was used earlier for the despair of immediacy.

for another reason he does not want to hear him, since he is afraid it might lead him too far. On the other hand, he quite often feels a need for solitude. It is a necessity of life for him, sometimes like breathing, at other times like sleeping. That he has this necessity of life more than most people is also a sign that he is a deeper nature. In general, the need for solitude is a sign that there is, after all, spirit in a person, and it is the measure of what spirit there is. "The utterly silly non-humans and fellow humans" feel so little need for solitude that, like lovebirds, they die at once if they have to be alone for a moment. As the little child must be lulled to sleep, so these people need the soothing lullaby of company in order to be able to eat, drink, sleep, pray, fall in love, etc.[20] Yet both in antiquity and in the Middle Ages people were aware of this need for solitude and respected what it signifies. In the constant sociability of our times we shudder so at [179] solitude that (oh, splendid epigram!) we know no use for it except as a punishment for criminals. But it is true: in our times it is indeed a crime to have spirit, so it is quite in order that such people, lovers of solitude, are classed with criminals.

So the inclosed person in despair lives on, horis successivis [hour after hour], in hours which, though not lived for eternity, still have something to do with the eternal, occupied with his self's relation to itself; but he does not really get any further. Then, when that is done, when the need for solitude has been satisfied, he goes out, as it were, even when he goes in to his wife and children or engages with them. What makes him so gentle as a husband and so solicitous as a father is, besides his natural good nature and his sense of duty, the admission he has made to himself, in his inclosed innermost being, concerning his weakness.

If it were possible for someone to become privy to his inclosing reserve, and one then said to him: this is pride, after all, you are really proud of your self—he would hardly make that admis-

20 The pun plays on Danish *Umennesker* (brutes, literally "non-humans") and *Medmennesker* (fellow humans).

sion to anyone else. Alone with himself he might well admit that there was something in it. But the passion with which his self had grasped his weakness would soon persuade him again that it could not possibly be pride, since it was precisely over his weakness that he despaired. As if it were not pride that laid such enormous weight on the weakness! As if it were not because he wanted to be proud of his self that he could not bear this consciousness of weakness! —If one were to say to him: "This is a strange entanglement, a strange kind of knot. For the whole trouble really lies in the way thought twists itself; otherwise it is even normal. This is precisely the way you have to go: you must go through this despair of the self to the self. What you say about weakness is quite right, but that is not what you should despair over. The self must be broken in order to become itself; just stop despairing over that." If one were to speak to him like this, he would understand it in a dispassionate moment. But soon passion would again see wrongly, and then once more he takes the wrong turn, into despair.

As was said, such despair is rather rare in the world. If it does not stop at this point, merely marking time, and if, on the other hand, no upheaval takes place in the person in despair that puts him on the right road to faith, then such [180] despair will either intensify itself into a higher form of despair and remain inclosing reserve, or it will break through outward and destroy the external disguise in which such a person in despair has been living as if incognito. In the latter case such a person in despair will throw himself into life, perhaps into the distraction of great undertakings. He will become a restless spirit whose existence leaves traces enough behind it, a restless spirit who wants to forget; and since the noise inside is too loud, strong measures are needed, though of a different kind from those Richard III uses so as not to hear his mother's curses. Or he will seek forgetfulness in sensuality, perhaps in debauchery. In despair he wants to go back to immediacy, but always with consciousness of the self

that he does not want to be.[21] In the first case, when despair is intensified, it becomes defiance. And now it becomes evident how much untruth lay in this business of weakness; it becomes evident how dialectically correct it is that the first expression of defiance is precisely despair over one's weakness.

But in conclusion let us take one more little look in at the inclosed person who, in his inclosing reserve, is marking time. If this inclosing reserve is maintained absolutely, omnibus numeris absoluta [complete in every respect], then suicide will be the danger that lies closest to him. People as they generally are have, naturally, no inkling of what such an inclosed person is able to bear; if they found out, they would be astonished. But then again, suicide is the danger for the absolutely inclosed. If, on the other hand, he talks to someone, if he opens himself to a single human being, then in all probability he is relaxed so much, his tension let down so much, that suicide does not result from the inclosing reserve. Such an inclosing reserve with one confidant is a whole tone milder than the absolute kind. He will then probably avoid suicide. Yet it can happen that, precisely at the moment he has opened himself to another, he despairs over it. It seems to him that he would infinitely rather have held out in silence than have a confidant. There are examples of this, of an inclosed person being driven to despair precisely by having gained a confidant. Then suicide may be the result after all. In poetry the catastrophe (assuming, poetice [for poetic purposes], that the person was, say, a king or an emperor) could also be shaped so that he had the confidant put to death. One could imagine a demonic tyrant of this kind, who felt a need to talk with a [181] human being about his torment and so used up a whole string of people, one after another. For to become his confidant was certain death: as soon as the tyrant had unburdened himself to him, he was put to death.—It would be a task for a poet to portray this agonizing self-contradiction in a demonic person—

21 In Shakespeare's *Richard III* (Act 4, scene 4) the king has trumpets and drums sounded to drown out the curses of his mother, the Duchess of York.

being unable to do without a confidant and unable to have one—resolved in this way.[22]

B) THE DESPAIR OF DEFIANCE

In despair wanting to be oneself: the self tries to create itself on its own terms.

Just as it was shown that α could be called the despair of femininity, so this despair can be called the despair of masculinity. In relation to the preceding, therefore, it is also despair seen under the qualification of spirit. But then masculinity, too, belongs essentially under the qualification of spirit, while femininity is a lower synthesis.

The despair described under α, 2 was over one's weakness; the person in despair does not want to be himself. But if one goes a single dialectical step further, if the one who despairs in this way becomes conscious of why he does not want to be himself, then it turns around, then defiance is there. For then it is precisely because in despair he wants to be himself.

First comes despair over the earthly or something earthly, then despair of the eternal, over oneself. Then comes defiance, which is really despair by means of the eternal: the despairing misuse of the eternal that is in the self, in order in despair to want to be oneself. But precisely because it is despair by means of the eternal, it lies in a certain sense very close to the truth; and precisely because it lies very close to the truth, it is infinitely far away. The despair that is the passage to faith is also by means of the eternal: by means of the eternal the self has the courage to lose itself in order to win itself. Here, on the other hand, it will not begin by losing itself but wants to be itself.

In this form of despair there is now the ascent in consciousness of the self, and thus greater consciousness of what despair is and of the fact that one's condition is despair. Here despair is conscious of itself as a deed; it does not come from outside as something suffered under the pressure of externality, it comes

22 "The demonic" renders *det Dæmoniske*.

directly from the self. And so defiance, in relation to despair over one's weakness, is after all a new qualification.

182 To want in despair to be oneself, there must be consciousness of an infinite self. This infinite self, however, is really only the most abstract form, the most abstract possibility, of the self. And it is this self that he in despair wants to be, severing the self from every relation to a power that has established it, or severing it from the notion that there is such a power. By means of this infinite form the self in despair wants to have dominion over itself, or to create itself, to make its self into the self he wants to be, to decide what he will and will not have in his concrete self. His concrete self, or his concretion, has of course necessity and limits; it is this quite definite thing, with these abilities, aptitudes, etc., in this concretion of relationships, etc. But by means of the infinite form, the negative self, he wants first to undertake to refashion the whole of this, in order to get out of it a self such as he wants, produced by means of the infinite form of the negative self—and then he wants to be himself. That is, he wants to begin a little earlier than other people, not at and with the beginning, but "in the beginning." He does not want to put on his own self, does not want to see his task in the self given to him; by means of being the infinite form he wants to construct it himself.[23]

If one wanted a general name for this despair, one could call it Stoicism, though without thinking only of that sect. And to shed more light on this kind of despair, it is best to distinguish between an acting self and a suffering self, and to show how the self, when it is acting, relates itself to itself, and how the self, when it is suffering, relates itself to itself in suffering, and that the formula is always: in despair wanting to be oneself.

If the despairing self is *acting,* it really always relates itself to itself only experimentally, whatever it undertakes, however great, however astonishing, with however much perseverance. It acknowledges no power over itself; therefore it ultimately

23 "In the beginning" echoes Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1: he wants to start where God starts.

lacks earnestness and can only conjure up a semblance of earnestness when it bestows its very highest attention on its experiments. This is a counterfeit earnestness. Like the fire Prometheus stole from the gods, this is stealing from God the thought that is earnestness: that God is looking at one. Instead, the despairing self is content to look at itself, and this is supposed to give its undertakings infinite interest and significance, whereas precisely this is what makes them experiments.[24] For even if this self [183] does not go so far in despair as to become an experimental god, no derived self can, by looking at itself, give itself more than it itself is. It remains the self, first and last; in its self-doubling it becomes neither more nor less than the self. To that extent the self, in its despairing striving to want to be itself, works its way into the very opposite: it really becomes no self. In the whole dialectic within which it acts there is nothing firm. What the self is does not stand firm at any moment—that is, eternally firm. The negative form of the self exercises the power of loosing as much as the power of binding. It can quite arbitrarily start all over again at any moment, and however long a single thought is pursued, the entire action takes place within a hypothesis. So far is the self from succeeding in becoming more and more itself that it only becomes more and more evident that it is a hypothetical self. The self is its own master, absolutely, as they say, its own master, and precisely this is the despair; but it is also what the self takes for its pleasure, its delight.[25] Yet on closer inspection one easily ascertains that this absolute ruler is a king without a country; he really rules over nothing. His condition, his sovereignty, is subject to the dialectic that at every moment rebellion is legitimate. For in the end this depends arbitrarily on the self itself.

So the despairing self is always only building castles in the air, always only fencing in the air. All these experimented vir-

24 Prometheus, the Titan of Greek myth, stole fire from the gods for humankind and was punished by being chained to a rock.

25 "Loosing" and "binding" echo the power given to Peter and the disciples in Matthew 16:19 and 18:18.

tues look brilliant; for a moment they enchant like an Eastern poem. Such self-control, such steadfastness, such ataraxia, etc., borders almost on the fabulous. Yes, it certainly does; and at the bottom of the whole thing there is also nothing. The self in despair wants to enjoy the entire satisfaction of making itself into itself, of developing itself, of being itself; it wants to have the honor of this poetic, masterly plan, of the way it has understood itself.[26] And yet in the final analysis it is a riddle what it understands by itself. At the very moment when it seems closest to having the building finished, it can arbitrarily dissolve the whole thing into nothing.

THE SUFFERING SELF AND THE DEMONIC

Clinging to a torment it refuses to have removed, defiance becomes a demonic rage against existence.

If the despairing self is *suffering,* the despair is still: in despair wanting to be oneself. Perhaps such an experimenting self, which in despair wants to be itself, runs into some difficulty or other while provisionally finding its bearings in its concrete self, something the [184] Christian would call a cross, a fundamental injury, whatever it may be. The negative self, the infinite form of the self, will perhaps at first throw this away entirely, pretend it does not exist, want to know nothing of it. But it does not succeed. Its skill at experimenting does not reach that far; not even its skill at abstracting reaches that far. Like Prometheus, the infinite, negative self feels itself nailed to this servitude. So here it is a suffering self. How, then, does the despair that is in despair wanting to be oneself show itself?

Look: in the preceding, we presented the form of despair that is to despair over the earthly or something earthly, understood in such a way that this is basically, and also shows itself to be, despairing of the eternal, that is, not wanting to let oneself be comforted and healed by the eternal, valuing the earthly so

26 *Ataraxia,* "unperturbedness," was the ideal of tranquility of the Stoics and Epicureans.

highly that the eternal can be no comfort. But it is also a form of despair not to want to hope in the possibility that an earthly need, a temporal cross, can be lifted. That is what this person in despair, who in despair wants to be himself, does not want. If he has convinced himself that this thorn in the flesh (whether it really is so, or his passion makes it so for him) gnaws so deeply that he cannot abstract from it[27], then he wants, as it were, to take it upon himself eternally. He takes offense at it, or rather, he takes it as an occasion to take offense at the whole of existence. He wants to be himself in defiance—not in spite of it to be himself [185] without it (that would be to abstract from it, and that he cannot do, or that is the movement in the direction of resignation). No, in spite of, or in defiance of, the whole of existence he wants to be himself with it, take it along, almost flaunting his torment in defiance.[28] For to hope in the possibility of help, especially by virtue of the absurd, that for God everything is possible—no, that he does not want. And to seek help from anyone else—no, not for anything in the world does he want that. If it came to that, he would rather be himself with all the torments of hell than seek help.[29]

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27 KIERKEGAARD'S NOTE. Incidentally, just to point it out, one will see here, precisely from this standpoint, that much of what is decked out in the world under the name of resignation is a kind of despair: that of in despair wanting to be one's abstract self, in despair wanting to be content with the eternal, and thereby being able to defy or ignore suffering in the earthly and temporal. The dialectic of resignation is really this: to want to be one's eternal self, and then, with respect to some particular thing in which the self suffers, not to want to be oneself, consoling oneself that it must after all fall away in eternity, and therefore thinking oneself justified in not taking it on in time. Though suffering under it, the self will not grant it the concession that it belongs to the self, that is, will not humble itself under it in faith. Resignation viewed as despair is thus essentially different from in despair not wanting to be oneself. For it does in despair want to be itself, but with the exception of one particular thing, with respect to which it in despair does not want to be itself.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. "Resignation" renders *Resignation*, as in "the infinite movement of resignation" in *Fear and Trembling*.

28 The "thorn in the flesh" is Paul's phrase (2 Corinthians 12:7). "Takes offense" renders *forarges*, from *Forargelse*, "offense": the New Testament *skandalon*, a stumbling block.

29 "By virtue of the absurd" renders *i Kraft af det Absurde*, as in *Fear and Trembling*.

And truly, what people say is not quite so entirely true: "that it goes without saying that a sufferer would so gladly be helped, if only someone could help him." It is far from being so, even if the opposite is not always as despairing as it is here. The matter is this. A sufferer usually has one or more ways in which he might wish to be helped. If he is helped in that way, why, then he is glad to be helped. But when, in a deeper sense, it becomes a serious matter of having to be helped, especially by a higher one, or by the Highest—this humiliation of having to accept help unconditionally, in any way whatever, of becoming like a nothing in the hand of the "Helper," for whom everything is possible, or merely of having to bow before another human being, of having to give up being oneself as long as one is seeking help: oh, there is certainly much suffering, even long and agonizing suffering, at which the self does not wince like this, and which it therefore basically prefers, as long as it can go on being itself.

But the more consciousness there is in such a sufferer, who in despair wants to be himself, the more the despair intensifies itself and becomes the demonic. Its origin is usually this. A self that in despair wants to be itself winces at some torment or other that simply cannot be taken away from, or separated from, his concrete self. On precisely this torment he then throws all his passion, which in the end becomes a demonic rage. Now even if it were so, even if God in heaven and all the angels offered to help him out of it—no, now he does not want it, now it is too late. Once he would gladly have given everything to be rid of this torment; he was made to wait; now it is past. Now, now he would rather rage against everything, be the one wronged by the whole world, by existence itself, the one for whom it is of the utmost importance to make sure he has his torment at hand and that no one takes it from him. For then he could not prove, and convince himself, that he is in the right. In the end this becomes so fixed in his [186] head that he is afraid of eternity for a quite peculiar reason: namely, that it will separate him from his infinite advantage, demonically understood, over other people, from his justification, demonically understood, for being what he is.—

Himself he wants to be. He began with the infinite abstraction of the self, and now at last he has become so concrete that it would be an impossibility to become eternal in that sense; and yet in despair he wants to be himself. Oh, demonic madness: he rages most of all at the thought that eternity might take it into its head to take his misery from him.

This kind of despair is seldom seen in the world. Such figures really occur only in the poets, the real ones, that is, who always lend their creations "demonic" ideality, taking the word in the pure Greek sense. Nevertheless such despair does occur in actuality too. What, then, is the corresponding externality? Well, there is no "corresponding" one, since a corresponding externality, corresponding to inclosing reserve, is a self-contradiction: if it corresponded, it would be disclosing. But here externality is the altogether indifferent thing, here where inclosing reserve, or what could be called an inwardness with a jammed lock, is so overwhelmingly what must be attended to.[30] The lowest forms of despair, where there really was no inwardness, or in any case nothing to say about it—the lowest forms of despair had to be presented by describing, or saying something about, the externals of such people in despair. But the more spiritual despair becomes, the more inwardness becomes a world of its own in inclosing reserve, the more indifferent are the externals under which despair hides. And precisely the more spiritual despair becomes, the more careful it itself is, with demonic shrewdness, to keep despair shut up in inclosing reserve, and so the more careful to reduce the external to indifference, to make it as insignificant and indifferent as possible. As in the tales of superstition the troll vanishes through a crack no one can see, so for despair, precisely the more spiritual it is, it matters all the more to dwell in an externality behind which no one would ordinarily think of looking for it. This hiddenness is itself something spiritual, and one of the safeguards for securing, as it were, behind actuality an *in*closure, a world *ex*clusively its own, [187] a world in

30 In Greek, a *daimōn* is a divine or semi-divine power, not necessarily evil, like the *daimonion* of Socrates.

which the despairing self, restless and tantalized, is occupied with wanting to be itself.[31]

We began (α 1) with the lowest form of despair, which in despair does not want to be itself. Demonic despair is the most intensified form of the despair that in despair wants to be itself. This despair does not even want to be itself in Stoic infatuation with itself and self-deification; it does not want, like that despair, falsely to be sure but still in a certain sense, to be itself according to its perfection. No, it wants to be itself in hatred of existence, to be itself according to its misery. It does not even want to be itself in defiance or defiantly, but out of spite. It does not even want in defiance to tear its self loose from the power that established it; out of spite it wants to force itself on that power, to thrust itself defiantly upon it, out of malice to hold on to it. And of course a malicious objection must above all take care to hold on to that which it is an objection against. Rebelling against the whole of existence, it thinks it has obtained a proof against it, against its goodness. The person in despair thinks that he himself is this proof, and that is what he wants to be. Therefore he wants to be himself, himself in his torment, in order to protest with this torment against the whole of existence. Whereas the weak person in despair wants to hear nothing of the comfort eternity has for him, such a person in despair does not want to hear of it either, but for a different reason: precisely this comfort would be his undoing—as an objection against the whole of existence. It is, to describe it figuratively, as if an author made a slip of the pen, and this slip became conscious of itself as such—perhaps it was really no mistake at all but, in a far higher sense, an essential part of the whole work—it is as if this slip of the pen now wanted to rebel against the author, out of hatred for him forbid him to correct it, and in insane defiance say to him: No, I will not be erased; I will stand as a witness against you, a witness that you are a second-rate author.

31 Tantalus, in Greek myth, was punished by standing in water and beneath fruit that always receded out of his reach.

Despair Is Sin

Andet Afsnit, A
The self before God; the Socratic definition of sin; sin as a position, not a negation.

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191 Sin is: *before God, or with the conception of God, in despair not wanting to be oneself, or in despair wanting to be oneself.* Sin is thus intensified weakness or intensified defiance: sin is the intensification of despair. The emphasis lies on *before God,* or on the conception of God being present. What makes sin, dialectically, ethically, religiously, into what lawyers call "aggravated" despair is the conception of God.[1]

THE POET OF THE RELIGIOUS

A poet who loves God but will not accept his torment stands on the border between despair and sin.

Although in this part, least of all in A, there is no room or place for psychological description, we must nevertheless mention here, as the most dialectical confinium [border zone] between despair and sin, what might be called a poet-existence in the direction of the religious. It is an existence that has something in common with the despair of resignation, except that the conception of God is present. Such a poet-existence will, as can be seen from the conjunction and position of the categories, be the most eminent poet-existence. Viewed Christianly, every poet-existence (in spite of all aesthetics) is sin: the sin of poetizing instead

1 "Sin" renders *Synd*; "before God" renders *for Gud* throughout. *Qvalificeret*, "aggravated," is the legal term for an offense made more serious by its circumstances.

of being, of relating to the good and the true through imagination instead of being it, that is, existentially striving to be it. The poet-existence we are speaking of here differs from despair in that it has the conception of God with it, or is before God. But it is enormously dialectical, and is like an impenetrable dialectical tangle as to how far it is obscurely conscious of being sin. Such a poet may have a very deep religious need, and the conception of God is taken up into his despair. He loves God above all, God who is his only comfort in his secret torment, and [192] yet he loves the torment; he will not let it go. He would so much like to be himself before God, but not with respect to the fixed point where the self suffers; there in despair he does not want to be himself. He hopes that eternity will take it away, and here in time, however much he suffers under it, he cannot make up his mind to take it on, to humble himself under it in faith. And yet he continues to relate himself to God, and this is his only bliss. It would be the greatest horror for him to have to do without God; "that would be enough to make one despair." And yet he really allows himself, though perhaps unconsciously, to poetize God a little bit differently from what God is, a little more à la a loving father who all too readily indulges the child's—only wish. Like one who became unhappy in love, and so became a poet, and blissfully praises the happiness of love: so he becomes a poet of religiousness. He became unhappy in religiousness. He dimly understands that what is required of him is to let go of this torment, that is, in faith to humble himself under it and take it on as belonging to the self. For he wants to keep it away from himself, and precisely in this way he holds on to it, although he does think (which, like every word of a person in despair, is right backward and so to be understood the other way around) that this is supposed to mean getting rid of it as well as possible, letting go of it as far as is humanly possible. But in faith to take it on—that he cannot do, that is, in the final sense he will not, or here his self ends in obscurity. But like that other poet's description of love, this poet's description of the religious has an enchantment, a lyrical sweep, such as no married man's and no

Reverend's has. Nor is what he says untrue, by no means; his portrayal is precisely his happier, his better self. In relation to the religious he is an unhappy lover, that is, he is not in the strict sense a believer. He has only the first element of faith, despair, and in it a burning longing for the religious. His collision is really this: Is he the one who is called? Is the thorn in the flesh the expression that he is to be used for the extraordinary? Before God, is the extraordinary that he has become entirely in order? Or is the thorn in the flesh what he must humble himself under in order to attain the universally human?—But enough of this. I can say with the emphasis of truth: to whom am I speaking? Psychological investigations like these to the nth power—who cares about such things? The Nuremberg pictures the pastor paints are easier [193] to understand. They resemble each and every one, deceptively so, people as they generally are, and, spiritually understood, nothing at all.[2]

CHAPTER 1. THE SELF BEFORE GOD

A self measured by God gains infinite reality, and its despair before God becomes sin.

In the preceding part a gradation in consciousness of the self was pointed out throughout. First came ignorance of having an eternal self (C. B. a.), then a knowledge of having a self in which there is, after all, something eternal (C. B. b.), and within this (α. 1. 2. β) further gradations were pointed out. This whole consideration must now be turned dialectically in a new way. The point is this. The gradation in consciousness of the self that we have dealt with so far falls within the qualification: the human self, or the self whose measure is the human being. But this self acquires a new quality and qualification by being the self directly before God.[3] This self is no longer the merely human self

2 Nuremberg pictures were cheap mass-produced prints with stock figures that could stand for anyone.

3 *Lige over for Gud*, "directly before God": the qualification on which the whole of Part Two turns.

but is what I would call, hoping not to be misunderstood, the theological self, the self directly before God. And what infinite reality the self gains by being conscious of existing before God, by becoming a human self whose measure is God! A cowherd who (if this were possible) is a self directly before cows is a very low self. So is a ruler who is a self directly before slaves—and in fact he is no self at all, for in both cases a measure is lacking. The child, who until now has had only his parents as his measure, becomes a self when, as a man, he gets the state as his measure. But what infinite accent falls on the self when it gets God as its measure! The measure for the self is always this: that directly before which it is a self. But this, in turn, is the very definition of what a "measure" is. Just as one can add only quantities of the same kind, so everything is qualitatively that by which it is measured; and what is qualitatively its measure is ethically its goal; and the measure and the goal are qualitatively what a thing is. The exception is the relation in the world of freedom. There, however, someone who is not qualitatively what is his goal and his measure must himself be to blame for this disqualification, so [194] that the goal and the measure nevertheless remain the same—as judgment—making plain what it is he is not, namely, that which is his goal and measure.

It was a very sound thought, one to which an older dogmatics so often returned, while a later dogmatics so often found fault with it because it lacked the understanding and the feeling for it—it was a very sound thought, even if it was sometimes misapplied: that what made sin terrible was that it was before God. From this people then proved the eternity of the punishments of hell. Later people grew clever and said: sin is sin; sin is no greater because it is against God or before God. Strange! Even lawyers speak of aggravated crimes; even lawyers distinguish whether a crime, for example, has been committed against a public official or against a private person, and they distinguish in punishment between parricide and ordinary murder.

No, the older dogmatics was right in this: that sin's being against God intensified it infinitely. The error lay in regarding

God as something external, and in its being as if one assumed that people sinned against God only now and then. But God is not something external in the way a police officer is. What must be looked at is that the self has the conception of God and yet does not will as he wills, and so is disobedient. Nor is it only now and then that people sin before God. For every sin is before God—or rather, what really makes human guilt into sin is that the guilty one had the consciousness of existing before God.

Despair is intensified in relation to consciousness of the self; but the self is intensified in relation to the measure for the self, and infinitely when God is the measure. The more conception of God, the more self; the more self, the more conception of God. Only when a self, as this particular single self, is conscious of existing before God—only then is it the infinite self; and this self then sins before God. The selfishness of paganism, therefore, whatever may be said about it, is still not nearly so aggravated as that of Christendom, insofar as there is selfishness here too; for the pagan did not have his self directly before God. The pagan and the natural human being have the merely human self as their measure. One may therefore well be right, from a higher standpoint, to see paganism as lying in sin. But the sin of paganism was really the despairing [195] ignorance of God, of existing before God; it is "to be without God in the world." From another side, therefore, it is true that the pagan did not sin in the strictest sense, for he did not sin before God; and all sin is before God. It is also quite certain, in one sense, that a pagan has many times been helped to slip through the world in this way without reproach, precisely because his Pelagian-frivolous conception saved him. But then his sin is another one: this Pelagian-frivolous view.[4] On the other hand, it is also quite certain that many a person, precisely by being strictly brought up in Christianity, has in a certain sense been plunged into sin, because the whole Christian outlook was too earnest for him, especially at an

4 The quotation is Ephesians 2:12. "Pelagian" refers to Pelagius (c. AD 360–420), who taught that human beings can avoid sin by their own will.

earlier period of his life. Yet in another sense this, in turn, is of some help to him: this deeper conception of what sin is.

Sin is: before God in despair not wanting to be oneself, or before God in despair wanting to be oneself. But is this definition—even if it may perhaps be granted to have its merits in other respects (among them the most important of all, that it is the only scriptural one; for Scripture always defines sin as disobedience)—is it not too spiritual? To this it must first and foremost be answered: a definition of sin can never be too spiritual (unless it becomes so spiritual that it abolishes sin); for sin is precisely a qualification of spirit. And next: why should it be too spiritual? Because it does not speak of murder, theft, fornication, and the like? But does it not speak of them? Are these not also self-will against God, a disobedience that defies his commandment? But on the other hand, when in speaking of sin one speaks only of such sins, it is so easily forgotten that one may, humanly speaking, be more or less in order in all such matters, and yet the whole of one's life be sin—the well-known kind of sin: the splendid vices, self-will that, spiritlessly or brazenly, remains or wants to remain ignorant of the infinitely deeper sense in which a human self owes God obedience with respect to its every most secret wish and thought, with respect to a ready ear to perceive, and a willingness to follow, God's every slightest hint as to what his will is with this self. The sins of the flesh are the self-will of the lower self. But how often is one devil not driven out with the devil's help, so that the last state becomes worse than the first. For this is exactly how it goes in the world: first a person sins out of frailty and weakness; and [196] then—well, then perhaps he learns to flee to God and is helped to faith, which saves from all sin; but that is not what we are speaking of here—then he despairs over his weakness and either becomes a Pharisee, who in despair drives himself to a certain legal righteousness, or in despair plunges into sin again.[5]

The definition therefore certainly embraces every conceivable and every actual form of sin; and it certainly brings out cor-

rectly the decisive point, that sin is despair (for sin is not the wildness of flesh and blood but the spirit's consent to it), and is: before God. As a definition it is algebra. It would be out of place in this little book, and moreover an attempt bound to fail, if I were to begin describing the particular sins. The main thing here is only that the definition, like a net, embraces all the forms. And that it does, as can also be seen when one tests it by setting up its opposite: the definition of faith, by which I steer throughout this whole book as by a sure sea-mark. Faith is: that the self, in being itself and in wanting to be itself, rests transparently in God.

But it has often enough been overlooked that the opposite of sin is by no means virtue. That is in part a pagan view, content with a merely human measure, which precisely does not know what sin is—that all sin is before God. No, *the opposite of sin is faith*, which is why it says in Romans 14:23: Everything that is not of faith is sin. And this is one of the most decisive qualifications for the whole of Christianity: that the opposite of sin is not virtue but faith.

APPENDIX. THE POSSIBILITY OF OFFENSE

The single human being existing before God is too high a thought, and so people take offense.

The opposition sin–faith is the Christian one, which, in Christian fashion, reshapes all ethical concepts and pulls out one more stop in them. At the root of the opposition lies the decisive Christian qualification: before God—a qualification which in turn has the decisive criterion of the Christian: the absurd, the paradox, the possibility of offense. And that this be demonstrated [197] in every qualification of the Christian is of the utmost importance, since offense is Christianity's safeguard against all speculation. Where, then, is the possibility of offense here? It is that a human being should have this reality: to exist as a *single*

5 Allusions to Matthew 12:24–27 (casting out devils by the prince of devils) and Matthew 12:45 ("the last state of that man is worse than the first").

human being directly before God; and so, in turn, what follows from it, that a human being's sin should concern God. This thought of the single human being—before God—never enters speculation's head; it merely universalizes individual human beings fantastically into the race. It was precisely for this reason that an unbelieving Christianity discovered that sin is sin, and that whether it is directly before God or not makes no difference either way. That is, people wanted to get rid of the qualification: before God. And for this purpose they invented a higher wisdom, which, strangely enough, was neither more nor less than what higher wisdom most often is: the old paganism.

People have so often talked about taking offense at Christianity because it is so dark and gloomy, taking offense at it because it is so severe, and so on. But it would surely be most correct, for once, to make clear that the real reason human beings take offense at Christianity is that it is too high, that its goal is not the human being's goal, that it wants to make the human being into something so extraordinary that he cannot get it into his head. A quite simple psychological account of what offense is will also make this clear. At the same time it will show how infinitely foolishly people have gone about defending Christianity, taking offense away; how stupidly or brazenly they have ignored Christ's own instructions, which so often and with such concern warn against offense—that is, which themselves point out that its possibility is there and is meant to be there. For if it is not meant to be there, if it is not an eternally essential part of the Christian, then it is human nonsense on Christ's part to go about with concern warning against it instead of taking it away.

THE DAY LABORER AND THE EMPEROR

A laborer invited to become the emperor's son-in-law would find the offer too much to believe.

Suppose I imagined a poor day laborer and the mightiest emperor who ever lived, and this mightiest emperor suddenly took it into his head to send for the day laborer—who had never

dreamed, "and in whose heart it had never arisen," that the emperor knew he existed; who would count himself indescribably happy merely to be allowed to see the emperor once, something he would tell his children and grandchildren as the most important event of his life—suppose the emperor sent for him and let him know that he wanted him for his [198] son-in-law: what then?[6] Then the day laborer, being human, would become somewhat or very bewildered, embarrassed and uneasy about it. It would seem to him (and this is the human thing), humanly, something most peculiar, something mad, which he would least of all dare mention to anyone else, since in his own quiet mind he was already not far from the explanation his neighbors next door and across the street would lose no time in busily spreading: that the emperor meant to make a fool of him, so that the day laborer would become the laughingstock of the whole town, his caricature in the paper, the story of his wedding to the emperor's daughter sold by the ballad-women.[7] Still, becoming the emperor's son-in-law would surely soon have to become an outward actuality, so that the day laborer could assure himself through his senses whether the emperor was in earnest or merely wanted to make fun of the poor man, make him unhappy for the rest of his life, and help him end up in a mental institution. For the quid nimis [the "too much"] is present, which can so infinitely easily turn into its opposite. A small mark of favor—that the day laborer could get into his head. That would be understood in the market town, by the highly esteemed educated public, by all the ballad-women, in short by the 5 times 100,000 people who lived in that market town—which, as regards population, was indeed a very large city, but as regards understanding of and feeling for the extraordinary, a very small market town. But this, becoming son-in-law—no, that was far too much. And suppose now that it was not an outward actuality in

6 The inner quotation echoes 1 Corinthians 2:9: what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, "nor has arisen in the human heart."

7 Ballad-women (*Visekjerlinger*) sold printed broadside songs on topical events in the streets of Copenhagen.

question but an inward one, so that facticity could not help the day laborer to certainty, but faith itself was the only facticity, and so everything was left to faith—whether he had humble courage enough to dare to believe it (for brazen courage cannot help anyone to *believe*): how many day laborers would there be who had this courage? But whoever lacked this courage would take offense; the extraordinary would sound to him almost like mockery of him. He would then perhaps honestly and plainly admit: Such a thing is too high for me, I cannot get it into my head; it is, to put it bluntly, foolishness to me.

And now Christianity! Christianity teaches that this single human being—and so every single human being, whatever else he may be, man, woman, housemaid, cabinet minister, merchant, barber, student, and so on—this single human being exists *before God*. This single human being, [199] who would perhaps be proud to have spoken with the king once in his life, this human being, who is more than a little vain about being on familiar terms with So-and-so—this human being exists before God, can speak with God whenever he wants, sure of being heard by him; in short, this human being is offered a life on the most intimate terms with God! Further: for this human being's sake, for this human being's sake too, God comes into the world, lets himself be born, suffers, dies; and this suffering God almost begs and implores this human being to accept the help that is offered him! Truly, if there is anything to lose one's mind over, surely it is this! Whoever lacks the humble courage to dare to believe it takes offense. But why does he take offense? Because it is too high for him, because he cannot get it into his head, because he cannot find the boldness to face it, and therefore must get rid of it, reduce it to nothing, to madness and nonsense—for it is as if it would suffocate him.

For what is offense? Offense is unhappy admiration. It is therefore akin to envy, but it is an envy that turns against oneself—in an even stricter sense, that is worst toward oneself. The narrow-heartedness of the natural human being cannot

grant himself the extraordinary that God has intended for him; so he takes offense.

The degree of offense depends on how much passion a person has in relation to admiration. More prosaic people without imagination and passion, who are therefore not really suited to admire either, also take offense, to be sure, but they confine themselves to saying: I can't get such a thing into my head; I'll leave it alone. These are the skeptics. But the more passion and imagination a person has—and so the closer he is in a certain sense, namely in possibility, to being able to become a believer, NB by humbling himself in worship under the extraordinary—the more passionate the offense, which in the end cannot be content with less than having it rooted out, annihilated, trampled in the dirt.

If you want to learn to understand offense, then study human envy—a study I offer as an extra, beyond the required syllabus, and flatter myself I have made thoroughly. Envy is concealed admiration. An admirer who feels he cannot become happy by giving himself up to it chooses to become envious of what he admires. Then he speaks another language; in his language it is now said that what he really admires is nothing, something stupid and insipid and odd and overwrought. [200] Admiration is happy self-abandonment; envy, unhappy self-assertion.

So too with offense. For what in the relation between human being and human being is admiration–envy is, in the relation between God and human being, worship–offense. The sum total of all human wisdom is this "golden"—or perhaps more correctly, this gold-plated—ne quid nimis [nothing too much]: too little and too much spoil everything. This is passed from man to man as wisdom and honored with admiration; its rate of exchange never fluctuates; the whole human race guarantees its value. Then now and then a genius lives who goes a tiny bit beyond it; he is declared mad—by the sensible. But Christianity

takes a tremendous giant stride beyond this ne quid nimis, into the absurd; there Christianity begins—and offense.[8]

One sees now how (so that there might still be something extraordinary left) how extraordinarily stupid it is to defend Christianity, how little knowledge of human beings it betrays, how it plays, if unconsciously, into the hands of offense by making the Christian into such a miserable something that am Ende [in the end] has to be rescued by a defense. It is therefore certain and true that whoever first thought of defending Christianity within Christendom is de facto [in fact] a Judas No. 2: he too betrays with a kiss, only his betrayal is that of stupidity. To defend something is always to discredit it.[9] Let someone have a warehouse full of gold, let him be willing to give away every ducat to the poor—but let him also be stupid enough to begin this charitable undertaking of his with a defense, in which he proves on three grounds that it is justifiable: and people will come close to doubting whether he is doing any good at all. But now the Christian! Yes, whoever defends it has never believed in it. If he believes, then the enthusiasm of faith is—not a defense, no, it is the attack and the victory; a believer is a victor.

So it is with the Christian and offense. Its possibility, then, is quite rightly present in the Christian definition of sin. It is this: before God. A pagan, the natural human being, is very willing to admit that sin exists; but this "before God," which is what really makes sin sin, is far too much for him. It is (though in a different way from the one shown here) making far too much [201] of being a human being; a little less, and he is willing to go along with it —"but too much is too much."

8 "Golden" alludes to Horace's "golden mean" (*aurea mediocritas*); *ne quid nimis* is a Latin proverb, found in Terence.

9 Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss (Luke 22:47–48).

CHAPTER 2. THE SOCRATIC DEFINITION OF SIN

Anti-Climacus examines Socrates' claim that sin is ignorance and finds it lacks the will.

Sin is ignorance. This, as is well known, is the Socratic definition, which, like everything Socratic, is always an authority worth heeding. However, it has gone with this Socratic point as with so much else that is Socratic: people have learned to feel a need to go further. How countless are those who have felt the need to go further than Socratic ignorance—presumably because they felt it impossible for them to stop there. For how many are there in each generation who could endure, even for a single month, expressing existentially ignorance of everything? [10]

I will therefore by no means dismiss the Socratic definition on the grounds that one cannot stop with it. Rather, with the Christian in mente [in mind], I will use it to bring out the Christian in all its sharpness—precisely because the Socratic definition is so genuinely Greek. So here, as always, every other definition that is not in the strictest sense strictly Christian, that is, every intermediate definition, is shown up in its emptiness.

The defect of the Socratic definition is that it leaves undetermined how the ignorance itself is to be more precisely understood, its origin, and so on. That is, even if sin is ignorance (or what Christianity would perhaps rather call stupidity), which in one sense cannot be denied at all: is this an original ignorance, so that the state is that of someone who has not known, and until now has not been able to know, anything about the truth? Or is it a produced, a later ignorance? If it is the latter, then sin must really lie in something other than ignorance; it must lie in the activity within a person by which he has worked at obscuring his knowledge. But even granting this, the stubborn and very tenacious defect returns, for the question becomes whether a person, at the moment he began to obscure his know-

10 Socrates claimed to know only that he knew nothing.

ledge, is clearly [202] conscious of doing so. If he is not clearly conscious of it, then his knowledge is already somewhat obscured before he began, and the question simply comes back again. If, on the other hand, it is assumed that when he began to obscure his knowledge he is clearly conscious of it, then sin (even if it is ignorance, insofar as ignorance is the result) lies not in knowledge but in the will, and the question that would have to arise concerns the relation of knowledge and will to each other. All this (and here one could go on asking for many days) the Socratic definition does not really go into. Socrates was certainly an ethicist (indeed, antiquity unconditionally claims him as the inventor of ethics), the first, as he is and remains the first of his kind; but he begins with ignorance. Intellectually it is ignorance he tends toward, knowing nothing. Ethically he understands by ignorance something quite different, and then he begins with that. But on the other hand, naturally, Socrates is not essentially a religious ethicist, still less—which is what the Christian is—a dogmatician. Therefore he does not really enter at all into the whole inquiry with which Christianity begins, into the prius [that which comes before] in which sin presupposes itself, and which is explained in Christian terms in the dogma of original sin—a dogma that in this inquiry we reach only as a boundary.

Socrates therefore does not really arrive at the category of sin, which is certainly a defect in a definition of sin. How so? If sin is ignorance, then sin does not really exist; for sin is precisely consciousness. If sin is being ignorant of what is right, so that one therefore does what is wrong, then sin does not exist. If this is sin, then it is assumed, as Socrates also assumed, that it never happens that someone, knowing what is right, does what is wrong, or, knowing that it is wrong, does that wrong. So if the Socratic definition is correct, sin does not exist at all. But look, this, precisely this, is quite in order from the Christian point of view, in a deeper sense quite correct; in the Christian interest, quod erat demonstrandum [which was to be proved]. Precisely the concept by which Christianity most decisively distinguishes itself qualitatively from paganism is: sin, the doctrine of sin.

And so Christianity also quite consistently assumes that neither paganism nor the natural human being knows what sin is; indeed, it assumes that a revelation from God is needed to make manifest what sin is. For it is not [203] the case, as a superficial view assumes, that the doctrine of the Atonement is the qualitative difference between paganism and Christianity. No, the beginning must be made much deeper, with sin, with the doctrine of sin, as Christianity also does. What a dangerous objection to Christianity, then, if paganism had a definition of sin that Christianity had to acknowledge as correct.

What, then, is the qualification Socrates lacks in defining sin? It is: the will, defiance. The Greek intellect was too happy, too naive, too aesthetic, too ironic, too witty—too sinful to be able to get it into its head that someone, knowingly, could refrain from doing the good, or, knowingly, with knowledge of what is right, do what is wrong. The Greek mind posits an intellectual categorical imperative.[11]

The truth in this must by no means be overlooked, and it surely needs to be impressed upon times like these, which have run wild in a great deal of empty, puffed-up and fruitless knowledge. So now, just as in Socrates' time, only even more so, it would certainly be needful that people be starved a little, Socratically. It is enough to make one both laugh and weep—all these assurances of having understood and grasped the highest, and also the virtuosity with which many know how to present it in abstracto [in the abstract], in a certain sense quite correctly—it is enough to make one both laugh and weep when one then sees that all this knowing and understanding exerts no power at all over people's lives, that their lives do not in the remotest way express what they have understood, but rather the very opposite. At the sight of this discrepancy, as sad as it is ridiculous, one involuntarily exclaims: but how in the world is it possible that they could have understood it? Is it really true that they have understood it? Here that old ironist and ethicist answers: Oh, my

11 The "categorical imperative" is Kant's term for the unconditional moral command.

dear fellow, never believe it; they have not understood it. For if they had truly understood it, their lives would express it too; they would do what they had understood.

So to understand and to understand are two things? Certainly; and whoever has understood this—though, mark well, not in the sense of the first kind of understanding—is eo ipso [by that very fact] initiated into all the secrets of irony. It is really this contradiction that occupies irony. To find it comic that a person is really ignorant of something is a very low kind of comedy, beneath the dignity of irony. There is nothing really deeply comic in the fact that people once lived who assumed the earth stands [204] still—when they knew no better. Our own age will presumably fare similarly in relation to an age with more knowledge of physics. The contradiction is between two different ages that lack a deeper point of coincidence; such a contradiction is not essential, and so not essentially comic either. No, but that a person stands there and says what is right—and so has understood it; and then, when he has to act, does what is wrong—and so shows that he has not understood it: yes, that is infinitely comic. It is infinitely comic that a person moved to tears—so that not only sweat but tears pour down him—can sit and read or listen to an account of self-denial, of the nobility of sacrificing one's life for the truth, and then the next moment, ein, zwei, drei, vupti [one, two, three, hey presto], almost with the tears still in his eyes, is in full swing, in the sweat of his brow and as best his modest means allow, helping untruth to victory. It is infinitely comic that a speaker, with truth in his voice and gestures, deeply moved and deeply moving, can portray the truth so that it shakes you, can look all evil, all the powers of hell, in the eye, with an aplomb in his bearing, a boldness in his glance, a correctness in his steps that is admirable—it is infinitely comic that he, almost in the same moment, almost with his "adrienne" still on, can run cowardly and timidly out of the way of the slightest inconvenience. It is infinitely comic that someone can understand the whole truth about how wretched

and petty the world is, and so on.[12] —that he can understand it, and then cannot recognize what he has understood; for almost in the same moment he himself goes off and joins in the same pettiness and wretchedness, takes honor from it and is honored by it, that is, acknowledges it. Oh, when one sees someone who assures us that he has fully understood how Christ went about in the form of a lowly servant, poor, despised, mocked—as Scripture says: spat upon—when I then see the same man so carefully fleeing to where, in worldly terms, it is good to be, settling himself there as securely as possible; when I see him so anxiously, as if his life depended on it, avoiding every breath of an unfavorable wind from right or left, so blissful, so supremely blissful, so happy as a lark—yes, to make it complete, so happy as a lark that he is even moved to thank God for it—at being unconditionally honored and esteemed by all, all: then I have often said to myself and within myself, "Socrates, Socrates, Socrates, can it be possible that this man has understood what he says he has understood?"[13] So I have said; indeed, I have also wished that 205
Socrates were right. For it seems to me as if Christianity were too severe, nor can I square it with my experience to make such a person a hypocrite. No, Socrates, you I can understand. You make him a joker, a sort of merry fellow, you make him fair game for laughter; you have nothing against it—indeed, it even has your approval—if I serve him up and dish him up comically, that is, provided I do it well.

Socrates, Socrates, Socrates! Yes, one may well say your name three times; it would not be too much to say it ten times, if that would help at all. People think the world needs a republic, and they think it needs a new social order and a new religion; but no one considers that what this world, confused precisely by so much knowledge, needs is surely a Socrates. But of course, if anyone thought of it, not to mention if many thought of it, he

12 An *adrienne* was a loose, flowing gown named after an eighteenth-century stage costume; here the speaker's robe, as if still in costume.
13 The servant form alludes to Philippians 2:7; "spat upon" to the passion predictions and narrative (Mark 10:34; Matthew 27:30).

would be less needed. What an error most needs is always what it least thinks of—naturally, for otherwise it would not be an error.

So such an ironic-ethical correction is something our age could very well use; perhaps it is really the only thing it needs—for it is obviously what it least thinks of. It would be highly necessary that, instead of going further than Socrates, we simply came back to this Socratic principle: to understand and to understand are two things—not as a result that in the end helps people into the deepest misery, since it precisely cancels the difference between understanding and understanding, but as the ethical view of everyday life.

The Socratic definition, then, gets by as follows. When someone does not do what is right, then he has not understood it either; his understanding is an illusion; his assurance of having understood is a wrong direction; his repeated assurance, devil take him, that he has understood is an enormous, enormous distance by way of the greatest possible detour. But then the definition is correct. If someone does what is right, then surely he does not sin; and if he does not do what is right, then he has not understood it either. If he had truly understood it, it would soon move him to do it, would soon make him a Chladni figure of his understanding: ergo, sin is ignorance.[14]

But where, then, does the defect lie? It lies in something the Socratic itself is aware of and remedies, but only to a certain degree: that a dialectical qualification is lacking concerning the transition from having understood something to doing it. In this transition the [206] Christian begins. By going this way it comes to show that sin lies in the will, arriving at the concept of defiance; and then, to make the end really fast, the dogma of original sin is added—alas, for the secret of speculation in comprehending is precisely to sew without fastening the end and without tying a knot in the thread, and that is why it can, marvelously, go on

14 A Chladni figure (*Klangfigur*) is the pattern that sand forms on a vibrating plate, making the sound visible; here, a life that visibly expresses its understanding.

sewing and sewing, i.e., pulling the thread through. Christianity, on the other hand, fastens the end by means of the paradox.

In pure ideality, where there is no question of the single actual human being, the transition is necessary (in the system, after all, everything proceeds with necessity), or there is no difficulty at all connected with the transition from understanding to doing. This is the Greek mind (though not the Socratic, for Socrates is too much of an ethicist for that). And exactly this same thing is really the whole secret of modern philosophy; for it is this: cogito ergo sum [I think, therefore I am], to think is to be; (in Christian terms, on the other hand, it runs: be it done to you as you believe; or, as you believe, so you are; to believe is to be). So one will see that modern philosophy is neither more nor less than paganism.[15] Yet this is not the worst; to be related to Socrates is no mean thing. But what is utterly un-Socratic in modern philosophy is that it wants to make itself and us believe that this is Christianity.

In the world of actuality, on the other hand, where it is a question of the single human being, there is this tiny little transition from having understood to doing. It is not always cito citissime [quickly, most quickly], not—to speak German, for want of speaking philosophically—geschwind wie der Wind [swift as the wind]. On the contrary, here a very long-winded story begins.

In the life of the spirit there is no standstill (really no state either; everything is actuality). So if a person does not do what is right in the very second he has recognized it—well, then, first of all, the knowledge goes off the boil. And next the question becomes what the will thinks of what has been recognized. The will is a dialectical factor and has in turn beneath it the whole lower nature in a human being. If the will does not like what has been recognized, it does not follow that it goes and does the opposite of what the knowledge understood—such strong opposites are doubtless rarer. But the will lets some time pass; there is an interim; it says: let's wait and see until tomorrow. Through all

15 *Cogito ergo sum* is Descartes's founding principle; the Christian saying echoes Matthew 8:13.

this the knowledge grows dimmer and dimmer, and the lower wins out [207] more and more. Alas, for the good must be done at once, at once, the moment it is recognized (and that is why in pure ideality the transition from thinking to being goes so easily, for there everything is at once); but the lower has its strength in dragging things out. Little by little the will has nothing against this happening; it almost turns a blind eye to it. And when the knowledge has become duly obscured, knowledge and will can understand each other better; in the end they agree completely, for now the knowledge has gone over to the side of the will and acknowledges that it is quite right, just the way the will wants it. And that is perhaps how a great many people live. Little by little they work at obscuring their ethical and ethical-religious knowing, which would lead them out into decisions and consequences that the lower in them does not love; instead they expand their aesthetic and metaphysical knowing, which, ethically, is distraction.

Yet with all this we have still got no further than the Socratic; for, Socrates would say, if this happens, it only shows that such a person has not understood what is right after all. That is, the Greek mind lacks the courage to state that someone knowingly does what is wrong, with knowledge of what is right does what is wrong; so it helps itself out and says: when someone does what is wrong, he has not understood what is right.

Quite right; and no *human being* can get any further. No human being can, by himself and of himself, state what sin is, precisely because he is in sin; all his talk about sin is at bottom a whitewashing of sin, an excuse, a sinful mitigation. That is why Christianity also begins in another way: with the claim that a revelation from God is needed to enlighten a human being about what sin is—that sin lies not in a person's not having understood what is right, but in his not wanting to understand it, and in his not wanting it.

Even as regards the distinction between not *being able* to understand and not *wanting* to understand, Socrates really sheds no light, whereas he is the grand master of all ironists in

operating with the distinction between understanding and understanding. Socrates explains that whoever does not do what is right has not understood it either; but Christianity goes a little further back and says it is because he does not want to understand it, and this in turn because he does not want what is right. And next it teaches that a person does what is wrong (defiance proper) even though he understands what is right, or refrains from doing what is right even though he understands it; [208] in short, the Christian doctrine of sin is nothing but impertinence toward the human being, accusation upon accusation; it is the charge that the divine, as prosecutor, takes the liberty of bringing against the human being.

But can any human being comprehend this Christian teaching? By no means; it is, after all, the Christian teaching, and therefore an offense. It must be believed. To comprehend is the range of a human being's relation to the human; but to believe is a human being's relation to the divine. How, then, does Christianity explain this incomprehensible thing? Quite consistently, in an equally incomprehensible way: by its having been revealed.

Understood in Christian terms, then, sin lies in the will, not in knowing; and this corruption of the will goes beyond the consciousness of the single individual. This is entirely consistent; for otherwise the question of how sin began would have to arise with regard to each single individual.

Here again, then, is the mark of offense. The possibility of offense lies in this: that a revelation from God is needed to enlighten a human being about what sin is and how deep it goes. The natural human being, the pagan, reasons like this: "All right, I admit that I have not understood all things in heaven and on earth. If a revelation is needed, then let it enlighten us about heavenly things. But that a revelation should be needed to explain what sin is—that is surely the most unreasonable thing of all. I don't pretend to be a perfect human being, far from it. But this much I do know, and I am quite willing to admit it: how far I am from perfection. Should I not, then, know what sin is?"

But Christianity answers: No, that is what you know least of all—how far you are from perfection, and what sin is.—See, in that sense sin is indeed, in Christian terms, ignorance: it is ignorance of what sin is.

The definition of sin given in the previous chapter must therefore be completed as follows: sin is—after one has been enlightened by a revelation from God about what sin is—before God in despair not wanting to be oneself, or in despair wanting to be oneself.

CHAPTER 3. SIN IS NOT A NEGATION BUT A POSITION

Against speculative theology, sin is a positive reality that must be believed, not comprehended.

209 That this is so is something orthodox dogmatics, and orthodoxy in general, have constantly fought for; and they have rejected as pantheistic every definition of sin that made it something merely negative—weakness, sensuousness, finitude, ignorance, and the like. Orthodoxy has seen quite rightly that here is where the battle must be fought; or, to recall what was said earlier, here is where the rope must be made fast, here is where one must hold firm. Orthodoxy has rightly seen that if sin is defined negatively, the whole of Christianity loses its footing. That is why orthodoxy insists that a revelation from God is needed to teach fallen humanity what sin is—a communication which, quite consistently, must then be believed, since it is a dogma. And naturally the paradox, faith, dogma—these three qualifications form an alliance and an accord that is the surest stronghold and bulwark against all pagan wisdom.

So much for orthodoxy. Through a strange misunderstanding, a so-called speculative dogmatics—which, to be sure, involves itself with philosophy in a dubious way—has then thought it could *comprehend* this qualification, that sin is a position. But if that is true, then sin is a negation. The secret of all comprehending is that the act of comprehending is itself higher than any position it posits. The concept posits a position, but the fact that

the position is comprehended is precisely its being negated. Speculative dogmatics, itself to some extent aware of this, has known no other remedy than—something that hardly befits a philosophical science—to throw out a detachment of assurances at the point where the movement is made.[16] One assures us, each time more solemnly than the last, swearing and cursing more and more, that sin is a position; that to say sin is merely a negation is pantheism and rationalism and God knows what else, but all of it something that speculative dogmatics renounces and abhors—and then one proceeds to comprehend that sin is a position. That is to say, it is a position only to a certain degree, no more than can still be comprehended.

210 And the same duplicity of speculation shows itself at another point as well, though one concerning the same thing. The qualification of sin, how sin is defined, is decisive for the qualification of repentance. Now, since this business of the negation of the negation is so very speculative, there is nothing for it: repentance must be the negation of the negation—and then sin, of course, becomes the negation.—It is certainly to be wished, incidentally, that some sober thinker would one day explain to what extent this purely logical move—which recalls logic's original relation to grammar (two negatives make an affirmative) and to mathematics—to what extent this logical move is valid in the world of actuality, the world of qualities; whether the dialectic of qualities is not altogether a different one; whether "transition" does not play a different role here. Sub specie æterni, æterno modo [under the aspect of eternity, in the eternal mode], and so on, nothing is spaced out at all; therefore everything *is*, and there is no transition whatever. To *posit* in this abstract medium is therefore eo ipso [by that very fact] the same as to *cancel*. But to regard actuality in the same way is close to madness. One can also say, quite in abstracto [in the abstract]: the perfect follows the imperfect. But if in the world of actuality

16 "Position" means something posited, a positive reality (Latin *ponere*, to posit), as opposed to a negation or lack. "Speculative dogmatics" is theology in the Hegelian manner, such as that of Philipp Marheineke and H. L. Martensen.

a man were to conclude from this that a work he did not finish (imperfectum [unfinished]) got finished of itself, and at once—well, he would surely be mad. And so it is, too, with sin's so-called position when the medium in which it is posited is pure thought; that medium is far too volatile for the position to become a serious matter.

But none of this concerns me here. I simply hold fast, always, to the Christian teaching that sin is a position—not, however, as though it could be comprehended, but as a paradox that must be believed. This, in my view, is what is right. If only all the attempts to comprehend can be shown to be self-contradictory, the matter is put in its proper light; it then becomes clear that it must be left to faith whether one will believe or not.—I can well comprehend (and this is by no means too divine to be comprehended) that someone who simply must comprehend, and can only like what claims to comprehend, finds this very meager. But if the whole of Christianity hinges on this—that it is to be believed, not comprehended; that it is *either* to be believed *or* to be taken offense at—is it really so meritorious to want to comprehend? Is it meritorious, or is it not rather either impudence or thoughtlessness to want to comprehend [211] what does not want to be comprehended? When a king gets the idea of going entirely incognito, of being treated in every respect as an ordinary man, is it then right—just because people in general think it a greater mark of distinction to pay him royal homage—is it right to do so? Or is it not precisely asserting oneself and one's own way of thinking against the king's will, doing as one pleases instead of submitting? Or would it please the king, the more inventive such a person could be in showing him a subject's deference when the king does not want to be treated that way—that is, the more inventive such a person could be in going against the king's will?—Let others admire and praise the one who claims to be able to comprehend Christianity. I regard it as a straightforward ethical task, one that perhaps demands no small amount of self-denial, in such speculative times, when all "the others" are busy comprehending, to confess that one

neither can nor should comprehend it. Yet this is surely just what the age, what Christendom, needs: a little Socratic ignorance with regard to Christianity—but, mark well, a little "Socratic" ignorance. Let us never forget—but how many are there, really, who have ever properly known it or thought it?—let us never forget that Socrates' ignorance was a kind of fear of God and worship of God; that his ignorance was, in Greek, the Jewish saying: the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. Let us never forget that it was precisely out of reverence for the deity that he was ignorant; that, insofar as a pagan could, he kept watch as a *judge* at the boundary between God—and human being, guarding that the abyss of qualitative difference between them, between God and human being, be firmly fixed, so that God—and human being did not, philosophice, poetice, etc. [philosophically, poetically], run together into one. See, that is why Socrates was the ignorant one, and that is why the deity recognized him as the most knowing.[17] —But Christianity teaches that everything Christian exists only for faith; therefore it will be precisely a Socratic, God-fearing ignorance that, by means of ignorance, guards faith against speculation, keeping watch that the abyss of qualitative difference between God—and human being be fixed as it is in the paradox and in faith, so that God and human being do not, even more terribly than ever in paganism, philosophice, poetice, etc., run together into one—in the System.

Only from one side, then, can there be any question here of shedding light on sin's being [212] a position. In the preceding part, the account of despair consistently pointed out an ascent. The expression for this ascent was partly the intensification of the consciousness of the self, partly the intensification from suffering to conscious action. Taken together, both expressions in turn express that despair comes not from outside but from within. And to the same degree it is also more and more positing. But according to the definition of sin that has been set out, sin

17 Proverbs 9:10; the "abyss … fixed" echoes Luke 16:26. The deity is Apollo, whose oracle at Delphi declared Socrates the wisest of men.

involves the self infinitely intensified by the conception of God, and so, in turn, the greatest possible consciousness of sin as a deed. —This is the expression for sin's being a position: that it is *before God* is precisely what is positive in it.

Moreover, the qualification that sin is a position also contains, in quite another sense, the possibility of offense, the paradoxical. For the paradox lies in its consequence for the doctrine of the Atonement. First Christianity goes and fixes sin so firmly as a position that the human understanding can never comprehend it; and then it is the same Christian doctrine that undertakes to do away with this position in a way the human understanding can never comprehend. Speculation, which talks its way out of the paradoxes, knocks a little off at both ends, and then things go more easily: it does not make sin quite so positive —and yet, for all that, it cannot get it into its head that sin should be entirely forgotten. But Christianity, the first inventor of the paradoxes, is as paradoxical as possible here too. It works, as it were, against itself, fixing sin so firmly as a position that it now seems a complete impossibility to get rid of it again—and then it is precisely Christianity that, through the Atonement, will do away with sin so completely that it is as if drowned in the sea.[18]

APPENDIX TO A. IS SIN THEN VERY RARE?

Most lives in Christendom are too spiritless even to be called sin in the strict sense.

In the first part it was pointed out that the more intensive despair becomes, the rarer it is in the world. But now, since sin is despair qualitatively intensified yet once more, then sin must surely be [213] quite rare? A strange difficulty! Christianity subordinates everything to sin; we have tried to present the Christian view as rigorously as possible: and then this strange result emerges, this strange result, that sin is not found in paganism at all, but only in Judaism and Christianity, and there, again, very rarely.

18 An allusion to Micah 7:19: "You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea."

Yet it is quite right that this is so—but only in one sense. "After being enlightened by a revelation from God about what sin is, before God in despair not wanting to be oneself, or in despair wanting to be oneself" is to sin—and certainly it is rare for a human being to be so developed, so transparent to himself, that this can apply to him. But what follows from that? Well, that needs careful attention, for here there is a peculiar dialectical turn. It did not follow from a person's not being in despair in the more intensive sense—it did not follow from this that he was not in despair. On the contrary; it was shown precisely that most people, by far the most people, are in despair, but in a lower degree of despair. Nor is there any merit in being in despair in a higher degree. Aesthetically, that is an advantage, for aesthetically only strength is considered; but ethically, the more intensive despair is further from salvation than the lower.

And so it is with sin, too. The lives of most people, defined in dialectical indifference, are so far from the good (faith) that they are almost too spiritless to be called sin—indeed, almost too spiritless to be called despair.

To be a sinner in the strictest sense is, of course, very far from being something meritorious. But on the other hand, where in all the world is an essential consciousness of sin to be found (and see, that is what Christianity wants) in a life so sunk in triviality, in silly aping of "the others," that one can scarcely even say of it that it is too spiritless to be called sin—a life worth only, as Scripture says, "to be spat out"?[19]

Yet that does not settle the matter, for the dialectic of sin simply catches one in another way. How does it happen, namely, that a person's life becomes so spiritless that it is as if Christianity could not be brought to bear on it at all—as when a jack (and Christianity's lifting power is like a jack) cannot be set in place [214] because there is no firm ground, only bog and quagmire? Is it something that happens to a person? No, it is the person's own fault. No one is born spiritless; and however many take this with

19 Revelation 3:16.

them into death as the only yield of their lives—it is not life's fault.

But it must be said, and as unreservedly as possible, that so-called Christendom (in which everyone, by the millions, is just like that a Christian as a matter of course, so that there are as many, exactly as many, Christians as there are people) is not only a wretched edition of Christianity, full of misprints that distort the meaning and of thoughtless omissions and additions, but an abuse of it: it has taken Christianity in vain. In a small country scarcely three poets are born in each generation, but there are plenty of pastors, many more than can be given appointments. With regard to a poet one speaks of having a calling; to become a pastor, in the notion of most people (and so of most Christians), it is enough to have passed an examination.[20] And yet, yet a true pastor is something even rarer than a true poet, and yet the word "calling" originally belongs to the religious sphere. But with regard to being a poet, Christendom has at least preserved a notion that it is something, and that there is something to its being a calling. Being a pastor, on the other hand, has in the eyes of most people (and so of most Christians) been stripped of every elevating notion; without the least mystery, in puris naturalibus [in its bare natural state], it is a way of making a living. "Call" means an official post; people talk of getting a call; but of having a call—yes, that is talked about too: of someone having a call to give away.[21]

Alas, and the fate of this word in Christendom is like a motto for the fate of Christianity as a whole. The misfortune is not that Christianity is not spoken (just as the misfortune is not that there are not enough pastors); but it is spoken in such a way that in the end the majority of people think nothing at all by it (just as by being a pastor this majority thinks of nothing other than the altogether workaday business of being a merchant, a lawyer,

20 In Denmark candidates for the ministry qualified by passing the university examination in theology.

21 Danish *Kald* means both a vocation and a clerical living; a patron who controlled a parish appointment was said to have a *Kald* to give away.

a bookbinder, a veterinarian, etc.), so that the highest and holiest makes no impression whatever, but sounds and is heard as something that, God knows why, has just somehow become custom and usage, like so much else. What wonder, then, that people—for lack of finding their own conduct indefensible—find it necessary to defend Christianity.—

215 A pastor ought surely to be a believer. And a believer! A believer is surely a lover; indeed, the most enamored of all lovers is really, in point of enthusiasm, only a youth compared with a believer. Now imagine a lover. Isn't it true that he would be able, day in and day out, as long as the day lasted, and the night as well, to talk about his being in love? But do you think it could occur to him, do you think it would be possible for him—do you not think it would be abhorrent to him—to talk in such a way that he tried to prove by three reasons that there was, after all, something to being in love?—rather as when the pastor proves by three reasons that praying is beneficial, so that praying has sunk so low in price that three reasons are needed to help it to a little bit of respectability. Or as when the pastor—and this is the same thing, only even more ridiculous—proves by three reasons that praying is a blessedness that surpasses all understanding.[22] Oh, priceless anticlimax—that something surpasses all understanding is proved by three—reasons, which, if they are good for anything at all, surely do not surpass all understanding and, quite the contrary, must make it evident to the understanding that this blessedness by no means surpasses all understanding; for "reasons" lie, after all, within the scope of the understanding. No, for what surpasses all understanding—and for the one who believes in it—three reasons mean no more than three bottles, or three stags! —And further, do you think it would occur to a lover to conduct a defense of his being in love—that is, to admit that for him it was not the absolute, unconditionally the absolute, but that he thought of it somehow together with the objections against it, and out of that came the defense; that

22 "Surpasses all understanding": Philippians 4:7. Sermons of the day were commonly divided into three points or "reasons."

is, do you think he could or would admit that he was not in love, give himself away as not being in love? And if someone were to suggest to a lover that he talk like that, don't you think he would consider that person mad? And if, besides being in love, he were also something of an observer, don't you think he would begin to suspect that the one who made him this suggestion had never known what being in love is, or wanted to get him to betray and deny his love—by defending it?—Is it not obvious that it can never occur to someone who is really in love to want to prove it by three reasons, or to defend it? For he is what is more than all reasons and every defense: he is in love. And the one who does it [216] is not in love; he merely pretends to be, and unfortunately—or fortunately—so stupidly that he merely gives himself away as not being in love.

But this is exactly how Christianity is talked about—by believing pastors: either one "defends" Christianity or one translates it into "reasons," if one is not also dabbling in "comprehending" it speculatively. This is called preaching, and in Christendom it is already considered a great thing that preaching goes on like this and that some people listen to it. And precisely for this reason Christendom (this is the proof of it) is so far from being what it calls itself that most people's lives, understood in Christian terms, are even too spiritless to be called sin in the strict Christian sense.

The Continuation of Sin

Andet Afsnit, B
Despairing over one's sin; despairing of the forgiveness of sins (offense); abandoning Christianity as untruth.

[217] Every state of sin is new sin; or, as it should more precisely be expressed, and will be expressed in what follows, the state of sin is the new sin, is sin. To the sinner this may seem an exaggeration; at most he acknowledges each actual new sin as a new sin. But eternity, which keeps his account, must enter the state of sin as new sin. It has only two columns, and "whatever is not of faith is sin"; every unrepented sin is a new sin, and every moment it remains unrepented is new sin. But how rare is the person who has continuity with respect to his consciousness of himself! Most often people are conscious only momentarily—conscious in the big decisions, but the everyday is not reckoned at all. They are spirit, after a fashion, once a week for an hour or so—which is, of course, a rather bestial way of being spirit. But eternity is essential continuity and demands this of a human being, namely, that he be conscious of himself as spirit and have faith. The sinner, on the other hand, is so much in the power of sin that he has no notion of its total character—that he is on the road astray to perdition. He reckons only each particular new sin, by which he seems to gain fresh speed along the road to perdition, just as if in the moment before he were not traveling that road with the speed of all the previous sins. So natural has sin become to him, or so much has sin become his second nature, that he finds the everyday entirely in order, and himself pauses only for a moment each time he, so to speak, gains fresh speed

through a new sin. In his perdition he is [218] blind to the fact that his life, instead of having the essential continuity of the eternal by being before God in faith, has the continuity of sin.

But "the continuity of sin"—isn't sin precisely the discontinuous? See, here it comes again, this notion that sin is merely a negation, to which one can never acquire lawful title, just as one can never acquire lawful title to stolen goods; a negation, a powerless attempt to constitute itself, which nevertheless, suffering all the torment of powerlessness in despairing defiance, cannot do it. Yes, that is the speculative view. But in Christian terms sin (and this must be believed, since it is the paradoxical, which no human being can comprehend) is a position that out of itself develops a more and more positing continuity.

And the law for the growth of this continuity is also different from the law for the growth of a debt, or of a negation. For a debt does not grow because it is not paid; it grows each time it is added to. But sin grows with every moment one does not get out of it. So far is the sinner from being right in regarding only each new sin as an increase of sin that, in Christian terms, the state of sin is really the greater sin, is the new sin. Even a proverb says that to sin is human, but to remain in sin is diabolical; in Christian terms, however, this proverb must indeed be understood somewhat differently.[1] The merely desultory view, which looks only at the new sin and skips over what lies between, what lies between the particular sins, is just as superficial as it would be to suppose that a train moves only each time the locomotive puffs. No, this puffing, and the thrust that follows it, is really not what should be looked at, but rather the steady speed at which the locomotive goes and which produces that puffing. And so it is with sin. The state of sin is, in the deepest sense, the sin; the particular sins are not the continuation of sin but the expression for the continuation of sin; in the particular new sin the speed of sin simply becomes more perceptible to the senses.

The state of sin is a worse sin than the particular sins; it is the sin. And understood in this way it holds that the state of sin is

the continuation of sin, is new sin. Ordinarily this is understood differently: it is taken to mean that one sin gives birth to a new sin. But this has a far deeper ground, namely, that the state of sin is new [219] sin. Psychologically, what Shakespeare has Macbeth say (Act 3, Scene 2) is masterly: Sündentsproßne Werke erlangen nur durch Sünde Kraft und Stärke [Deeds sprung from sin gain power and strength only through sin]. That is to say, sin within itself is a consistency, and in this consistency of evil within itself it also has a certain power. But one never arrives at such a view by looking only at the particular sins.[2]

Most people, to be sure, live with far too little consciousness of themselves to have any notion of what consistency is; that is to say, they do not exist qua [as] spirit. Their lives consist, whether in a certain childlike, lovable naivety or in silliness, of a bit of action, a bit of incident, this and that: now they do something good, then something bad again, and then they start all over; now they are in despair for an afternoon, perhaps three weeks, but then they are cheerful fellows again, and then in despair again for a day or so. They play along in life, so to speak, but they never experience staking everything on one thing, never arrive at the conception of an infinite consistency within themselves. That is why among them there is always talk only of the particular: particular good deeds, particular sins.

Every existence that is under the qualification of spirit, even if only on its own responsibility, has essential consistency within itself, and consistency in something higher, at least in an idea. But such a person in turn infinitely fears every inconsistency, because he has an infinite conception of what the consequence might be: that he could be torn out of the totality in which he has his life. The slightest inconsistency is an enormous loss, for he loses the consistency. In that same moment, perhaps, the spell is broken, the mysterious power that bound all the forces in harmony is weakened, the mainspring slackened,

1 The Latin proverb *errare humanum est, perseverare diabolicum* (to err is human, to persist is diabolical).

2 Shakespeare's line is "Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill."

the whole perhaps a chaos in which the forces fight against one another, to the suffering of the self, but in which there is no, no agreement with itself, no momentum, no impetus. The immense machinery, which in consistency was so pliant in its iron strength, so supple in all its power, is out of order; and the more excellent, the grander the machinery was, the more terrible the confusion.—The believer, who thus rests in, has his life in, the consistency of the good, has an infinite fear of even the slightest sin; for he has infinitely much to lose. Immediate people, the childlike or childish, have no totality to lose; they always lose and win only in particulars, or only particulars.

[220] But as with the believer, so too with his counter-image, the demonic person, with respect to the consistency of sin within itself. Just as the drunkard constantly keeps up his intoxication from day to day, for fear of the halt, the listlessness that would set in, and its possible consequences, if one day he were to become entirely sober: so it is with the demonic person. Indeed, just as the good person, if someone approached him with temptation, presenting sin in some alluring form, would beg him, "Do not tempt me," so there are surely examples of exactly the same thing in a demonic person. Faced with someone who is stronger than he in the good, the demonic person—when that other wants to present the good to him in its blessed sublimity—can plead for himself, can plead with tears, that the other not speak to him, not, as he puts it, make him weak. Precisely because the demonic person is consistent within himself and in the consistency of evil, precisely for that reason he too has a totality to lose. A single moment outside his consistency, a single dietary indiscretion, a single sidelong glance, a single moment of seeing and understanding the whole, or even just a part of it, in a different way—and he might never be himself again, he says. That is to say, he has given up the good in despair; it cannot help him anyway. But it could well disturb him, make it impossible for him ever again to get the full momentum of consistency, make him weak. Only in the continuation of sin is he himself, only in it does he live, does he have a sense of him-

self. But what does this mean? It means that the state of sin is what, deep down where he has sunk, holds him together, godlessly strengthening him through consistency. It is not the particular new sin that (yes, it is horribly mad!) helps him; rather, the particular new sin is merely the expression for the state of sin, which is really the sin.

By "the continuation of sin," which we are now to treat, is meant, then, not so much the particular new sins as the state of sin, which in turn becomes the intensification of sin within itself, a remaining in the state of sin with consciousness of it; so that the law for the movement of intensification here, as everywhere, is inward, into more and more intensive consciousness.

A. THE SIN OF DESPAIRING OVER ONE'S SIN

Despair over sin closes the self off from repentance and grace, as with Macbeth.

[221] Sin is despair; the intensification is the new sin of despairing over one's sin. It is also easy to see that this is a matter of intensification; it is not a new sin in the sense in which someone who once stole 100 rix-dollars steals 1,000 rix-dollars another time. No, here there is no talk of particular sins; the state of sin is the sin, and this is intensified in a new consciousness.

Despairing over one's sin is the expression for sin's having become, or wanting to be, consistent within itself. It will have nothing to do with the good, will not be weak enough to listen now and then to another kind of talk. No, it will listen only to itself, have dealings only with itself, shut itself in with itself, indeed, enclose itself within yet one more enclosure, and, by despair over sin, secure itself against every attack or pursuit by the good. It is conscious of having cut away the bridge behind it, and thus of being as inaccessible to the good as the good is to it, so that even if in a weak moment it should itself want the good, that would be impossible. Sin itself is a severing from the good, but despair over sin is a second severing. This naturally wrings the utmost demonic powers out of sin, gives it the godless hardi-

ness or obduracy of having consistently to regard everything called repentance and everything called grace not merely as empty and meaningless but as its enemy, as what it must above all defend itself against—exactly as the good person defends himself against temptation. Understood in this way, it is an apt line of Mephistopheles (in *Faust*) that nothing is more wretched than a devil who despairs; for despairing must here be understood as wanting to be weak enough to hear something about repentance and grace.[3] To designate the intensification in the relation between sin and despair over sin, one could say: the first is the break with the good, the second the break with repentance.

Despair over sin is an attempt to keep oneself up by sinking still deeper. Just as someone ascending in a balloon rises by throwing off weights, so the one in despair sinks by throwing off all the good more and more resolutely (for the weight of the good is uplift); he sinks, though he himself, of course, thinks he is rising—and indeed he is becoming [222] lighter. Sin itself is the struggle of despair; but when the forces are then exhausted, a new intensification is needed, a new demonic closing-up in oneself: that is despair over sin. It is progress, an ascent in the demonic—naturally, a going deeper into sin. It is an attempt to give sin stability and interest as a power, by having it settled for all eternity that one will hear nothing of repentance and nothing of grace. Yet despair over sin is conscious precisely of its own emptiness—that it has not the least thing to live on, not even its own self in the conception of it. Psychologically, Macbeth's line (Act 2, Scene 2) is masterly: von jetzt (after he has murdered the king—and now despairs over his sin) giebt es nichts Ernstes mehr im Leben; Alles ist Tand, gestorben Ruhm und Gnade [from now on there is nothing serious left in life; all is trifles, dead are renown and grace]. What is masterly is the double stroke in the last words (*Ruhm* und *Gnade*).[4] By sin, that

3 Mephistopheles is the devil of the Faust legend, best known from Goethe's *Faust*.
4 In modern editions Act 2, Scene 3: "from this instant there's nothing serious in mortality: all is but toys: renown and grace is dead," quoted in German translation.

is, by despairing over sin, he has lost every relation to grace—and to himself as well. His selfish self culminates in ambition. Now he has become king, and yet, in despairing over his sin and over the reality of repentance, over grace, he has also lost himself; he cannot even keep it up for himself, and he is exactly as far from being able to enjoy his self in ambition as from grasping grace.

In life (insofar as despair over sin occurs in life at all; but in any case something occurs that people call by that name) this despair over sin is very often misjudged—presumably because in the world one generally has to do only with frivolity, thoughtlessness, and sheer silliness, and so one becomes positively solemn and respectfully takes off one's hat at every manifestation of something deeper. Whether in muddled unclarity about itself and its significance, or with a touch of hypocrisy, or by means of the cunning and sophistry that all despair has within itself, despair over sin is not disinclined to give itself the appearance of being something good. It is then supposed to be the expression of a deep nature, which therefore takes its sin so much to heart. Let me give an example. When a person who has been given to some sin or other, but has then for a long time resisted [223] the temptation and conquered—when he has a relapse and again succumbs to the temptation, the dejection that sets in is by no means always sorrow over the sin. It can be many other things; it can, for that matter, also be bitterness against Providence, as if it were Providence that had let him fall into temptation, as if it ought not to have been so hard on him, since he had for a long time now victoriously resisted temptation. But in any case it is thoroughly sentimental simply to take this sorrow at face value, to fail entirely to notice the duplicity in all passion—which in turn is the ominous thing that can make the passionate person sometimes realize afterwards, almost to the point of madness, that he has said the opposite of what he meant to say. Such a person perhaps assures us in stronger and stronger terms how this relapse torments and tortures him, how it drives him to despair: "I will never forgive myself," he says. And all this is supposed to

express how much good dwells in him, what a deep nature he is. This is a mystification. I deliberately let a catchword slip into the account, "I will never forgive myself," a phrase heard precisely in such contexts. And it is by this very phrase that one can at once get one's dialectical bearings. He will never forgive himself —but if God were willing to forgive him, then surely he could have the kindness to forgive himself. No, his despair over sin—and most of all, precisely, the more it rages in passionate expression, by which (the last thing he suspects) he informs against himself when he "will never forgive himself" for having been able to sin like that (for this talk is nearly the opposite of penitent contrition, which asks God to forgive)—is very far from being a qualification of the good; it is a more intensive qualification of sin, whose intensity is a going deeper into sin. The fact is that during the time he victoriously resisted temptation he became, in his own eyes, better than he really is; he became proud of himself. It is now in the interest of this pride that the past be something entirely left behind. But in the relapse the past suddenly becomes entirely present again. His pride cannot bear this reminder, and hence this deep grief, etc. But the direction of the grief is obviously away from God—a hidden self-love and pride—instead of humbly beginning by humbly thanking God that he had, after all, for so [224] long helped him resist temptation, confessing before God and himself that this is already far more than he had deserved, and then humbling himself under the memory of what he has been.

Here, as everywhere, what the old upbuilding writings explain is so profound, so experienced, so full of guidance. They teach that God sometimes allows the believer to stumble and fall into some temptation or other—precisely to humble him and thereby establish him more firmly in the good; the contrast between the relapse and the perhaps considerable progress in the good is so humbling, the identity with oneself so painful. The better a person is, the more deeply, naturally, the particular sin hurts, and the more dangerous it is if he does not make the turn correctly—dangerous even the slightest bit of impatience.

Out of sorrow he may perhaps sink into the darkest melancholy —and a fool of a spiritual adviser may not be far from admiring his deep soul and what power the good has in him—as if this were of the good. And his wife—yes, she feels deeply humbled in comparison with such an earnest and holy man, who can grieve over sin in this way. Perhaps his talk is even more deceptive: perhaps he does not say, "I can never forgive myself" (as if he had perhaps previously forgiven himself sins—a blasphemy); no, he says that God can never forgive him. Alas, and this is only a mystification. His sorrow, his worry, his despair is selfish (like the anxiety about sin that sometimes almost drives a person into sin through anxiety, because it is self-love that wants to be proud of itself, to be without sin)—and comfort is what he needs least; which is also why the enormous quantities of grounds for comfort that spiritual advisers prescribe only make the sickness worse.

B. THE SIN OF DESPAIRING OF THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

Refusing forgiveness is offense, and Christendom's confusion of God and humanity makes it brazen.

225 The intensification in the consciousness of the self is here knowledge of Christ: a self directly before Christ. First came (in the previous part) ignorance of having an eternal self; then knowledge of having a self in which there is, after all, something eternal. Next it was shown (at the transition to Part Two) that this distinction falls under the heading: the self that has a human conception of itself, or whose measure is the human being. The opposite of this was a self directly before God, and this was made the basis for the definition of sin.

* Note the difference between despairing *over* one's sin and despairing *of* the forgiveness of sins.

Now comes a self directly before Christ, a self that in despair still does not want to be itself, or in despair wants to be itself. For despair of the forgiveness of sins must be traced back to one or the other of the formulas for despair: weakness or defiance.

Weakness, which, offended, does not dare to believe; defiance, which, offended, will not believe. Only here weakness and defiance are the reverse of what they otherwise are, since the issue is not simply being oneself but being oneself under the qualification of being a sinner, and so being oneself under the qualification of one's imperfection. Otherwise weakness is: in despair not wanting to be oneself. Here this is defiance. For here it is indeed defiance not to want to be oneself, what one is, a sinner, and for that reason to want to do without the forgiveness of sins. Otherwise defiance is: in despair wanting to be oneself. Here this is weakness: in despair wanting to be oneself, a sinner, in such a way that there is no forgiveness.

A self directly before Christ is a self intensified by God's tremendous concession. It is intensified by the tremendous emphasis that falls upon it because God, for this self's sake too, let himself be born, became a human being, suffered, died. As was said earlier, the more conception of God, the more self; so here it holds: the more conception of Christ, the more self. A self is qualitatively what its measure is. That Christ is the measure is the expression, attested and [226] witnessed by God, of the tremendous reality a self has. For only in Christ is it true that God is the goal and the measure of the human being, or the measure and the goal.—But the more self, the more intense the sin.

The intensification in sin can be shown from another side as well. Sin was despair; the intensification was despair over sin. But now God offers reconciliation in the forgiveness of sins. Yet the sinner despairs, and despair gains an even deeper expression. It now relates itself to God in a way, and yet this is precisely because it is even farther away, sunk even more intensely in sin. When the sinner despairs of the forgiveness of sins, it is almost as if he walked right up to God. It certainly sounds like dialogue: "No, there is no forgiveness of sins, it is an impossibility." It looks like hand-to-hand combat. And yet a human being must move qualitatively farther away from God in order to say this, and in order for it to be heard. To fight in this way *cominus* [at close quarters], he must be *eminus* [at a distance]. So

strangely is the life of spirit constructed acoustically; so strangely are its distances laid out. A human being must be as far away from God as possible for that No to be heard which nevertheless in a way wants to get at God. The greatest possible impertinence toward God is the farthest away. To be impertinent toward God one must go far away. If one is nearer to him, one cannot be impertinent, and if one is impertinent, that means *eo ipso* [by that very fact] that one is far away. O human powerlessness before God! When one is impertinent toward a highly exalted person, one may perhaps be cast far away from him as punishment; but to be able to be impertinent toward God, one must go far away from him.

In life people are most often mistaken about this sin (despairing of the forgiveness of sins), especially since the ethical was abolished, so that a sound ethical word is seldom or never heard. Aesthetically and metaphysically, despairing of the forgiveness of sins is honored as the sign of a deep nature. It is rather as if one were to regard it as the sign of a deep nature in a child that it is naughty. In general, it is unbelievable what confusion has entered the religious since the "You shall" was abolished from the human being's relation to God, when it is the only regulative principle. This "You shall" must be present in every qualification of the religious. In its place, the conception of God, or the idea of God, has been fantastically used as an ingredient in human [227] self-importance, so as to feel important before God. In political life one makes oneself important by belonging to the opposition, and in the end probably wishes there were a government, just to have something to oppose. In the same way, people in the end do not want to abolish God either—simply in order to make themselves even more important by being the opposition. And everything that in the old days was regarded with horror as the expression of ungodly insubordination has now become a mark of genius, the sign of a deep nature. "You shall *believe*," it said in the old days, short and plain, as soberly as possible—now it is a mark of genius and the sign of a deep nature not to be able to. "You shall believe the forgive-

ness of sins," it said, and the only commentary on this text was: "Misfortune shall befall you if you cannot; for what one shall, one can." Now it is a mark of genius and the sign of a deep nature not to be able to believe it. What an excellent result Christendom has achieved! If not a word were heard about Christianity, people would still not be so conceited—and paganism never was either. But because Christian ideas float about in the air in such an un-Christian way, they are used for the most intensified impudence, insofar as they are not misused in another, but equally brazen, way. For is it not epigrammatic enough that swearing was probably not a custom in paganism but is really at home in Christendom? Paganism named the name of God with a certain horror, with awe before the mysterious, most often with great solemnity. In Christendom, by contrast, God's name is probably the word that occurs most often in everyday speech, and unquestionably the word least thought about and most carelessly used. For the poor revealed God (who was careless and unwise enough to become revealed, instead of keeping hidden, as persons of rank always do) has become a personage all too well known to the entire population. One does him an exceedingly great service by going to church now and then, and for this one is praised by the pastor, who thanks one on God's behalf for the honor of the visit, honors one with the title of "devout," and makes a few little digs at those who never do God the honor of going to church.

The sin of despairing of the forgiveness of sins is *offense.* Here the Jews were entirely right to be offended at Christ because he wanted to forgive sins. It takes a singularly high degree of spiritlessness (that is, the kind ordinarily found in Christendom), [228] if one is not a believer (and if one is, one of course believes that Christ was God), not to be offended that a human being wants to forgive sins. And next, it takes an equally singular spiritlessness not to be offended that sin can be forgiven. For human understanding this is the most impossible thing of all—though I do not on that account commend it as genius not to be able to believe it; for it *shall* be believed.

In paganism this sin could naturally not be found. Even if the pagan could have had the true conception of sin (which he could not, since he lacked the conception of God), he could have got no further than despairing over his sin. Indeed, what is more (and here lies every concession that can be made to human understanding and thought), one would have to praise the pagan who actually got so far as to despair not over the world, not over himself in a more general sense, but over his sin[5]. Humanly speaking, that takes both profundity and ethical qualifications. No human being as such can get further than this, and seldom enough does anyone get that far. But in Christian terms everything is changed; for you shall believe the forgiveness of sins.

And where does Christendom stand with regard to the forgiveness of sins? Well, the condition of Christendom is really despair of the forgiveness of sins. But this must be understood as follows: Christendom is so far behind that its condition is not even revealed as being this. People have not even arrived at the consciousness of sin. They know only the kind of sins that paganism also knew, and they live happily and contentedly in pagan [229] security. But because they live in Christendom, they go further than paganism: they go and imagine that this security is —well, in Christendom it cannot be anything else—the consciousness of the forgiveness of sins. And in this the pastors confirm the congregation.

Christendom's fundamental misfortune is really Christianity. The doctrine of the God-man (safeguarded, mind you, when

5 KIERKEGAARD'S NOTE. It will be noticed that despair over sin is here understood dialectically, as tending toward faith. That this dialectical element exists must never be forgotten (even though this book treats despair only as the sickness); it lies in the fact that despair is also the first moment of faith. When, on the other hand, the direction is away from faith, away from the relation to God, then despair over sin is the new sin. In the life of the spirit everything is dialectical. Thus offense, as possibility annulled, is a moment in faith; but offense with its direction away from faith is sin. One can reproach a person for not even being able to be offended by Christianity. When one speaks this way, one is of course speaking of being offended as if it were something good. On the other hand, one must of course say that being offended is sin.

Christianly understood, by the paradox and the possibility of offense) has been preached over and over again until it has been taken in vain. The qualitative difference between God and human being has been abolished pantheistically—first in a lofty speculative way, then in a vulgar way in the streets and lanes. Never has any teaching on earth really brought God and human being so close together as Christianity. Nor could any; only God himself can do it. Every human invention remains, after all, a dream, an uncertain fancy. But never has any teaching so carefully defended itself against the most dreadful of all blasphemies: that after God has taken this step, it should then be taken in vain, as if it all came to the same thing, God and human being. Never has any teaching defended itself against this as Christianity has, which defends itself by means of offense. Woe to the slack speakers, woe to the loose thinkers, and woe, woe to the whole following that has learned from them and praised them!

THE CROWD AND THE SINGLE INDIVIDUAL

Christianity's doctrine of sin separates people into single individuals, each judged alone before God.

If order is to be kept in existence—and God does want that, for he is not a God of confusion—then first and foremost care must be taken that every human being is a single individual human being and becomes conscious of being a single individual human being. Suppose people are first allowed to run together into what Aristotle calls the animal category: the crowd. Suppose this abstraction (instead of being less than nothing, less than the most insignificant single human being) is then regarded as being something. Then it will not be long before this abstraction becomes God. And then, then it squares *philosophice* [philosophically] with the doctrine of the God-man.[6] In the states people have learned that the crowd overawes the king and

6 "Not a God of confusion": 1 Corinthians 14:33. Aristotle (Politics III.11) remarks that some multitudes differ little from beasts.

the newspapers overawe the councillors of state. In the same way they finally discover that *summa summarum* [the sum total] of all human beings overawes God. This is then called the doctrine of the God-man, or that God and human being are *idem per idem* [one and the same]. Of course, several of the philosophers who helped to spread this doctrine of the generation's superiority over the individual turn away in disgust when their doctrine has sunk so low that the rabble is the God-man. But these 230 philosophers forget that it is, after all, their doctrine. They overlook that it was no truer when the distinguished adopted it, when the elite of the distinguished or a select circle of philosophers was the incarnation.[7]

That is to say, the doctrine of the God-man has made Christendom brazen. It almost looks as if God had been too weak. It is as though he had fared like the good-natured man who makes too great concessions and is then repaid with ingratitude. It is God who invented the doctrine of the God-man, and now Christendom has brazenly turned it around and foists the kinship upon God. So the concession God has made means roughly what it means in these times when a king grants a freer constitution—and we all know what that means: "he had no choice."[8] It is as though God had got himself into an awkward position. It is as though the clever person would be right if he said to God: It's your own fault; why did you get so involved with human beings? It would never have occurred to any human being, never have entered any human heart, that there should be this likeness between God and human being. It was you yourself who had it proclaimed; now you are reaping the fruit.

Yet Christianity secured itself from the very beginning. It begins with the doctrine of sin. The category of sin is the category of the single individual. Sin cannot be thought speculatively at all. For the single individual human being falls beneath the concept; one cannot think a single individual human being,

7 Councillor of state (*Conferentsraad*): a high honorary title of rank in Denmark.
8 Written in 1848, when Frederik VII gave up absolute rule; Denmark received a free constitution in June 1849.

only the concept "human being."—That is why speculation at once arrives at the doctrine of the generation's *predominance* over the individual; for it is too much to expect that speculation should acknowledge the concept's *impotence* in relation to actuality.—But just as one cannot think a single individual human being, neither can one think a single individual sinner. One can think sin (then it becomes negation), but not a single individual sinner. Yet precisely for that reason sin can never become a matter of earnestness when it is only to be thought. For earnestness is precisely that you and I are sinners. Earnestness is not sin in general; the emphasis of earnestness falls on the sinner, who is the single individual. With regard to "the single individual human being," speculation, if it is consistent, must really look down with great contempt on being a single individual human being, or on being what cannot be thought. If it wanted to do something along these lines, it would have to say to the single individual: Is this something to waste time on? Above all, try to forget it; to be a single individual human being is to be nothing; think—then you are the whole of humanity [231] , *cogito ergo sum* [I think, therefore I am]. Perhaps, though, this too might be a lie, and the single individual human being, and being a single individual human being, might be the highest. But let that be as it may. Quite consistently, however, speculation would also have to say: being a single individual sinner is not anything to be; it falls beneath the concept; don't waste time on it, etc. And what next? Instead of being a single individual sinner (just as one was urged, instead of being a single individual human being, to think the concept "human being"), is one perhaps to think sin? And what next? By thinking sin, does one perhaps become "sin" oneself—*cogito ergo sum*? An excellent proposal! Still, one need not fear becoming sin in this way—pure sin; for sin precisely cannot be thought. Even speculation would presumably have to concede this, since sin is indeed a falling away from the concept. But, to argue no longer *e concessis* [from what has been conceded], the main difficulty lies elsewhere. Speculation does not take into account that with regard to sin the ethical is

involved, which always points in the opposite direction from speculation and takes exactly the opposite steps. For the ethical does not abstract from actuality but immerses itself in actuality, and it operates essentially with the help of the category that speculation overlooks and despises: the single individual. Sin is a qualification of the single individual. It is frivolity and new sin to pretend that being a single individual sinner is nothing—when one is oneself this single individual sinner. Here Christianity steps in and makes the sign of the cross against speculation. It is just as impossible for speculation to get out of this difficulty as it is for a sailing ship to sail forward straight into a head wind. The earnestness of sin is its actuality in the single individual, whether you or I. Speculatively, one is supposed to disregard the single individual; therefore one can speak speculatively of sin only frivolously. The dialectic of sin runs directly counter to that of speculation.

Here Christianity begins, with the doctrine of sin, and thereby with the single individual[9]. For it is indeed Christianity that has taught [232] about the God-man, about the likeness between God and human being, but it is a great hater of wanton or impudent impertinence. By means of the doctrine of sin and of the single individual sinner, God and Christ have, once and for all, and quite differently from any king, secured themselves against the nation, the people, the crowd, the public, etc., etc., and likewise against every demand for a freer constitution. All those abstractions simply do not exist for God. For God in Christ there live only single individual human beings (sinners)—yet God can easily survey the whole; he can even take care of the sparrows besides. God is altogether a friend of order; and to that end he is himself present at every point, in every moment. He is omnipresent (which the textbook lists as one of the titles by which God is named, and which people think about a little now and then, but presumably never try to think in every moment).

9 KIERKEGAARD'S NOTE. The doctrine of the sin of the race has often been misused, because people have not noticed that sin, however common it is to all, does not gather human beings together into a common concept, into a society or a company ("any more than the crowd of the dead out in the churchyard forms a society"). Instead it splits human beings apart into single individuals and holds each single individual fast as a sinner—a splitting apart that in another sense both accords with and is teleologically directed toward the perfection of existence. People have not noticed this, and so they have let the fallen race be made good again once and for all through Christ. And so once again they have saddled God with an abstraction which, as an abstraction, would claim closer kinship with him. But this is a pretext that only makes people brazen. For when "the single individual" is to feel himself in kinship with God (and this is the teaching of Christianity), he also receives its whole pressure in fear and trembling; if it were not an old discovery, he would have to discover the possibility of offense. But if the single individual is to arrive at this glory by way of an abstraction, then the matter becomes far too easy and is at bottom taken in vain. The single individual then does not receive the tremendous pressure of God, which presses down in humiliation just as deeply as it lifts up. The single individual imagines that he has everything as a matter of course by participating in that abstraction. Being a human being is not like being an animal, where the specimen is always less than the species. The human being is distinguished from other animal species not only by the advantages usually mentioned but qualitatively, by the fact that the individual, the single individual, is more than the species. And this qualification is in turn dialectical: it means that the single individual is a sinner, but then again that to be the single individual is perfection.

His concept is not like a human being's, beneath which the single individual falls as what cannot be absorbed into the concept. His concept encompasses everything, and in another sense [233] he has no concept. God does not make do with an abbreviation; he comprehends (*comprehendit*) actuality itself, every single thing; for him the single individual does not fall beneath the concept.[10]

The doctrine of sin—that you and I are sinners—a doctrine that unconditionally splits "the crowd" apart, now fixes the qualitative difference between God and human being more deeply than it has ever been fixed before. Again, only God can do this; for sin is indeed: *before God*, etc. In nothing is a human being so different from God as in this: that he—and this means every human being—is a sinner, and is so "before God." By this the opposites are held together in a double sense. They are held together (*continentur* [they are contained]); they are not allowed to go apart from each other. But by being held together in this way, the difference shows itself all the more strongly, as when one speaks of holding two colors together: *opposita juxta se posita magis illucescunt* [opposites placed side by side stand out more clearly]. Of everything that is otherwise predicated of a human being, sin is the one thing that can in no way be said of God, neither *via negationis* [by way of negation] nor *via eminentiae* [by way of eminence]. To say of God that he is not a sinner (in the same sense as saying that he is not finite, and thus, *via negationis*, that he is infinite) is blasphemy.[11]

As a sinner, the human being is separated from God by the most yawning chasm of quality. And of course God in turn is separated from the human being by the same yawning chasm of quality when he forgives sins. For even if, by a reverse kind of accommodation, the divine could otherwise be transferred to

10 The textbook: Balle's catechism textbook, used for confirmation instruction in Denmark.

11 The two traditional ways of speaking of God in scholastic theology: denying him creaturely limits, or ascribing creaturely perfections to him in the highest degree.

the human, in one thing the human being will never in all eternity come to resemble God: in forgiving sins.

Here, then, lies the utmost concentration of offense—which the very teaching that taught the likeness between God and human being has found necessary.

But offense is the most decisive possible qualification of subjectivity, of the single individual human being. To think offense without thinking of someone offended is perhaps not quite as impossible as flute-playing when there is no flute-player. But even thought must surely concede that offense, even more than falling in love, is an unreal concept that becomes real only each time there is someone, a single individual, who is offended.[12]

Offense, then, relates to the single individual. And with this Christianity begins: by making every human being a single individual, a single individual [234] sinner. And now it concentrates everything that heaven and earth can muster in the way of the possibility of offense (only God has that at his disposal): and this is Christianity. It then says to each single individual: You shall believe—that is, you shall either be offended or you shall believe. Not one word more; there is nothing more to add. "Now I have spoken," says God in heaven, "we shall talk again in eternity. In the meantime you can do what you like, but the judgment is coming."

A judgment! Yes, we human beings have learned—experience teaches it—that when there is mutiny on a ship or in an army, the guilty are so many that punishment has to be dropped. And when it is the public, the highly esteemed cultured public, or the people, then it is not only no crime; then, according to the newspaper, which can be relied on like the gospel and revelation, it is the will of God. How does this come about? It comes from the fact that the concept of judgment corresponds to the single individual; one does not judge en masse. One can kill people en masse, turn the hoses on them en masse, flatter them en masse—in short, treat people like cattle in many ways—but

12 An echo of Socrates in Plato's *Apology* (27b): can anyone believe in flute-playing without believing in flute-players?

one cannot judge people like cattle, for one cannot judge cattle. However many are judged, if the judging is to have earnestness and truth, each single individual is judged[13]. Now when so many are guilty, this cannot humanly be done. So the whole thing is given up; it is recognized that there can be no question of any judgment. They are too many to be judged; one cannot get at them, or cannot manage to get at them, as single individuals; therefore one must give up *judging*.

Our enlightened age finds all anthropomorphic and anthropopathic conceptions of God unfitting. Yet it does not find it unfitting to think of God as judge on the model of an ordinary district judge or judge advocate general who cannot get through so extensive a case. And so it concludes: it will be exactly the same in eternity. So let us just stick together and make sure the pastors preach that way.[14] And should there be a single individual who dared to speak otherwise—a single individual foolish enough to make his own life anxious and accountable in fear and trembling, and then also to want to torment [235] others—then let us secure ourselves by regarding him as mad or, if need be, by killing him. As long as there are many of us doing it, it is no wrong. It is nonsense and antiquated to think that the many can do wrong; what the many do is the will of God. Before this wisdom all human beings have bowed until now, kings and emperors and excellencies—this we know from experience, for we are not inexperienced youths, we do not toss out idle words, we speak as men of experience. With the help of this wisdom all our protégés have been helped up until now. So, by God, God too will have to learn to bow. It is only a matter of our becoming many, really many, who stick together; if we do that, we are secured against the judgment of eternity.—Yes, they certainly would be secured, if it were only in eternity that they were to become single individuals. But before God they were and are

13 KIERKEGAARD'S NOTE. See, that is why God is "the Judge": because for him there is no crowd, only single individuals.

14 District judge (*Birkedommer*): judge of a local jurisdiction; judge advocate general (*General-Auditeur*): the chief military judge.

always single individuals. Someone sitting in a glass case is not as exposed as every human being is in his transparency before God. This is the relation of conscience. By means of conscience things are so arranged that the report immediately follows every guilt, and the guilty one is the one who must write it himself. But it is written in invisible ink, and so becomes really clear only when it is held up to the light in eternity, while eternity audits the consciences. At bottom, everyone arrives in eternity bringing with him and handing over the most exact record of every least trifle he has committed or omitted. A child could therefore manage the holding of judgment in eternity. There is really nothing for a third party to do; everything, down to the most insignificant word ever spoken, is in order. The guilty person on his journey through life to eternity fares like that murderer who fled by rail, at the train's speed, from the scene of the deed—and from his crime. Alas, right beneath the carriage in which he sat ran the electromagnetic telegraph with his description and orders to arrest him at the first station. When he arrived at the station and stepped out of the carriage, he was under arrest—in a way he had brought the denunciation with him himself.

So despair of the forgiveness of sins is offense. And offense is the intensification of sin. People generally do not think of this at all. They hardly count offense as sin—which they do not talk about anyway; they talk about sins, among which offense finds no place. Still less do they understand offense as the [236] intensification of sin. This comes from not forming the opposition, in the Christian way, between sin and faith, but between sin and virtue.

C. THE SIN OF DECLARING CHRISTIANITY UNTRUE

The self goes on the offensive against Christianity; this is the sin against the Holy Spirit.

This is sin against the Holy Spirit. Here the self is intensified to the utmost in despair. It not only casts off the whole of Chris-

tianity but makes it a lie and untruth—what a tremendously despairing conception of itself this self must have![15]

The intensification of sin shows itself clearly when sin is understood as a war between human being and God in which the tactics change. The intensification is an ascent from the defensive to the offensive. Sin is despair; here the fighting is evasive. Then came despair over one's sin; here the fighting is once more evasive, or it entrenches itself within its position of retreat, but always *pedem referens* [falling back step by step]. Now the tactics change. Although sin sinks deeper and deeper into itself and so moves farther away, in another sense it comes closer and becomes more and more decisively itself. Despair of the forgiveness of sins is a definite position over against an offer of God's mercy; sin is not entirely in flight, not merely defensive. But the sin of abandoning Christianity as untruth and a lie is offensive war. All that went before still concedes to its adversary, in a way, that it is the stronger. But now sin is on the attack.

Sin against the Holy Spirit is the positive form of being offended.

The teaching of Christianity is the doctrine of the God-man, of the kinship between God and human being—but, mind you, in such a way that the possibility of offense is, if I may put it so, the guarantee by which God secures himself so that the human being cannot come too close to him. The possibility of offense is the dialectical element in everything Christian. If it is taken away, then the Christian is not merely paganism but something so fantastic that paganism would have to declare it nonsense. To be as near to God as Christianity teaches that a human being can come, and dares to come, and shall come to him in Christ—that has never occurred to any human being. If [237] this is now to be understood directly, just like that, without the slightest reservation, completely unabashed, in a devil-may-care way, then—if one wants to call paganism's poetry about the gods human

15 *Modo ponendo*: by way of affirmation, i.e., actively asserting something rather than merely denying. Sin against the Holy Spirit: Matthew 12:31–32.

madness—Christianity is the invention of a mad God. Such a teaching could only occur to a God who has lost his mind: so must a human being judge who has still kept his understanding. If the human being were simply to be his chum like that, the incarnate God would become a counterpart to Prince Henry in Shakespeare.[16]

God and human being are two qualities between which there is an infinite qualitative difference. Every teaching that overlooks this difference is, humanly speaking, mad; divinely understood, it is blasphemy. In paganism the human being made God a human being (the man-god); in Christianity God makes himself a human being (the God-man). But in the infinite love of his compassionate grace he nevertheless makes one condition; he cannot do otherwise. Precisely this is the sorrow in Christ, that "he cannot do otherwise." He can humble himself, take the form of a servant, suffer, die for human beings, invite all to come to him, sacrifice every day of his life and every hour of the day, and sacrifice his life—but the possibility of offense he cannot take away.[17] O unique work of love! O unfathomable sorrow of love! Even God cannot—just as in another sense he does not want to, cannot want to—but even if he wanted to, he cannot make it impossible that this work of love might become for a human being the very opposite, the utmost misery! For the greatest possible human misery, greater even than sin, is to be offended at Christ and to remain in the offense. And this Christ cannot, this "love" cannot, make impossible. See, that is why he says: "Blessed is the one who is not offended at me." More he cannot do.[18] So he can—it is possible—he can by his love come to make a human being more miserable than a human being could ever otherwise become. O unfathomable contradiction in love! And yet he cannot—out of love—bring himself to leave the work of love unfinished; alas, even though it should make a human

16 Prince Hal in Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, who carouses with Falstaff and his cronies and, once crowned, casts them off.
17 The invitation to all: Matthew 11:28.
18 Matthew 11:6.

being more miserable than he would otherwise ever have become!

Let us speak of it in quite human terms. O wretched the human being who has never felt the urge, out of love, to sacrifice everything out of love, and who therefore has not been able to! But suppose he then discovered that precisely this [238] sacrifice of his in love might possibly become the other person's, the beloved's, greatest misfortune: what then? Then either love lost its resilience in him; from being a life of power it collapsed into the inclosed brooding of a melancholy feeling. He withdrew from love; he did not dare to do this work of love, sinking himself, not under the deed, but under the weight of that possibility. For just as a weight becomes infinitely heavier when it is placed at the end of a pole and the one lifting it has to hold the opposite end, so every deed becomes infinitely heavier when it becomes dialectical, and heaviest when it becomes sympathetically dialectical: what love urges one to do for the beloved, concern for the beloved in another sense seems to advise against.—Or love won, and he dared it out of love. O, but in the joy of love (as love is always joyful, especially when it sacrifices everything) there was still a deep sorrow—for it was, after all, possible! See, that is why he completed this work of love, why he made the sacrifice (in which, for his own part, he rejoiced) not without tears. Over this—what shall I call it—this history painting of inwardness hovers that dark possibility. And yet, had it not hovered over it, his deed would not have been a deed of true love.—O my friend, what have you really tried in life! Strain your brain, tear aside every covering and lay bare the *viscera* [inmost depths] of feeling in your breast, tear down every fortification that separates you from the one you are reading about, and then read Shakespeare —and you will shudder at collisions. But the truly religious collisions even Shakespeare seems to have shrunk back from. Perhaps these can only be expressed in the language of the gods. And this language no human being can speak; for, as a Greek

said long ago so beautifully: from human beings one learns to speak, from the gods to be silent.[19]

That there is this infinite qualitative difference between God and human being is the possibility of offense, which cannot be taken away. Out of love God becomes a human being. He says: See here what it is to be a human being—but, he adds, oh, take care, for I am also God—blessed is the one who is not offended at me. As a human being he takes on the form of a lowly servant; he expresses what it is to be a lowly human being, so that no human being should think himself excluded, or think that it is human prestige and prestige among human beings that brings one closer to [239] God. No, he is the lowly human being. Look here, he says, and make sure of what it is to be a human being—oh, but take care, for I am also God—blessed is the one who is not offended at me. Or the other way round: The Father and I are one; yet I am this single, lowly human being, poor, forsaken, delivered into the hands of men—blessed is the one who is not offended at me. I, this lowly human being, am the one who makes the deaf hear, the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers clean, the dead rise—blessed is the one who is not offended at me.[20]

Answerable to the highest authority, I therefore venture to say that these words, "blessed is the one who is not offended at me," belong to the proclamation of Christ—if not in the same way as the words of institution at the Lord's Supper, then at least as the words: Let each one examine himself. They are Christ's own words, and they must, especially in Christendom, be impressed again and again, repeated, said to each person in par-

19 Plutarch, "On Talkativeness" 8.
20 John 10:30; Matthew 11:5.

ticular. Wherever[21] these words are not heard as well, or in any case wherever the presentation of the Christian is not at every point permeated by this thought, there Christianity is blasphemy.[22] For without a bodyguard and without servants who might prepare the way for him and make people aware of who it was that came, Christ walked here on earth in the lowly form of a servant. But the possibility of offense (oh, how in his love this was his sorrow!) guarded and guards him, and fixes a yawning chasm between him and the one who was nearest to him and stood nearest to him.

For the one who is not offended *worships* in faith. But to worship, which is the expression of faith, is to express that the infinitely yawning [240] chasm of quality between them is fixed. For in faith, again, the possibility of offense is the dialectical element[23].

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21 KIERKEGAARD'S NOTE. And this is now the case almost everywhere in Christendom. It seems *either* to ignore completely that Christ himself is the one who so repeatedly, so fervently warned against offense—even toward the end of his life, even his faithful apostles, who had followed him from the beginning and left everything for his sake; *or* perhaps even silently to regard it as a kind of overwrought anxiousness on Christ's part, since the experience of thousands upon thousands proves that one can have faith in Christ without having noticed the least thing of the possibility of offense. But this might well be a mistake, one that will surely become evident when the possibility of offense comes to judge Christendom.

22 "Let each one examine himself": 1 Corinthians 11:28, said of preparing for the Lord's Supper.

23 KIERKEGAARD'S NOTE. Here is a little task for observers. If one assumes that all the many pastors, here and abroad, who preach and write sermons are believing Christians, how is it to be explained that one never hears or reads the prayer that would be so natural, especially in our times: God in heaven, I thank you that you have not required of a human being that he should comprehend Christianity; for if that were required, I would be the most miserable of all. The more I seek to comprehend it, the more incomprehensible it seems to me, the more I discover only the possibility of offense. Therefore I thank you that you require only faith, and I pray you to go on increasing it in me. Orthodoxly, this prayer would be entirely correct, and, assuming it were true in the one who prays it, it would at the same time be correct irony on the whole of speculation. But will faith be found on earth!

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Luke 18:8.

But the kind of offense we are speaking of here is *modo ponendo* [positive, by way of assertion]: it says of Christianity that it is untruth and a lie, and thereby says the same of Christ.

To shed light on this kind of offense, it will be best to go through the various forms of offense. Offense relates in principle to the paradox (Christ), and so it recurs with every qualification of the Christian, because every such qualification relates to Christ, has Christ *in mente* [in mind].

THREE FORMS OF OFFENSE

Offense may leave Christ undecided, stare helplessly at the paradox, or declare Christianity a lie.

The lowest form of offense, humanly speaking the most innocent, is to leave the whole question of Christ undecided, and to judge like this: I do not presume to judge anything about it; I do not believe, but I pass no judgment. That this is a form of offense escapes most people. The fact is that this Christian element has been completely forgotten: *"You shall."* That is why people do not see that this is offense: treating Christ as a matter of indifference. That Christianity has been proclaimed to you means that you shall have an opinion about Christ. He is—or, that he exists and that he has existed is—the decision of all existence. If Christ has been proclaimed to you, then it is offense to say: I will have no opinion about it.

Yet this must be understood with a certain restriction in these times, when Christianity is proclaimed as poorly as it is. There surely [241] live many thousands who have heard Christianity proclaimed and have never heard anything about this "shall." But the one who has heard it and then says, I will have no opinion about it—he is offended. For he denies Christ's divinity, denies that it has the right to require of a human being that he shall have an opinion. It does no good for such a person to say, "But I'm not saying anything, neither yes nor no, about Christ." For then one simply asks him: Have you no opinion either as to whether you shall have an opinion about him or not? If he

answers, "Yes, I do," he traps himself; and if he answers, "No," Christianity judges him nonetheless: he shall have an opinion about it, and so again about Christ; no human being shall presume to leave the life of Christ aside as a curiosity. When God lets himself be born and becomes a human being, this is not an idle whim, something he hits upon just to have something to do, perhaps to put an end to the boredom that, as has been brazenly said, must go with being God. It is not in order to have adventures. No, when God does this, this fact is the earnestness of existence. And this in turn is the earnestness in this earnestness: that everyone *shall* have an opinion about it. When a king visits a provincial town, he regards it as an insult if an official, without a lawful excuse, fails to pay his respects. But what would he think if someone were to ignore the whole fact that the king was in town, and were to play the private citizen who in this respect "couldn't care less about His Majesty and the Royal Law"? And so too when it pleases God to become a human being —that it should then please a human being (and what the official is to the king, every human being is to God) to say of it: Well, that is something about which I do not wish to have an opinion.[24] In this way one speaks loftily about what one at bottom overlooks; and so one loftily overlooks God.

The next form of offense is the negative but suffering form. It does feel that it is not able to ignore Christ, that it cannot leave the question of Christ aside and otherwise keep busy with life. But neither can it believe; so it goes on staring at one and the same point, at the paradox. To that extent it does honor Christianity: it expresses that this question, "What do you think of Christ?", really is the most decisive. Such an offended person lives on like a shadow; his life is consumed, because in his innermost being he is constantly [242] occupied with this decision. And in this way he expresses (as the suffering of unhappy love does in relation to love) what reality Christianity has.[25]

24 The Royal Law (*Kongeloven*) of 1665 was the constitution of Danish absolute monarchy.

25 "What do you think of Christ?": Matthew 22:42.

The last form of offense is the one we are speaking of here: the positive. It declares Christianity untruth and a lie. It denies Christ (that he has existed and that he is the one he said he was) either docetically or rationalistically. Either Christ does not become a single individual human being but only appears to be one, or he becomes only a single individual human being. So he either becomes, docetically, poetry, mythology, which makes no claim to actuality, or, rationalistically, an actuality that makes no claim to be divine. In this denial of Christ as the paradox there lies, of course, the denial of everything Christian: sin, the forgiveness of sins, etc.[26]

This form of offense is sin against the Holy Spirit. As the Jews said of Christ that he drives out devils with the help of the devil, so this offense makes Christ an invention of the devil.

This offense is the highest intensification of sin—which is usually overlooked, because the opposition is not formed, in the Christian way, between sin and faith.

In this whole book, by contrast, this opposition has been made to count. Right at the beginning, in Part One, A, A, the book set out the formula for the state in which there is no despair at all: in relating itself to itself and in willing to be itself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it. And this formula in turn, as has often been recalled, is the definition of faith.

26 Docetism: the early heresy that Christ only seemed to be a human being.