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Kierkegaard and Hegel: Motion, Modality, and the Absolute

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Kierkegaard and Hegel: Motion, Modality, and the Absolute

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B.A., Colby College, 2007

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An abstract of
a dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
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Abstract

Kierkegaard and Hegel: Motion, Modality, and the Absolute
By Claudine Davidshofer

It has long been the standard view among commentators that Kierkegaard is the harsh critic of Hegel, and that he finds little of value in Hegel's work. Yet, surprisingly, few scholars have attempted a thorough study of the relation between Hegel's and Kierkegaard's philosophies. In this dissertation, I perform this in-depth, systematic study, by looking at both systems in their most foundational elements: motion and modality. The dissertation is divided into two main parts: metaphysics and existence.

In Part One, I examine Hegel's and Kierkegaard's views of the Absolute by looking at how they explain the most foundational metaphysical elements of the Absolute: motion and modality. I show why Kierkegaard thinks that Hegel falls just short of explaining both transition and actuality, and why, therefore, he responds with such an un-Hegelian view of the Absolute, which is divided between immanence and divine transcendence and which depends on transcendence for motion, for modality, for everything. In Part Two, I examine whether Kierkegaard thinks that Hegelian philosophy applies to concrete existence, whether the individual can be a Hegelian in daily life. I look at whether the individual can use Hegel's views of motion and modality to navigate transition and actuality in daily life. Once again, we see that Kierkegaard thinks that Hegel falls just short of explaining motion and modality, and he thinks that the individual needs faith and transcendence to make sense of everyday existence. In both parts, I show how "leap" and "repetition" are Kierkegaard's responses to Hegel's principles of motion and modality, in particular, mediation.

Overall, Kierkegaard thinks that Hegel is only almost right; Hegelian mediation only almost works. These "almosts" and "not quites" make Hegel's philosophy fairly useless, in both metaphysics and in existence. But even though Kierkegaard ends up with a very un-Hegelian view of the metaphysical-existential whole, he is still deeply influenced by Hegel. He cannot get rid of Hegel and Hegelian mediation so easily. I show throughout that some of Kierkegaard's most "Kierkegaardian" principles (leap and repetition) are adaptations of and responses to some of Hegel's most "Hegelian" principles (mediation).

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Abbreviations

Søren Kierkegaard's Texts

CA *The Concept of Anxiety*. Edited and Translated by Reidar Thomte in collaboration with Albert B. Anderson. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.

CD *Christian Discourses*. Edited and Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.

CUP *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Edited and Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.

EO1 *Either/Or, Volume I*. Edited and Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.

EO2 *Either/Or, Volume II*. Edited and Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.

FTR *Fear and Trembling and Repetition*. Edited and Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.

JC *Johannes Climacus, or De omnibus dubitandum est*. Edited and Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.

JP *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, vols. 1-7. Edited and Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.

PF *Philosophical Fragments*. Edited and Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.

SLW *Stages on Life's Way*. Edited and Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.

SUD *The Sickness Unto Death*. Edited and Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.

G.W.F. Hegel's Texts

EL *The Encyclopedia Logic. Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline and Critical Writings*. Edited by Ernst Behler. Translated by A.V. Miller and Steven A. Taubeneck. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1990.

SL *Hegel's Science of Logic*. Translated by A.V. Miller. New York: Humanity Books, 1991.

PS *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by A.V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

PR *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Edited by Allen W. Wood. Translated by H.B. Nisbet. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

LPR *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vols. 1-3. Translated by Rev. E.B. Speirs and J. Burdon Sanderson. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1962.

Introduction

When we read some Kierkegaard—even the tiniest little bit of Kierkegaard—we cannot help but notice that he seems frustrated with Hegel. He is irritated—angry even. Hardly a chapter goes by before we encounter some unfriendly comment about Hegel, the Hegelians, the Hegelian philosophy, the absolute method, the system, or mediation. Hardly a section of Hegel's philosophy is spared; we read mocking comments about his views on metaphysics, religion, ethics, and everyday existence. [1] We cannot help but wonder, what did Hegel ever do to Kierkegaard? Why is Kierkegaard so upset with Hegel?

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The story of the relationship between Hegel and Kierkegaard is familiar, very familiar. It has long been the standard view among commentators that Kierkegaard is the harsh critic of Hegel and that he finds little of value in Hegel's work. If Hegel is the philosopher of the absolute Idea, world-historical system-building, and speculative reason, then Kierkegaard is the philosopher of paradox, the existing individual, and religious faith. As the interpretation often goes, modern philosophy ends with Hegel on one side and Kierkegaard stubbornly on the other. They sink down into their respective trenches, unwilling to cross over enemy lines.

Given such a strong assessment of this relation (or, non-relation) between Kierkegaard and Hegel, it is surprising to find that few scholars have systematically and

[1] We are referring here primarily to Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works, where he explicitly mentions Hegel. But even in the more theological works, signed under Kierkegaard's own name, his views on Hegelian philosophy continue to carry over into and influence his religious views.

thoroughly compared Hegel's and Kierkegaard's philosophical projects. Niels Thulstrup's book, *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel*, is one of the first studies, and it is likely the study that first crystallized the standard view. [2] Thulstrup describes the thesis of his work as follows, "Hegel and Kierkegaard have in the main nothing in common as thinkers, neither as regards object, purpose, or method, nor as regards what each considered to be indisputable principles." [3] Thulstrup seems to approach his study, however, with the already preconceived conclusion that the two philosophers do not, in fact, share anything in common, and he goes to great pains to make Kierkegaard's texts fit this conclusion. He proceeds chronologically through Kierkegaard's texts, picking out with tweezers all of the passages where Kierkegaard mentions Hegel, and then he shows that each of these passages (by itself, in isolation from the others) proves that Kierkegaard is criticizing Hegel. He makes little attempt to connect the passages and themes together into a nuanced, complete narrative. His study is one-sided and philosophically cursory, and we are left feeling a bit suspicious.

And yet, scholars have passed down Thulstrup's interpretation—unquestioned—for decades. This is one of the great curiosities of the history of philosophy—that such a decisive interpretation could be continually passed along, without anyone either supporting it or challenging it with further study.[4]

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[2] There are Danish scholars before Thulstrup who hold the same view that Kierkegaard is nothing but the harsh critic of Hegel, but Thulstrup is the first to maintain this view through a systematic study, thus solidifying the view and beginning the campaign of Kierkegaard versus Hegel. For a summary of these Danish studies, see Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003), 3-14.

[3] Niels Thulstrup, *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel*, trans. George L. Stengren (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 12.

[4] After Thulstrup's book, the one notable exception to the standard interpretation is Mark C. Taylor's book, *Journeys to Selfhood: Hegel and Kierkegaard.* Taylor says he wants to suspend judgment about the two philosophers and to bring them closer together so that the relation between them can emerge more clearly. Mark C. Taylor, *Journeys to Selfhood: Hegel and Kierkegaard* (Los Angeles: University of California Press,

In his recent book, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered,* Jon Stewart finally takes up the relation anew. He reconstructs the historical and philosophical atmosphere of Kierkegaard's own day, and he argues that—and he has an impressively prodigious amount of research to support his argument—most of Kierkegaard's so-called attacks on "Hegel" and "the Hegelian philosophy" are not directed at Hegel himself. Rather, they are covertly directed at Kierkegaard's own Danish contemporaries—e.g. Heiberg, Martensen, Adler—who misunderstand and misappropriate Hegel's thought. In a philosophical world after Hegel, everyone was busily applying Hegelianism to this, that, and the other thing. Stewart's view makes sense. We often wonder if Kierkegaard's polemics are meant ironically and aimed at someone other than Hegel himself. His comments on "The System" and "The Absolute Method," for example, do not resemble Hegel's views at all. They seem to be deliberate caricatures of Hegel's ideas, catch-phrases and empty buzz words that were likely repeated by Kierkegaard's contemporaries.

Stewart's book is an immense achievement, and it convincingly calls into question the long-standing standard interpretation. However, while Stewart brings Kierkegaard into conversation with the Danish Hegelians of his day, he does not bring Kierkegaard into conversation with Hegel himself, except in a few places.[5] Hegel seems to drop out of the

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1980), 21. While Taylor's intention is admirable, the standard interpretation does not budge much. Hegel still comes out as the philosopher of reason and Kierkegaard as the philosopher of faith. Even if this view is indeed correct, Taylor does not show why Kierkegaard has such a different view from Hegel. We do not know if Kierkegaard is responding to or influenced by Hegel at all. This is due, in large part, to the method Taylor uses. He does not put the two in dialogue. Instead, for each theme he discusses, he treats one philosopher and then the other philosopher, separately, in separate chunks of text, without referring much between them. We are left feeling like this is two separate books—one on selfhood in Hegel and one on selfhood in Kierkegaard—and not one book—a comparative study of selfhood in Hegel and Kierkegaard. We know that they have the same goal, a journey to authentic selfhood, but that they have different views of both the journey and the nature of this authentic selfhood. We do not know, however, whether Kierkegaard's alternative views are influenced by or a response to Hegel.

[5] Stewart does suggest that Kierkegaard is positively influenced by Hegel while he is a student, as is seen in some of his early works, such as *The Concept of Irony*. Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, 90-181. But in his pseudonymous works, where we find the bulk of the so-called attacks on

discussion, and we are left wondering what happened to Hegel, the real Hegel. Stewart himself readily admits this point, and he expresses his hope that his book will convince scholars that the relation between Kierkegaard and Hegel is, at the very least, much more complex than the standard interpretation allows. And Stewart hopes that his book will prompt other scholars to reevaluate the relation between Kierkegaard and Hegel.[6] In what follows, we will perform this in-depth, systematic study comparing the philosophical systems of Hegel and Kierkegaard, by looking at each system in its most basic elements: motion and modality.

During his years as a student at the University of Copenhagen, Kierkegaard studies and continually engages with Hegel's philosophy. At this time, Hegelianism was everywhere.[7] He feels a profound respect for Hegel and is intrigued by his grand philosophical claims. Hegel promises us that, with the help of mediation and self-determining thought, he can explain everything through speculative reason, even the most difficult elements of metaphysics and existence, like motion and modality, being and becoming. Hegel promises to eliminate the alleged opacities and insoluble paradoxes of

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Hegelianism, Kierkegaard is not targeting Hegel himself but the Danish Hegelians of his day, and so Stewart focuses mainly on the views of the Danish Hegelians and not those of Hegel himself. One notable exception is when Stewart suggests that Kierkegaard's concept of repetition may have its foundations in Hegel's discussion of "sense certainty" in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Ibid., 268-281.

[6] "I hope to have made more problematic and accordingly more interesting the Hegel—Kierkegaard relation by removing from the scholarship the overly simplistic view of Thulstrup and others…Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel was profoundly differentiated and it obliges one to abandon the old clichés that have dominated the understanding of this relation for so long now…The hope is that this study will occasion scholars to reconsider the long-established views on Kierkegaard's relation to Hegel." Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, 652.

[7] It is not known how much of Hegel's primary texts Kierkegaard studied in a thorough, systematic way. We do know that he owned and commented on many of Hegel's primary texts, such as *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, *Lectures on Aesthetics*, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, *Lectures on History*, *The Philosophy of Right*, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, *The Science of Logic*, and *The Encyclopedia Logic*. He undoubtedly also received some of his knowledge about Hegel from secondary sources, such as the Danish Hegelians, Trendelenburg, and Schelling. But given how many texts of Hegel's he owned and how much Hegelianism was debated at the University of Copenhagen during his day, we can assume that Kierkegaard has a good understanding of Hegel, especially because, as we will see, he mentions very specific examples from Hegel's texts in both his published works and in his unpublished journals.

thought and reality. He advertises an end to all in-itselfs and to all reliance on transcendence radically separated from immanence. Hegel brings everything back inside of thought and back inside of immanence. Given such promises, it is natural that Kierkegaard is going to wonder whether—and maybe even hope that—Hegel might be correct.

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The guiding question of this study is a simple one: According to Kierkegaard, is Hegel right? Or, a bit more specifically, according to Kierkegaard, does Hegelian mediation work? We will answer this question in two main parts: 1. Does Hegel's philosophy work in metaphysics? 2. Does Hegel's philosophy apply to concrete everyday existence? The answer that we will continually find, in both metaphysics and in existence, is: Hegel is right, but only *almost* right, and therefore, Hegel and the Hegelian philosophy are fairly useless. Mediation works, but it only *almost* works, and therefore, mediation is fairly useless.

In Part One—metaphysics—we will examine Hegel's and Kierkegaard's views of the Absolute by looking at how they explain the most foundational metaphysical principles of the Absolute: motion and modality. In Chapter One, we will analyze how Hegel explains transition—why there is movement and what grounds movement—through the principle of mediation. We will show why Kierkegaard thinks that mediation does not (quite) explain transition, and why, therefore, we cannot explain transition through speculative thought and immanence alone, as Hegel tries to do. In Chapter Two, we will examine how Hegel explains modality—how the actual is actual and why there is something rather than

nothing—by analyzing how Hegel thinks possibility, actuality, and necessity combine to form actuality, actuality both as the overall Absolute and as the Absolute's particular moments. We will show why Kierkegaard thinks that Hegel cannot (quite) explain actuality, and why, therefore, we cannot explain actuality through thought and immanence alone. In both chapters, we will show how Kierkegaard's principles of leap and repetition are his responses to Hegel's views on motion and modality and how leap and repetition are foundational to his alternative view of the Absolute.

At the end of Part One, we will see that Kierkegaard thinks that Hegel falls short—just oh so short—of explaining transition and actuality, of creating an Absolute that is fully immanent and fully transparent to thought. As a result, Kierkegaard is forced to respond to Hegel with a very un-Hegelian view of the Absolute. He reverts back to an Absolute that is divided between (yet also the paradoxical union of) earthly immanence and divine transcendence, and which depends on divine transcendence for movement, for actuality, for everything. Kierkegaard thinks that we still need faith and transcendence to make sense of metaphysics.

In Part Two—existence—we will examine whether Kierkegaard thinks that Hegelian philosophy can be applied to daily life, whether it helps the individual to live and move in concrete everyday existence. Basically, what is it like to be a Hegelian in daily life? Hegel's principles were meant to apply not solely in metaphysics, but also to existence. Mediation and the Concept apply to thought and being alike, to metaphysics and existence alike. In Chapter Three, we will examine whether Kierkegaard thinks that mediation can be transferred from metaphysics to existence, whether mediation helps the individual to navigate transition in daily life, to move forward into the future. In Chapter

Four, we will look at whether Kierkegaard thinks that the individual can use Hegel's view of modality in daily life. We look at whether Hegelian modality helps the individual to navigate actuality in daily life, helps him to understand how possibility, actuality, and necessity function in everyday existence.

In Part Two, we will see that the problems Kierkegaard identifies with Hegelian mediation and modality (Part One) repeat themselves, and they repeat themselves all the more forcefully, when transferred from metaphysics to existence. The "almosts" and the "not quites" of Hegelian philosophy become even more glaring when the individual tries to be a Hegelian in daily life. Since Hegelian mediation and modality only almost work in daily life—they fall just oh so short—they are fairly useless to daily life. As we will see, Kierkegaard's pseudonymous characters meet with some unfortunate and sometimes even comical results. Kierkegaard again offers the principles of leap and repetition as alternatives to Hegel's principles. Once again, the individual cannot get by on speculative thought alone. He needs transcendence and faith to make sense of everyday existence.

Overall, Kierkegaard thinks that transcendence and faith are still needed to make sense of the Absolute, in both metaphysics and in existence. While he ends up with this un-Hegelian view of reality, he arrives there, at least in part, through a sincere engagement with Hegelian philosophy. But in the end, Hegel fails at exactly the places where he most needs to succeed—in explaining transition and actuality. According to Kierkegaard, the math just does not add up. However, as we will see throughout, Kierkegaard is still profoundly influenced by Hegel. Hegel does a lot, just not as much as he advertises. Kierkegaard continually struggles with Hegel and with mediation; neither can be gotten rid of so easily. And some of Kierkegaard's most "Kierkegaardian" principles (leap and

repetition) are adaptations of and responses to some of Hegel's most "Hegelian" principles (mediation).

So why is Kierkegaard so upset with Hegel? The short answer is that Kierkegaard is disappointed. He feels pretty let down. Hegel leaves him hanging in partial answers and whole problems. It takes a lot of time and patience to wade through the many, many pages of Hegel's texts, only to find out that it only almost works. And there is nothing more frustrating than an "almost."

Part I:

Does Hegel's Metaphysics Work?

Chapter One

Transition and the Metaphysical Absolute

Throughout his texts, Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms continually claim that Hegel was never able to adequately explain transition. Hegel was never able to explain what causes movement and what grounds movement. For example, in his *Journals and Papers*, Kierkegaard plainly states that "Hegel has never done justice to the category of transition."[8] And in the *Postscript*, Johannes Climacus repeatedly complains that there is no movement in Hegel's philosophy.[9] Given that Hegel's philosophy is dominated by dialectical movement, and that Hegelian mediation is precisely supposed to produce movement everywhere, Kierkegaard is making a striking objection here. Why does Kierkegaard think that Hegelian philosophy achieves exactly the opposite of what Hegel says it achieves?

What is even more difficult is that Kierkegaard's criticisms of Hegel are often brief, cryptic, and scattered across various texts and different pseudonyms. His criticisms are dropped into the text and immediately left behind without further explanation, or they are buried within long footnotes, almost as an afterthought. But, as we will see, if we bring these comments together, we realize that Kierkegaard's often seemingly sarcastic and off-hand comments actually present a serious and relevant critique of how Hegel explains movement. In this chapter, we will explore the following questions: why does Kierkegaard think that Hegel cannot explain movement? How does Kierkegaard's alternative explanation of movement shape his alternative view of the Absolute?

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[8] *JP*, vol. 1, 260; *Pap*. IV C 80.
[9] *CUP*, 99-110.

I. Skepticism About Mediation

In *The Concept of Anxiety*, Vigilius Haufniensis explains that Hegel achieves transition in metaphysics through the principles of negation and mediation. By using these principles, we can explain movement forward between two metaphysical categories (between any two things in general). We can explain how we move from the first category to the second category, how a new category comes to be from a pervious category. According to Hegel, through metaphysical thought alone, we can explain how movement forward to something new occurs. But while Hegel claims that his entire metaphysical system is presuppositionless—no element may be employed within the system that has not been established by a preceding stage of the dialectic[10]—Haufniensis objects that negation and mediation are used throughout Hegel's *Logic* without ever having been established by the system itself. He writes,

> In recent philosophy there is a category that is continually used in logical no less than in historical-philosophical inquiries. It is the category of transition. However, no further explanation is given. The term is freely used without further ado…[T]here is no embarrassment at all over the use in Hegelian thought of the terms 'transition,' 'negation,' 'mediation,' i.e., the principles of motion, in such a way that they do not find their place in the systematic progression. If this is not a presupposition, I do not know what a presupposition is. For to use something that is nowhere explained is indeed to presuppose it.[11]

For a system that boasts of being without presupposition, Haufniensis thinks that its biggest presupposition of all is its use of mediation and negation to explain transition. Hegel presupposes his own foundational principle, namely, that transition *can* indeed be explained by metaphysical thought alone. Haufniensis thinks that we have to assume the conclusion as our presupposition. It is as if Hegel were saying that he can explain

[10] *SL*, 40-42, 68-70.
[11] *CA*, 81.

transition, because he says that he can explain transition; mediation works, because he says that mediation works. It seems like something suspicious is going on.

Mediation and negation are shrouded in disquieting suspicion. Haufniensis complains that "systematic thought seems to pay homage to secretiveness with respect to its innermost movements. Negation, transition, mediation are three disguised, suspicious, and secret agents that bring about all movements."[12] Mediation and negation are nothing but clever masks and elaborate disguises that hide the true principles of transition that secretly move Hegel's logical system. These secret agents, hired out in service of the system, eagerly fill in the holes, by adding the next term and forcing the next transition. The system is really moved by powers external to the system—powers opaque to metaphysical thought—which are deviously hidden under these masks of immanent transition. Haufniensis warns us that these secret agents are "strange pixies and goblins who like busy clerks bring about movement in Hegelian logic…[They] made Hegel's logic something of a miracle and gave logical thought feet to move on, without anyone's being able to observe them."[13] The logic is moved by mystical fairies and mischievous wizards, who inhabit the ground of the logic, living in its very foundation. They work underneath the system, holding the entire system upright. They continually keep things moving by releasing the next term and fabricating the next transition. Haufniensis thinks that Hegel is playing a prank on us: movement cannot be explained by metaphysical thought alone. Haufniensis wants to unmask Hegel's principles of transition and reveal them as the goblins that they truly are.

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[12] *CA*, 81-82.
[13] Ibid., 12.

In the beginning of the *Science of Logic*, Hegel asks his readers to suspend all presuppositions regarding the nature of abstract, metaphysical thought. We must let go of the traditional rules and logical principles that we typically think govern thought. We should simply step back and observe as thought internally determines itself, moving according to its own immanent "simple rhythm."[14] Thought moves itself, by itself. The metaphysical system unfolds itself, by itself. The metaphysical categories dialectically unfold and connect themselves.[15] Or, as Hegel says in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, "we must let the Notion move spontaneously of its own nature…This refusal to intrude into the immanent rhythm of the Notion, either arbitrarily or with wisdom obtained from elsewhere, constitutes a restraint which is itself an essential moment of the Notion."[16]

According to Hegel, we must simply take up "what is there before us."[17] Hegel cautions us, therefore, that if an objection is advanced against his metaphysical system, it must be found internal to the system itself. Most critiques are irrelevant, because they rely on presuppositions and principles external to the system. His opponents do not approach the system from within the system itself, by simply watching as thought determines itself and as the metaphysical system unfolds itself. Objections often take for granted the traditional rules of rationality and logic—i.e. a strict reliance on the law of non-contradiction. But even these rules of thought must be suspended. Hegel writes, "I have been only too often and too vehemently attacked by opponents who are incapable of making the simple reflection that their opinions and objections contain categories which are presuppositions and which themselves need to be criticized first before they are

[14] *SL*, 54.
[15] Ibid., 40-42, 52-54, 68-74.
[16] *PS*, 36.
[17] *SL*, 69.

employed."[18] If a flaw is to be found in Hegel's system—in how Hegel treats transition—we must find it immanent to the inner workings of the dialectical process itself.[19]

If Kierkegaard is to advance a viable critique of Hegel's system, and not join the crowded ranks of the "uncouth and uneducated"[20] whom Hegel disdains, he must respect Hegel's requirements for presuppositionless, immanent critique. Kierkegaard cannot rely on any external criterion of thought, but must meet the system on the system's own terms. He must show that Hegel himself has not stuck to his own criterion for immanent development, by demonstrating that Hegel has snuck in some external, illicit principle in order to make transition happen in the dialectic. Kierkegaard must hold to Hegel's method of simply observing metaphysical thought as it unfolds itself, and he must show that thought cannot immanently determine itself by itself, and that transition cannot be explained by metaphysical thought alone. He must demonstrate that thought—and the metaphysical system itself—is not the smooth, self-enclosing Hegelian circle, but rather, that thought—and the metaphysical system itself—contains limits and paradoxes, contains elements that cannot be explained by metaphysical thought.

II. Hegel's Principle of Transition: Mediation

To see how Hegel uses the principle of mediation to explain transition, we will look at two key places in the *Science of Logic* where the process of mediation can be seen

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[18] SL, 41.
[19] For a good discussion of immanent critique and presuppositionless thought in Hegel, see Stephen Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel's Logic: From Being to Infinity* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2006), 39-71.
[20] *SL*, 41.

particularly well: 1. Hegel's discussion of the laws of non-contradiction and excluded middle 2. The opening dialectical sequence on the category of Being.

According to the traditional understanding of the law of non-contradiction, each thing is equal to itself and only to itself. Each thing is a self-enclosed, static unity, and it stands in rigid opposition to its contrary. The two contraries have no relation to each other. +A = +A and –A = –A. But Hegel thinks that this static view of things is not correct. When we think of +A, we automatically also think of its negation, –A. +A can only be +A if it excludes that which is different from itself, –A. When thought thinks of +A, it cannot help but also think of –A right along with it. –A is part of the very thought and essence of +A itself. Therefore, +A is not just +A, but rather, +A is the *mediation* of itself and its negation, –A. +A is not a static, self-identity. It is internal duality, self-contradiction, and restless instability, because it is the relating of itself and its negation. In the same way, when we think of –A, we also automatically think of its negation, +A. –A depends on +A to be –A. When we think of –A, we automatically also think of its negation, +A, which it must exclude from itself to be itself. –A relies on the thought and essence of its negation to be itself. –A is the *mediation* of itself and its negation, +A. –A is not a static, self-identical unity. It is internal duality, self-contradiction, and restless instability, because it is the relating of itself and its negation.[21]

According to Hegel, thought now realizes that +A and –A are not opposed contraries, but rather, that both contraries share the same internal truth. They both fall to the same "Ground," namely, the ground of mediation.[22] Each is the mediation of itself and its opposite; each is the self-contradictory relating of itself and its negation. +A is only +A

[21] *SL*, 409-443; see also *EL*, 81-87.
[22] *SL*, 442-447; see also *EL*, 86-87.

in relating to –A and –A is only –A in relating to +A. When thought thinks of the one, it is immediately thrown back to the other, and when thought thinks of the other, it is immediately thrown back to the one. Their common internal truth, their common "Ground," is this relating activity between the one and its opposite internal to each one. The law of non-contradiction is not the most basic principle of all things. Contradiction (the mediating activity between self and opposite internal to all things) is the most basic principle of all things (of metaphysical categories and of things in general). Hegel says that contradiction is a "profounder determination"[23] than non-contradiction, and contradiction (this mediating activity at the heart of all things) is precisely what causes movement forward between terms, causes the current term to go out of existence and the new term to come into existence.[24] Hegel writes, "Only when the manifold terms have been driven to the point of contradiction do they become active and lively towards one another, receiving in contradiction the negativity which is the indwelling pulsation of self-movement and spontaneous activity."[25]

Since +A is the mediation of itself and its negation, Hegel explains, +A is internally self-contradictory, unstable, and restless. +A wants to dissolve this self-contradiction internal to itself—i.e. it wants to dissolve itself—and to move to a new, more stable unity, let us say +B. +A necessarily dissolves itself and necessarily passes over into the next term, +B, which incorporates the moments of +A (+A and –A) into a hither unity. Thought does not like being caught up in the self-contradictory movement internal to +A, so it thinks its way out of this contradiction by dissolving this term and rethinking its two moments

[23] *SL*, 439.
[24] Ibid., 439-443.
[25] Ibid., 442.

(+A and –A) into a higher unity, into a new term, +B. Thought necessarily dissolves the first term and brings into existence the second term. +A necessarily dissolves itself and passes over into the next term, +B. (The dialectical process of mediation repeats itself with each new metaphysical category in Hegel's *Logic*: thought realizes that +B is the mediation of itself and –B, and so it dissolves this term and rethinks its moments into a new term, +C, and so on. This process of mediation produces movement forward from category to category in Hegel's *Logic*. It also produces movement forward in *all* of Hegel's texts.)

In sum, movement forward to the next term occurs, because thought realizes that the current term is mediated and self-contradictory, and so it dissolves this term and rethinks its moments into a new unity. Once the term falls to the ground of mediation—once it reveals itself as internal self-contradictory relating between itself and its negation—it necessarily passes over into the next term. Thought can think transition. Thought can think through movement forward from the first to the second thing. Hegel's mediation—the famous *aufheben*—has the curiously dual power of both canceling and preserving, of both destroying and positing. It cancels the first term, but preserves its moments in the second term; it destroys the first term, but it also simultaneously posits the second term. Mediation (supposedly) includes and explains both moments of transition: the going out of existence of the first and the coming into existence of the second. Mediation shows the old and the new, the first and the second, the movement and the result of the movement.

Hegel illustrates this process again when he discusses the law of excluded middle, which is simply another way of thinking about the law of non-contradiction.[26] According

[26] *SL*, 438-489; see also *EL*, 85-86.

to the traditional law of excluded middle, a thing is either +A or –A, and there is no third between them. But Hegel says that there is a third, and this third is what produces movement forward to a new term. Hegel explains that this third is already "given in the law itself."[27] "A" is this third, and "this A is neither +A nor –A, and is equally well +A and –A" and "this is the third which was to be excluded."[28] "A" is neither +A nor –A, but is also both +A and –A, because it is the common ground on which each rests and on which their exclusionary relation rests. (It is –A—+A). This common ground is, again, the common ground of mediation—the contradictory relating between self and opposite internal to all things. There is no strict either/or between these contraries. They fall to the same ground of mediation—to the "third," the missing middle of the law of excluded middle—that allows each to be and to be in relation to each other. Once again, it is in "falling to the ground"[29] of mediation that movement forward to a new category occurs. When thought realizes that the current category, +A, is self-contradictory relating between itself and its negation, it necessarily dissolves this category and passes over into a new category, +B, that incorporates the two contrary moments of +A into a new unity. Once thought realizes that the current category is mediation, it necessarily cancels this category and posits a new category. The first goes out of existence and the second comes into existence; thought moves from the first forward to the second.

Kierkegaard disagrees with Hegel that mediation explains and produces movement forward from the first term to the second term. Kierkegaard thinks that thought is indeed compelled to follow the dialectic as far as the mediation internal to the first term (+A is the

[27] *SL*, 438.
[28] Ibid., 439.
[29] Ibid., 435.

self-contradictory relating of itself and its negation, -A), but this is as far as thought is compelled to go. Thought gets stuck within the mediation internal to the first term, and it never moves forward to a new term, never rethinks the contrary moments of +A into +B. Kierkegaard agrees with Hegel's great insight that mediation, rather than non-contradiction, is indeed the truth of the first category—the truth of all categories—but he disagrees that the mediation of the current term produces movement forward to a new term. He agrees that when thought thinks of +A, it necessarily also thinks of –A (and when it thinks of –A, it necessarily also thinks of +A), and therefore, thought is necessarily compelled to realize that +A is the mediation of itself and its negation. But he thinks that thought gets stuck precisely here, in the mediating activity between self and opposite internal to +A. He does not see why thought is *necessarily* compelled to rethink the moments of +A into a new unity, why +A *necessarily* self-dissolves and moves to a new term. Why doesn't thought just remain endlessly stuck within +A itself, oscillating back and forth between +A and –A internal to +A? Why doesn't thought just remain within this inner tension, remain in the mediation of the first term? Kierkegaard thinks that if thought is left alone to unfold itself of its own necessity, as Hegel wants, then it would get stuck in the mediation of the first term and would never move forward to a new term.

In his *Journals and Papers*, Kierkegaard summarizes this main objection against mediation. He asks, "Is mediation the zero point, or is it a third?"[30] Hegel gets us as far as the zero point—mediation is the common ground, is ground zero, of all things—but only as far as the zero point. Each category falls to the zero point of mediation, but this is still within the first term itself, and is not a new third term, +B. Mediation gets us only as far

[30] *JP*, vol. 2, 1603; *Pap*. IV C 81.

as mediation. It get us to ground zero for the first term, but not forward to a new term. Mediation does not explain the crucial moment of transition. There is still a decisive gap between the going out of existence of the old and the coming into existence of the new (between the dissolving of the self-subsistent identity of the first term and the positing of the new term). There is a break in continuity between the zero point of the current term and the new third term. Kierkegaard is frustrated, because mediation is right, but only almost right. And because it is only almost right, it is fairly useless. Hegel gives us the revolutionary insight that all things are mediated, but this mediation does not produce movement forward. We are still left stranded in the first term, stranded at the ground zero of mediation. Mediation alone cannot explain transition. Mediation raises as many questions as it answers. Mediation is not as user-friendly as Hegel advertises.

Haufniensis also articulates this concern: " 'Mediation' is equivocal, for it suggests simultaneously the relation between the two and the result of the relation, that in which the two relate themselves to each other as well as the two that related themselves to each other. It indicates movement as well as repose. Whether this is a perfection must be determined by subjecting mediation to a more profound dialectical test, but, unfortunately, this is something for which we still must wait."[31] Mediation obfuscates the distinction between the two moments of transition. It somehow includes both the process of coming into existence and the new existence itself, both the movement and the result of this movement, both the zero point of the first term and the new third term. Hegel gives mediation the paradoxical powers of both process and result, movement and rest, coming into existence and the new existence itself. Haufniensis thinks that Hegel is precisely trying to cover up

[31] *CA*, 11.

the gap that exists between these two moments of transition—when something goes from coming into existence to existence, when the first term goes out of existence and the new term now decisively is. By giving mediation paradoxical powers, Hegel seems to concede that transition happens by something transcendent to thought, that thought precisely cannot think transition at all. The principle of mediation, which is supposed to make transition transparent to thought, is actually the most obscure principle of all.

Kierkegaard thinks that transition is a decided discontinuity, and that it is not open to thought. We cannot think our way through the transition between +A and +B. In *The Postscript*, Johannes Climacus complains that, by using a word with opposite meanings (that is, by letting mediation both cancel and posit), Hegel tries to mash together the two distinctive moments of transition—going out of existence and coming into existence, negating and positing, the old and the new term, the movement and the result of the movement—so that we do not notice that he has not really explained transition at all. By using such an ambiguous word, Hegel distracts us with trickery and hand-waving—some of his goblins and masked secret agents come onto the scene—making us believe that somehow, in some instant when we were not looking, the jump was made, the magical *aufheben* performed its contrary functions, and we have moved from the first to the second term.[32]

Climacus says, "We have a simple phrase current among the people, used humoristically to indicate the impossible: 'To talk with one's mouth full of hot mush.' This is just about the trick that speculative philosophy contrives to perform, in thus using a word

[32] *CUP*, 222.

with opposite meanings."[33] When an individual talks with hot mush in his mouth, the details of what he says gets lost in the mush. The listener cannot make out all of the distinct words and sentence breaks, but he must assume that something meaningful was said, even if some of the details get mushy. So too, the onlooker of the *aufheben* must assume that somehow the transition has been made, even though he cannot make out the distinct moments and breaks within the transition, since they get lost within the mushy dual power of mediation. Climacus thinks that Hegel should put down the hot oatmeal. Hegel should not try to explain mediation when his mouth is full.

It is pretty convenient (or inconvenient) that this mush occurs at the crucial moment of transition in the dialectic—when the first "passes over" into the second. Climacus writes, "I do know that the word *aufheben* has various, indeed opposite, meanings in the German language…Whether it is a good quality in a word to have opposite meanings, I do not know, but anyone who wants to express himself with precision usually avoids the use of such a word in decisive places…So speculation annuls all difficulty and then leaves me with the difficulty of understanding just what it is doing with this *aufheben*."[34] Climacus (and Kierkegaard) wants to remove the mush, to unmask the goblins and secret agents. He wants precisely to focus on and exaggerate this discontinuity in the dialectic, to show that mediation obfuscates the two moments of transition. He wants to show that transition is a

[33] I am using David F. Swenson's translation of the *Postscript* for this particular line. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), 199. Hong and Hong translate this line as follows: "There is a simple folk saying that humorously denotes the impossible: to have one's mouth full of crackers and to whistle at the same time. Speculative thought accomplishes a tour de force somewhat like that by using a word that also denotes the very opposite" (222). The image created is different in both translations, but the message is the same: It gets messy and uncouth when Hegel tries to talk with his mouth full.

[34] *CUP*, 222.

leap, a decided break in immanence and thought, and that transition relies on something transcendent.

Haufniensis agrees that transition is a break in immanence, and he commends Plato for having recognized the difficulty of trying to explain transition through metaphysical thought alone. He explains that Plato recognizes that transition is a "strange entity." [35] Transition itself is nothing, and yet it is the decisive moment between the first and the second, between movement and rest, between the relation and the result of the relation. [36] For Plato, the moment of transition "lies between motion and rest without occupying any time, and into this and out from this that which is in motion changes into rest, and that which is at rest changes into motion…Plato deserves credit for having clarified the difficulty; yet the moment remains a silent atomistic abstraction." [37] This decisive moment of transition, which both separates and connects the going out of existence of the old and the coming into existence of the new, is not open to thought. Haufniensis is irritated that Hegel does not heed Plato's concerns, and he is disappointed that Hegel tries to cover up the discontinuity between the two moments of transition with the obscure dual power of the negative. Hegel merely ignores Plato's concern that we cannot explain transition in thought and immanence alone.

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[35] *CA*, 83

[36] See Plato, *Parmenides*, 156d-157a: "Is there, then, this queer thing in which it might be, just when it changes?"—"What queer thing?"—"The instant. The instant seems to signify something such that changing occurs from it to each of two states. For a thing doesn't change from rest while rest continues, or from motion while motion continues. Rather, this queer creature, the instant, lurks between motion and rest—being in no time at all—and to it and from it the moving thing changes to resting and the resting thing changes to moving."—"It looks that way."—"And the one, if in fact it both rests and moves, could change to each state—for only in this way could it do both. But in changing, it changes at an instant, and when it changes, it would be in no time at all, and just then it would be neither in motion nor at rest."—"No, it wouldn't."—"Is it so with the other changes too? Whenever the one changes from being to ceasing-to-be, or from not-being to coming-to-be, isn't it then between certain states of motion and rest? And then it neither is nor is not, and neither comes to be nor ceases to be?"—"It seems so, at any rate." *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 388.

[37] *CA*, 83-84

Perhaps Hegel intends precisely for the *aufheben* to be somewhat ironic,[38] and perhaps Kierkegaard should not take it so seriously. Perhaps he wishes to show that, yes, we do not know exactly how thought makes the transition to the next category, but the important thing is simply that thought *does* make the transition, that the dialectic *does* move forward, and so we can just assume that the transition is made and that transition is immanent to thought. But Kierkegaard can reply that it seems odd for Hegel to insist upon the plasticity, immanence, and necessity of thought's movement, but then, at the most crucial points of the dialectic, to rely on irony and arbitrariness. If Hegel's main goal is to show that everything is immanent to thought—that thought can think through even the most difficult elements of metaphysics, like transition—but then he admits that mediation operates in obscure ways, doesn't this just show that Hegel cannot explain transition? Kierkegaard does not quite understand what Hegel is up to: Is Hegel serious or ironic when he says that mediation explains transition? If he is serious, Kierkegaard thinks mediation does not work, and so mediation is fairly useless. If he is joking somewhat, Kierkegaard thinks mediation does not work, and so mediation is fairly useless. Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms constantly wonder what exactly Hegel is up to and what they are supposed to do with mediation.

Given these critiques, it seems like Hegel's dialectic could never even get off the ground. It would get stuck in the mediation of the first category, and never move on to the second category, let alone work its way through to its self-enclosing end. Let us see if this is in fact true, by observing how mediation is supposed to work in the opening dialectical sequence on the category of Being.

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[38] Donald Philip Verene, *Hegel's Recollection: A Study of Images in the* Phenomenology of Spirit (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 22-24, 30-32, 57-58.

According to Hegel, Being is posited as the first category. But the thought of pure, indeterminate Being is also the thought of pure emptiness, of Nothing. In thinking Being, thought actually thinks of its negation, Nothing. But Nothing, as pure indeterminateness and emptiness, is exactly what Being was. Thought is thrown back again to Being. Through this movement from Being to Nothing and back to Being, thought realizes that Being and Nothing are not self-enclosed, rigid contraries, but rather, that each necessarily relies on the other to be what it is. Being is Being only in relating to Nothing. Nothing is Nothing only in relating to Being. Being and Nothing fall to a common ground, share the same internal truth, Becoming. Becoming is the zero point of each, is the common ground of mediation between self and opposite internal to each.[39] Being is really Becoming, is internal self-contradictory relating between itself and its negation, Nothing. Being is, therefore, internally self-contradictory, unstable, and restless. Hegel explains that Being, as Becoming, necessarily wants to dissolve this contradiction internal to itself and to pass over into a new unity that incorporates these contrary moments into a higher unity. Thought necessarily dissolves this contradiction internal to Being (i.e. Becoming) and rethinks its moments into a new unity, Determinate Being. Being necessarily dissolves itself and passes over into a new term, Determinate Being.[40]

Kierkegaard would bring the same critique against mediation that we already saw above. We can easily follow Hegel's dialectic as far as Becoming, which is the "zero point" of Being, but this is as far as we are necessarily compelled to go. The mediating activity between Being and Nothing internal to Being is unproblematic; when thought thinks of the one it is necessarily thrown to the other, and when thought thinks of the other,

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[39] *SL*, 82-83; see also *EL*, 68-72.
[40] *SL*, 105-108; see also *EL*, 72-74.

it is necessarily thrown back to the one. But, the crucial moment of transition between categories—when thought moves from Becoming (the zero point of Being) to Determinate Being (a new "third" term)—is more problematic. Kierkegaard would suggest that, if thought is left to determine itself, it would simply get stuck within Becoming, within the internal truth of Being as mediation, and would never move forward to a new term, Determinate Being. Thought is not *necessarily* compelled to rethink the moments of Being into a higher unity. There is nothing that *necessarily* compels Being to dissolve itself and pass over into a new unity. Why can't thought just remain within the truth of Being as Becoming? Why does thought necessarily dissolve this term and pass over into a new term? Again, it seems like mediation is mushing together the two distinctive moments of "passing over"—the going out of existence of the first and the coming into existence of the second (the dissolving of the self-subsistent identity of Being into the mediating activity of Being and the coming into existence of Determinate Being as a new term). Thought gets us far as the zero point of Becoming, but not to a new third, Determinate Being. Once again, mediation gets us pretty far, but not quite far enough.

In the *Philosophical Fragments*, Johannes Climacus describes this mushing together of the moments of transition through an insightful, humorous metaphor. He writes, "the concept, like a juggler in this carnival time, has to keep doing these continual flip-flopping tricks—until the man himself flips over."[41] The juggler flip flops from side to side, and this movement continues on indefinitely, until, all of a sudden, the juggler breaks this back and forth inertia and flips himself fully around. We are impressed that the juggler flips himself over, but we do not quite know how he does it. It all happens so "all

[41] *PF*, 6.

of a sudden," that we miss the moment of transition. So too, speculative thought flip flops back and forth between the contrary moments of self and negation internal to Being (thought gets stuck in Becoming), but then, all of a sudden, thought breaks this flip flopping inertia and flips itself fully around. The category flips itself fully over. But this transition happens so all of a sudden, that we miss this crucial moment when the flip flopping stops and the flipping over occurs. We are impressed that the category (and the juggler) flips itself over, but we do not quite know how this happens. How does the juggler go from flip flopping to flipping over? How does thought go from flip flopping within Being (Becoming) to flipping over into Determinate Being? Why do we always seem to miss that "all of a sudden" moment of flipping over?

In the *Postscript*, Climacus claims that this flipping over is achieved through the dialectic's devious use of the "marvelous phrase '*so long—until*.'"[42] The first category remains *so long—until* it necessarily passes over into the next category; thought remains in the first category *so long—until* it necessarily rethinks its contrary moments into a higher unity. But Climacus claims that it is not, in fact, that the category remains *so long—until* it necessarily passes over. It is we who hold onto the category only *so long—until* we can endure it no more, and we suddenly decide to make it pass over. We desire to and arbitrarily decide to jump to something new. If we let thought move itself, we would find that the *so long* continues and the *until* never comes. Some force transcendent to thought—will, desire, arbitrary decision—provides the *until* and the transition of "passing over." We simply decide that it is time to move, and we will into existence the next transition and the next term. Thought endures the flip flopping internal to the first category only *so long*—

[42] *CUP*, 337.

until it gets tired and bored of waiting patiently for the next category, and then it decides to flip over, to jump forward to a new category.

Climacus summarizes this point by saying,

> "Whenever a transition must be made, the opposite continues so long until it switches over into its opposite—and then one proceeds further. Good Lord, we are all frail human beings and are very fond of change, as the saying goes. Consequently, if it cannot ever be otherwise, if the opposite keeps on so long until it switches over into is opposite, this keeps on forever, which would be extremely boring—well, let it pass, that is, it is assumed. In this way the method advances—by *necessity*."[43]

We love variety and change so much that we are willing to jump to the next term, even if we must admit that we do not know how this transition takes place. And why not? After all, Hegel has already provided us with the next category (and all next categories) in the system? It is very easy to jump forward and accept it as the next "necessary" category when it is already provided ready-made and ahead of time. We are willing to assume that the transition somehow takes place, because we are tired of being stuck in the mediation of the first term. And Hegel has already laid out all of the stepping stones for us; he has already provided us with a nice little path from shore to shore across the river. Hegel stands on the other shore, coaxing us forward, stone by stone, category by category. So, we arbitrarily decide to move on, to intervene in thought's immanent process and jump forward to the next term. If thought were true to Hegel's own requirements for passively observing itself, it would have to be a juggler with infinite stamina to perform infinite flip flopping: it would ceaselessly flip flop back and forth within the first term and never flip itself over into a new term. It looks like Hegel's dialectic cannot move forward by mediation alone. It looks like we get stuck in the first term and that Hegel's dialectic cannot even get off the ground at all. Mediation only gets us as far as mediation; it gets us to the mediation of the current

[43] *CUP*, 337.

term but not forward to a new term. Mediation only almost works, and therefore, Kierkegaard wonders what mediation is really good for.

III. Kierkegaard's Principles of Transition: Leap and Repetition

By following Hegel's system and by watching as metaphysical thought determines itself, we have seen that Kierkegaard does not think that mediation explains transition. Thought and immanence cannot think transition. Transition must happen by something transcendent to thought. Climacus summarizes all of the critiques we have seen by saying, "the immanent transition is nevertheless a chimera, a fancy, as if the one standpoint on its own necessarily determined its transition over to another, since the category of transition is itself a break in immanence, is a *leap*."[44] Transition happens by something external to thought—by a leap.

We find the foundation for Kierkegaard's concept of the leap in Hegel's own thought. In the *Logic*, in the section on "Measure," Hegel explains that the coming into existence of a new quality or state happens by a decisive interruption, and "the transition is therefore a *leap*."[45] This occurs frequently in the physical world, when products change state or new products are formed. Water, for example, does not turn to ice gradually, but all at once, by a sudden leap. Water cools and freezes gradually, but there is a decisive instant when the water ceases to be water and is now ice. The changes of state "do not appear gradually; on the contrary, each new state appears as a leap, suddenly interrupting and checking the gradual succession of temperature changes at these points."[46] It happens

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[44] *CUP*, 295.
[45] *SL*, 368.
[46] Ibid., 369.

all at once and is a break in the gradual transition.[47] Hegel notes that gradualness seems to make the transition easier to understand, because it happens little by little, through intermediary steps, so that the transition can almost be "seen."[48] But gradualness does not explain the decisive moment when the new product goes from not-being to being, the decisive moment when the old goes out of existence and the new product now is.

Haufniensis certainly agrees with Hegel that coming into existence happens through a leap. He says, "The new quality appears with the first, with the leap, with the suddenness of the enigmatic."[49] Haufniensis commends Hegel for drawing attention to the leap, but thinks Hegel himself does not fully understand its implications, even for his own logical system. He writes, "Hegel made use of the leap, but in logic…However, Hegel's misfortune is exactly that he wants to maintain the new quality and yet does not want to do it, since he wants to do it in logic, which, as soon as this is recognized, must acquire a different consciousness of itself and its significance."[50] In recognizing the leap, Hegel should have developed a new perspective on his system and realized that he actually intimates a crucial critique of his own system. Hegel's own system is (dis)connected by leaps. Hegel falls prey to his own criticism of relying on "gradualness" to explain transition. Mediation is supposed to show how the first category gradually, step by step, passes over into the next term: thought realizes that the first term is necessarily related to its negation, this internal mediation makes the first term contradictory and unstable, and thought wants to dissolve this contradiction and pass over into a new term. But this

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[47] Kierkegaard explicitly mentions this example of water turning to ice in his *Journals and Papers*: "Every quality consequently emerges with a leap…The leap by which water turns to ice."
JP, vol. 3, 2345; *Pap*. V C 1.
[48] *SL*, 370.
[49] *CA*, 30
[50] Ibid.

gradualness of mediation does not explain the interruption of the leap, the crucial moment of transition when thought moves from the zero point of the current term to a new third term. Since immanent transition supposedly works through these smooth dialectical steps, thought is easily duped into believing that the next category gradually comes into existence, because thought can almost "see" the transition taking place. But, for Haufniensis, Hegel's mediation is nothing but the "preliminary runs to the leap, without being able to explain the leap."[51] Mediation gives us a good running start, but it stops just short. It stops at exactly the crucial moment when the first is supposed to pass over into the second. If anything, by halting at this crucial moment of transition, mediation only highlights the interruption of the leap all the more.

In the *Philosophical Fragments*, Climacus explains that, in a demonstration, thought may demonstrate the existence of something through a gradual, step by step process, but the crucial point at which this thing comes into existence in the demonstration is always a "letting go,"[52] is always a leap. This letting go is not internal to the demonstration, internal to thought itself, but is external to thought, is "*meine Zuthat* [my contribution.]"[53] It is our decision to finally cut off the endless process of thought and to assert that the thing that was to be demonstrated has come into existence. It is our decision to end the "so long—until" of thought and to declare that the thing now is.[54] Thought never comes to a conclusion by itself. Thought never gets from point A to point B by itself.

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[51] *CA*, 29.
[52] *PF*, 43.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Kierkegaard puts many of these comments about the leap together in a key passage in his *Journals and Papers*: "*How does a new quality emerge from an unbroken quantitative determinant?* I am a poor man who does not have many ideas; if I get one, I must take care that I hold onto it. A leap. The Platonic moment. *Unsre Zuthat* (See passage in the *Phänomenologie*). *Hinter den Rücken.* Every quality consequently emerges with a leap." *JP*, vol. 3, 2345; *Pap*. V C 1.

Thought always requires something transcendent to thought—i.e. will, desire, decision—to come to a conclusion and to bring something into existence. Thought always comes to a conclusion by a leap.

Hegel further acknowledges the leap in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* when he suggests that consciousness moves between the stages of the phenomenology by qualitative leaps. He writes, "But just as the first breath drawn by a child after its long, quiet nourishment breaks the gradualness of merely quantitative growth—there is a qualitative leap, and the child is born—so likewise the Spirit in its formation matures slowly and quietly into its new shape, dissolving bit by bit the structure of its previous world, whose tottering state is only hinted at by isolated symptoms."[55] Spirit moves to the next stage of consciousness, by a leap, "in one flash,"[56] and "by a sunburst."[57] Mediation might explain the gradual dissolution of the current stage of consciousness (it sees that this stage is internally contradictory and unstable), but mediation cannot explain that decisive moment when the current stage of consciousness goes out of existence and the new stage comes into existence, that moment when the new stage is suddenly born, suddenly goes from not-being to being. The new stage of consciousness comes into existence all of a sudden, by a leap, by something opaque to thought. Hegel seems to admit that thought moves by leaps, by something going on "behind the back of consciousness."[58] Hegel seems to admit that mediation does not quite explain mediation, and that transition happens by something transcendent to thought.

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[55] *PS*, 6.
[56] Ibid., 7.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid., 56.

Kierkegaard concludes that all transition is a leap. All transition is a decisive break with immanence, and it relies on transcendence. We still need transcendence to make sense of movement. Kierkegaard seizes this (at least partially Hegelian-inspired) idea that transition happens by a leap, and he makes the leap the basis of much, if not all, of his philosophy. What does it mean to say that transition is a leap? What kind of structure does the leap have?

Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms generally describe the leap as a vertical movement performed by the individual from a standing position straight up and straight back down again on the same spot.[59] In leaping, the individual undergoes a change in consciousness, and he gains a new perspective on immanence. He jumps up from immanence to divine transcendence and then comes back down again to immanence. When he jumps up to transcendence, he sees immanence from the viewpoint of divine transcendence, sees immanence the way God sees immanence, though only briefly and imperfectly. He sees that movement is radically dependent on God as its ultimate source. All movement, at every moment, has its source first and foremost in divine transcendence. At each moment of transition, God freely decides to renew and recreate movement; he freely descends into immanence, renewing and sustaining movement. All transition is indeed a leap, is indeed a radical "break with immanence,"[60] because it is the interruption of immanence by divine transcendence.

When the individual comes back down again to immanence, he brings this perspective of transcendence back with him, transforming the way he sees immanence. He sees immanence with the eye of transcendence. He realizes that each moment of transition

[59] *CUP*, 124, 365; *FTR*, 36-50, 170.
[60] *CUP*, 295

requires that God bring together in paradoxical union two entirely separate realms: immanence and transcendence. The image of the vertical leap allows Kierkegaard to emphasize that the Absolute is divided between, yet also the paradoxical union of, these two separate realms: immanence and transcendence, finite and infinite, eternal and temporal, God and man. While the leap makes impossible a Hegelian Absolute that is fully immanent and fully transparent to thought, Kierkegaard thinks that "We ought not despise the leap. There is something extraordinary in it."[61] It is extraordinary, absurd, and miraculous that God created and continually renews movement.

Each transition requires that God "repeat" the leap. (Of course, for God it is not a leap, but a descent. God freely descends into earthly immanence. But for the human, it is always seen as a leap, because his consciousness is raised up to the perspective of the transcendent). In *Repetition*, Constantin Constantius says that " 'Mediation' is a foreign word; 'repetition' is a good Danish word, and I congratulate the Danish language on a philosophical term." [62] Kierkegaard is obviously poking fun at Hegel here. Hegel is delighted to find within the everyday German vocabulary the word *aufheben*, because, since it has opposite meanings (to cancel and preserve), it is already a speculative, philosophical term.[63] He takes this everyday, yet philosophical, term and makes it the basis of his view of reality.

Kierkegaard takes his cue from Hegel, and he looks to his own native Danish language for an everyday word that can also serve as his philosophical basis of reality. In Danish, repetition is the word *gjentagelse*. This "good Danish word" is formed from the

[61] *JP*, vol. 3, 2357; *Pap*. VIII A 681.
[62] *FTR*, 149.
[63] *SL*, 107

prefix "*gjen*," which means "again," and the verb, "*at tage*," which means "to take." *Gjentagelse* means "to take back" or "to take again" or "to renew." Kierkegaard likely chooses this word because it has an inherently active, willful character. "Taking back" and "taking again" requires that there is an active, willful agent who is doing this "taking." This allows Kierkegaard to emphasize that movement has its source in an active, free agent (not in the necessity of mediation), and its ultimate source in God. At each moment of transition, divine transcendence freely descends into immanence and "takes" immanence "back" into transcendence, takes the finite back to the infinite, takes the temporal back to the eternal. The Divine "renews" his decision to connect the two realms of the Absolute and "renews" his decision to keep movement going. Movement continually happens by a repetition of vertical leaps—or vertical descents. The Absolute is connected by a repetition of vertical leaps—or vertical descents.

Chapter Two

Actuality and the Metaphysical Absolute

In the first chapter, we saw that Kierkegaard disagrees with Hegel's view of transition, and his alternate view of transition leads him to a different view of the metaphysical whole, namely, that transcendence is still needed to make sense of the metaphysical whole. In this chapter, we will look at the other major, foundational component of the metaphysical absolute: actuality. Actuality is meant here as both particular actualities and as the overall metaphysical absolute, which is composed of these particular actualities. To define actuality, we will look at how both Hegel and Kierkegaard understand the relation among the three modalities—possibility, actuality, and necessity—and how these three modalities combine to form actuality. We will look at the following questions: How is the actual, actual? What are the roles of possibility and necessity in forming actuality?

In *The Sickness Unto Death,* Anti-Climacus writes, "The philosophers are mistaken when they explain necessity as a unity of possibility and actuality—no, actuality is the unity of possibility and necessity."[1] Anti-Climacus is targeting Hegel's view of modality. But, remaining true to the Kierkegaardian cryptic, fragmented style, Anti-Climacus does not explain this position at all. He drops this sweeping metaphysical claim into the text as an offhand comment and then leaves it aside without further attention. It is Johannes Climacus, in the *Philosophical Fragments*, who gives a more sustained explanation of modality and provides a way of understanding Anti-Climacus' position. Climacus

[1] *SUD,* 36.

performs the ambitious, controversial task of rejecting Hegel's view of modality within the few pages that he whimsically calls a mere "Interlude" within the larger text.[2] Climacus challenges Hegel during a seemingly impromptu digression—an approach that seems comically fitting for one of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms.

How is the actual, actual? Hegel answers this question most explicitly in the *Science of Logic*, in the section titled "Actuality."[3] Put briefly, he explains that the actual is actual—both as a whole and in its parts—because it is necessity. Necessity is simply the proper description of contingent actuality itself. Contingent actuality is necessity, because it is self-grounding and self-grounded. Its possibility is its actuality and its actuality is its possibility. This self-convergence of possibility and actuality means that actuality is sufficient unto itself and needs no external condition for its being. Necessity and contingency are a dialectical unity, simply two different perspectives on the same one, immanent actuality. There is no metaphysical division between contingency and necessity, and there is no need of a transcendent necessity to ground and sustain contingent actuality. Actuality is necessity: it is necessary that there is contingency and this contingency is necessarily self-sustaining.

Climacus, as we will see, objects to Hegel's view that actuality is necessity. Contrary to Hegel, Climacus keeps contingency and necessity metaphysically apart. Contingency and necessity are not two different views on the one actuality. Contingent actuality is metaphysically separate from (but also paradoxically united with) a transcendent necessity. The actual is actual, because it is the paradoxical union of immanent possibility and transcendent necessity. Why does Climacus think that Hegel's

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[2] *PF*, 72-88.
[3] *SL*, 541-553. See also *EL*, 93-101.

view falls short? Why does he revert back to such a decidedly un-Hegelian view of actuality? To answer these questions, we will first carefully analyze Hegel's complex discussion of modality and examine Climacus' objection to Hegel's view. We will then consider Climacus' and Anti-Climacus' alternative approach to explaining actuality.

I. Hegel's View of Actuality: Possibility and Actuality form Necessity

Hegel's account of modality is complex. Thought initially thinks actuality in the most abstract manner and must progressively move to a more determinate definition. In doing so, thought moves through three major stages—Formal modality, Real modality, and Absolute modality—and each of these has its own sub-stages. To gain a full understanding of Hegel's complex view, we will follow thought through each of these stages and sub-stages of the dialectic.[4]

A. Formal Modality: The Necessity of Contingency

According to Hegel, to understand how the actual is actual, thought first thinks actuality in the most abstract manner, in its purely formal, logical structure, without regard for how the material conditions of reality affect modality. Thought first determines the bare form and structure of actuality, that is, how possibility, actuality and necessity combine to form actuality as such. In thinking actuality, thought immediately realizes that

[4] For excellent discussions of Hegel's account of modality, see the following three works. My understanding of Hegel's view is indebted to these discussions. John W. Burbridge, *Hegel on Logic and Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 39-51; Martin Kusch and Juha Manninen, "Hegel on Modalities and Monadology," in *Modern Modalities*: *Studies of the History of Modal Theories from Medieval Nominalism to Logical Positivism*, ed. Simo Knuuttila (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), 109-177; Stephen Houlgate, "Necessity and Contingency in Hegel's *Science of Logic*," *Owl of Minerva* 27, no. 1 (Fall 1995): 37-50.

actuality implies and requires something prior from which it arises, namely, formal possibility from which formal actuality arises. What is actual is first and foremost possible. To analyze formal actuality, then, thought must first analyze formal possibility. Initially, the only formal condition for possibility is the law of non-contradiction. Possibility must have the form of self-identity and non-contradiction. It is possible that +A, and it is equally possible that –A, but +A and –A are not possible together as a unity. Anything that is not self-contradictory is, strictly speaking, possible.[5]

Each content is as possible as its opposite content. Anything is equally as possible as it is impossible. Thought sees that possibility is boundless potential and "boundless multiplicity,"[6] limited only by the condition of non-contradiction. In thinking the possibility of +A, thought is thrown to its opposite, the possibility of –A, because the definition of possibility requires that it is *merely* possible, that both opposite contents are equally possible. The possibility of the one content necessarily implies and depends upon the possibility of the opposite content, and thought now realizes that, rather than being self-identity and non-contradiction, formal possibility has turned out to be the opposite: formal possibility is really internal duality and self-contradictory unrest back and forth between itself and its opposite possibility. Hegel explains, then, that the truth of possibility is "relating *ground*,"[7] as this self-contradictory movement back and forth between itself and its opposite possibility. According to Hegel, thought necessarily dissolves this contradiction internal to formal possibility and passes over into a new unity—formal actuality. Thought realizes that possibility cannot help but become actuality. Possibility

[5] *SL*, 542-543.
[6] Ibid., 543.
[7] Ibid., 544.

is always the possibility *of* something—of actuality. The very form and internal structure of possibility itself forces it to pass over into actuality. Possibility is always already actuality.[8]

Possibility passes over into actuality. In thinking this actuality, Hegel explains that thought is thrown back to its opposite, to the possibility from which it came. Actuality is still tied to the duality of possibility. The actual is merely possible, for it could have been one or the other possible content. Actuality is really self-contradictory movement back and forth between itself and its opposite, possibility. The truth of formal actuality (and of formal possibility) is contingency, as this relating activity internal to actuality between itself and possibility. Contingent actuality is an actual that "at the same time is determined as merely possible, whose other or opposite equally is," and it is a possible that has happened to become actual.[9] Thought sees that possibility cannot help but become actuality, an actuality that is contingency, which bares the uncertainty of the possibility from which it came.

According to Hegel, thought takes one final step. It dissolves this self-contradictory movement internal to formal contingency (the movement between actuality and possibility), and rethinks possibility and actuality together as moments of a higher unity—formal necessity. Hegel writes, "This *absolute unrest* of the *becoming* of these two determinations is *contingency*. But just because each immediately turns into its opposite, equally in this other it simply *unites with itself*, and this identity of both, of one in the other, is *necessity*."[10] In contingency, thought sees possibility and actuality as two separate

[8] *SL*, 543-544.
[9] Ibid., 545.
[10] Ibid.

modalities, but when it focuses on their relation, it realizes that possibility and actuality are really a self-converging identity. Possibility passes over into actuality and actuality passes back over into possibility. The one has eternally passed over into the other. Possibility and actuality are the same unity, seen merely under two different modal perspectives. The unrest of contingency is really the unity of formal necessity.

For Hegel, necessity is not an external substance or force that drives actuality from the outside. Necessity is rather the proper description of immanent actuality as such. In thinking through possibility (and actuality), thought sees that possibility and actuality cannot help but form the unity of contingent actuality. Possibility is never merely possibility, but has eternally passed over into actuality, and this actuality bares within it the uncertainty of the possibility from which it came. It is necessary that possibility pass over into actuality, and this actuality, because it comes from possibility and so could have been otherwise, is a contingent actuality. This self-enclosing circle of possibility and actuality necessarily yields contingent actuality. Formal modality shows us, that, by the internal structure of possibility alone, possibility is necessarily already contingent actuality, and a contingent actuality that is immanently self-grounded and self-grounding. It is *necessary* that there be contingent actuality and actualities. [11] It is immanently necessary that there be something rather than nothing. It is necessary that God departs from himself and creates the world.

Johannes Climacus disagrees with Hegel's view that contingent actuality is immanently necessary. Climacus likely agrees with Hegel that the truth of formal possibility is "relating ground," as the self-contradictory movement internal to possibility.

[11] Houlgate, "Necessity and Contingency in Hegel's *Science of Logic*," 7-42.

Possibility is indeed an internal duality between one possibility and its opposite possibility. But this is as far as thought can follow Hegel's dialectic. Climacus claims, "Nothing coming into existence [moving from possibility to actuality] comes into existence by way of a ground, but everything by way of a cause. Every cause ends in a freely acting cause."[12] For Hegel, a new term comes into existence when the first term "falls to the ground." The ground, which is the truth of each category as self-contradictory movement between itself and its opposite, self-dissolves and passes over into a new category. Climacus thinks, however, that coming into existence never happens through this "falling to the ground." The ground of a category—its internal structure as self-contradictory movement—does not force it to pass over into a new category. It is not the case that if we arrive at the ground of one term, we have automatically also arrived at the next term.

Climacus' objection relies on the same basic argument we discussed in detail in Chapter One: the transition between categories requires a breach of dialectical immanence. A new term does not come to be through ground (the internal necessity of the term itself), but through a free cause transcendent to the dialectic. We recall that Kierkegaard claims that thought can only ever get as far as ground, as the "zero point," of the first term, but it can never move to a new "third" term. We saw, for example, that the truth of Being is Becoming—which is the ground of the first term—but Being does not pass over into Determinate Being—a new term. And similarly, the truth of Identity is ground—the movement back and forth between Identity and Difference internal to Identity—but not Existence—a new third term. Here again, thought gets stuck in possibility as "relating ground," but it cannot move from this "zero point" to a new "third" term, actuality. Since

[12] *PF*, 75.

the one possibility is equally as possible as the contrary possibility, thought remains stuck within the endless oscillating movement back and forth within formal possibility. Thought does not necessarily rethink these contrary moments into a higher unity—contingent actuality. There is nothing about the internal structure of possibility that compels it to pass over into actuality. The truth of possibility is not actuality. The truth of possibility is that it is *merely possibility*—the unrest between the one and the other possible content. There is an insurmountable break and leap between possibility and actuality.

Climacus believes, therefore, that coming into existence does not occur through ground (immanent necessity of the category), but through a "freely acting cause." If the transition from possibility to actuality does not occur through immanence, it must occur through transcendence. If it does not occur through necessity, it must occur through freedom. All movement from possibility to actuality is a breach of dialectical immanence, which occurs through the free act of a transcendent cause (the will of the transcendent necessary being, God), who acts upon the dialectic of possibility and actuality from the outside.

Climacus says virtually nothing about what he means by divine causation, and how this free act of transcendent necessity causes all movement from possibility to actuality. He does give us a clue, though, when he drops Leibniz's theory of possible worlds into the text—albeit in parenthesis and without further explanation.[13] He adopts Leibniz's idea that God freely chooses to create actuality, and to create actuality in one particular way, out of the infinitely many possible ways he could conceive. He chooses to create the best possible world, with its particular laws of nature and series of events. All movement from

[13] *PF*, 80.

possibility to actuality, whether it happens through regular laws of nature or free human actions, depends upon and points back to this free act of the Divine. Climacus writes,

> Every cause ends in a freely acting cause. The intervening causes are misleading in that the coming into existence appears to be necessary; the truth about them is that they, as having themselves come into existence, *definitely* point back to a freely acting cause. As soon as coming into existence is definitely reflected upon, even an inference from natural law is not evidence of the necessity of any coming into existence. So also with the manifestations of freedom.[14]

No actuality comes into existence by pure immanence and necessity—by the internal structure of possibility alone. All actuality depends upon the free cause of the transcendent necessary being. While certain events may seem predictable and regular, and therefore "necessary," as Hegel would have it, they are still radically contingent upon and dependent upon divine causation, for the divine could have created actuality with different laws and series of events. It could always have been otherwise.[15]

Actuality, as a whole and in each of its particular moments, depends upon transcendent necessity. Jack D. Caputo puts this point nicely when he says,

> the very Being of the world is contingent inasmuch as it originates in a free act of divine creation, and everything that happens in the world happens contingently. Not even the laws of nature give evidence of pure necessity since the phenomena which these laws govern might never have existed since the laws themselves could be altered by the divine freedom…when Kierkegaard speaks of the 'transcendence of movement,' he means the absolute unpredictability of the next moment from the present, an Ockhamistic contingency in the successive moments of change, a Cartesian 'conservation of the universe' from moment to moment thanks to the divine freedom. [16]

Climacus emphasizes the radical contingency, at each moment, of contingent actuality upon transcendent necessity. Contingent actuality is indeed contingent and not necessary.

For Climacus, the main problem is that it looks like Hegel's dialectic can never get moving in the first place, and that actuality can never emerge from possibility at all. There

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[14] *PF*, 75.

[15] For discussions of how Kierkegaard views Leibniz's account of modality, see Ronald Grimsley, "Kierkegaard and Leibniz," *Journal for the History of Ideas* 26, no. 3 (July-September 1965): 383-396; Shannon Nason, "Contingency, Necessity, and Causation in Kierkegaard's Theory of Change," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 20, no. 1 (January 2012): 141-162.

[16] Jack D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 18.

is a break between possibility and actuality, between the possibility of actuality and the actuality of actuality. But Hegel thinks philosophers have continually made a needless fuss over the question of how the One becomes Many, Being becomes Determinate Beings, how the Abstract becomes Concrete, or here, how the Possible becomes the Actual. Hegel writes in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, "Accordingly, we do not need to ask the question, still less to think that fretting over such a question is philosophy, or even that it is a question philosophy cannot answer, the question, viz. '*How*, from this pure essence, how does difference or otherness *issue forth* from it?' For the division into two moments has already taken place."[17] The actual does not *come to be* from the possible at all. The possible is eternally the actual and has eternally already passed over into actuality. Actuality is already necessarily include in the structure of possibility itself. God's act of creation is necessitated by His own immanent structure.

But, having looked closely at the dialectic, Hegel's answer seems somewhat insufficient. He dismisses the question too easily. For Climacus, the possible does not simply pass over into the actual. There is always an insurmountable break and fundamental leap between the possible and the actual, and only an external cause (God) can bring into existence the actual from the possible. All actuality, both as a whole and in its particular moments, is radically contingent upon the freely acting cause of the transcendent necessary being.

B. Real Modality: The Contingency of Necessity

According to Hegel, the dialectic of formal modality shows that contingent actuality is necessary. Actuality has the structure of the self-converging unity of possibility

[17] *PS*, 100; See also *SL*, 103-105, 153-154, 172-173.

and actuality, and therefore, possibility cannot help but become contingent actuality. Thought now takes this result from formal modality, and thinks actuality in "real" terms, in terms of the concrete, material world. Thought takes into account not merely the form of actuality (the necessity of contingency) but also the content of actuality, how this form plays out in material actualities.

Real actuality, Hegel explains, is actuality as a whole. Real actuality is "a *manifold* content in general" or "the existent world" as such, the totality of conditions and current circumstances, which includes the multiplicity of particular actualities and the interconnections among them.[18] Thought now looks at actuality not in isolation—as is the case with formal actuality—but also at how a particular actuality fits into and relies upon the overall totality of actuality as such. In thinking real actuality, thought immediately realizes that actuality is simultaneously also possibility. Actuality is also the conditions, materials, and potential for new actualities. A particular actuality, A, is simultaneously the possibility of a new particular actuality B, and if B becomes actual, this new actuality is implicitly already the possibility of actuality C, and so on. Real actuality is eternally also the possibility of its own new particular actualities, for, as a whole, it continually rearranges itself to accommodate and generate its own new particular possibilities and actualities, through this endless chain of possibility and actuality. Real actuality is also real possibility.[19]

But in thinking real possibility, Hegel says, thought is immediately thrown back to its opposite, to real actuality. Real possibility is always already real actuality. Real possibility does not face the problem inherent to formal possibility—namely, that since

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[18] *SL*, 546.
[19] Ibid., 546-547.

both +A and -A are equally possible, there is interminable movement back and forth between the two and uncertainty as to which possibility will become actual—because the conditions of material actuality limit the infinite multiplicity of possibility. Concrete actuality makes one content "really" possible and the other content merely formally, hypothetically possible. If something is "really" possible, it is grounded in and fits into the material conditions of real actuality. Real possibility emerges when all conditions are in place in actuality for this possibility to become actual. Real possibility, therefore, cannot help but become real actuality, because "when all the conditions of something are completely present, it enters into actuality."[20] As soon as real possibility is—as soon as all the conditions are in place in actuality for this possibility to be a "real" possibility—this real possibility automatically turns into a real actuality. As soon as real possibility is, real possibility has already turned into real actuality. A real possibility is already a new real actuality.

Real possibility has eternally passed over into real actuality. Real possibility cannot help but become real actuality. That is, real actuality—both as a whole and in its particular moments—is necessity. Hegel says that "what is really possible can no longer be otherwise, under the particular conditions and circumstances something else cannot follow. Real possibility and necessity are therefore only *seemingly* different; this is an identity which does not have to *become* but is already *presupposed* and lies at their base."[21] But Hegel emphasizes that necessity is not some separate substantial condition that lies transcendent to actuality, grounding and sustaining actuality. Rather, necessity is simply the description of actuality as such. Actuality is necessity, because it is a self-grounded

[20] *SL*, 548.
[21] Ibid., 549.

and self-grounding totality, which continually generates and fulfills its own particular possibilities and actualities from out of its own metaphysical structure and material content. Necessity describes actuality, because actuality is a self-moving and self-sustaining whole, wherein its particular possibilities are nothing but its own actualities and its actualities are nothing but its own possibilities. Actuality is a self-moving and self-enclosing circle.

It is worth noting here that Hegel is not assigning a strict necessity and determinism to actuality. While it is true that all real possibilities must actualize, these real possibilities are contingent upon the conditions present in actuality. This process of "necessity," then, is really just another way of looking at contingent actuality itself, because this necessity is nothing other than the process of contingency working out its own possibilities and actualities as they contingently arise. The necessary movement between possibility and actuality is beholden to whatever contingent conditions obtain in actuality. Formal modality showed us the necessity of contingency. Real modality now shows us the contingency within necessity. So, once more, Hegel says that necessity and contingency are a dialectical unity, are merely two different viewpoints on the same one, immanent metaphysical actuality. [22]

We should also note that Hegel does leave room for human freedom within actuality, because human freedom is one more possibility within the many possibilities working themselves out in actuality. Individuals can intervene in and alter the course of events, but even their freedom is restricted by contingent conditions. Individuals cannot

[22] Houlgate, "Necessity and Contingency in Hegel's *Science of Logic*," 44-45; Martin and Manninen, "Hegel on Modalities and Monadology," 136-139.

actualize any possibility whatsoever, but only those possibilities that are indeed "real" possibilities at the time, possibilities that accord with the current conditions.[23]

Climacus likely agrees with Hegel's more developed view of possibility as real possibility. For Hegel, determining the real possibility of a given content requires that thought knows the conditions that ground this content. It is possible that either +A or –A will become actual, but only one of these contents is "really possible," given the conditions present in actuality. Real possibility requires knowing the conditions of the content, knowing the "how" of the "what." Climacus seems to agree with Hegel, because he describes possibility as the "multiple possible how" (the conditions) that grounds the "thus and so" (the content of actuality).[24] For both Hegel and Climacus, then, thought has a real possibility—and knows this possibility will necessarily become a real actuality—only if it knows the full set of conditions that grounds this content. Thought must know the "how" in order to know the "thus and so."

But even given this shared view of real possibility, Climacus still objects to Hegel's view that thought knows necessarily which contingent actuality will come to be. Thought never sees contingency under the viewpoint of necessity. For Hegel, this process of moving from possibility to actuality is simple, and it requires nothing more than for thought to construct a real possibility, for once thought has a real possibility, it also automatically has a real actuality. To construct a real possibility, thought must know all the conditions that determine a content as "really possible." Once thought has a complete set of conditions (a real possibility), it also automatically knows the content (real actuality). But Climacus thinks this transition from possibility to actuality, when "it is in the process of occurring,

[23] Martin and Manninen, "Hegel on Modalities and Monadology," 136-139.
[24] *PF*, 82-83.

even though it is taking place, as they say, right in front of one's nose," is opaque to thought.[25] Thought is unable to ever construct a full real possibility in the first place, and if thought cannot construct a real possibility, then it cannot pass over into a real actuality. Thought cannot make the transition from possibility to actuality, because it never fully knows the "how" that would allegedly pass over into the "thus and so."

According to Climacus, thought never knows all the conditions that are needed to construct a full real possibility. There is such multiplicity, complexity, and uncertainty within the "how," that thought can never know the "thus and so." Each condition relies on other conditions and is interwoven into a complex, seemingly limitless web of conditions. Thought must continually move backward and outward within real possibility to consider further context and combinations. Thought can never be certain it has all and only the relevant conditions, as there may be conditions or counter-conditions that remain hidden to thought. If thought does not have a full set of conditions to determine the one content as really possible, then the other contrary content still remains, strictly speaking, a possibility.

Hegel thinks he eliminates the uncertainty and multiplicity that plague formal possibility—i.e. one content is as possible as the other content and so thought oscillates endlessly between the two contents, unable to move from possibility to actuality and not knowing which possibility will become actual—with his definition of real possibility, because the conditions supposedly determine the one content as really possible and the other content as merely formally possible. But Climacus shows that limitless multiplicity and uncertainty still plague real possibility, as the infinity of conditions prohibit thought

[25] *PF*, 82.

from constructing a full set of conditions to ground one content as really possible. Even in real possibility, thought still remains endlessly stuck within possibility and cannot move to real actuality. The uncertainty of the "how," prevents thought from moving to the "thus and so."

Kierkegaard explains that in the transition from possibility to actuality—there is a pause, "the pause of coming into existence and the pause of possibility."[26] Thought must wait for this gap between possibility and actuality to be closed. Thought does not *know* actuality from possibility, but rather, it merely *believes* and *has faith* that it knows which actuality will come to be from possibility.[27] Thought knows perhaps some or even many of the conditions, and it constructs a likely story of which actuality will come to be, but since it never has all the conditions (never has a real possibility), it never knows which actuality will result. Thought must wait for actuality to replace possibility and either confirm or deny its likely story. Thought "stands *in pausa* and waits for the coming into existence,"[28] for it is unable to pass over into actuality, unable to close this gap by itself. Thought can only ever think contingency from possibility, never necessity for possibility.

Similarly, Climacus says possibility and actuality are not a self-converging unity, because thought cannot move from actuality backward to its possibility—i.e. thought cannot move from the "thus and so" to the "how." Once a real possibility becomes a real actuality, its content is indeed certain, but the set of conditions which determined this content (its real possibility) still remains uncertain. The moment thought reflects on the certainty of actuality, and "that it has come into existence, that it has occurred, it makes

[26] *PF*, 80.
[27] Ibid., 83-85.
[28] Ibid., 80.

dubious what has come into existence in the coming into existence and its 'thus and so' in the possible how of coming into existence."[29] The same actuality can be brought about by many different sets of conditions, and there may always be factors that thought cannot access. Thought can never reconstruct with certainty the exact set of conditions that led to a given content. The actuality is certain, but the possibility remains uncertain, because thought cannot reconstruct the exact real possibility that led to this real actuality. Climacus writes, "the unchangeableness of the past is that its actual 'thus and so' cannot be different, but from this does it follow that its possible 'how' could not have been different."[30] There is too much multiplicity and uncertainty within real possibility to allow thought to reconstruct real possibility from real actuality.

According to Climacus, actuality that comes into existence is a "contradiction between certainty and uncertainty," between the certainty of actuality and the uncertainty of possibility, and this is the "*discrimen* [distinctive mark] of something that has come into existence."[31] Contrary to Hegel's view that grounding actuality in its possibility solidifies actuality as certain and knowable for thought, Climacus holds that attempting to ground actuality in its possibility produces the opposite result, namely, actuality becomes all the more dubious, mysterious, and uncertain for thought. Once thought reflects on the fact that actuality has come into existence from the limitless multiplicity of possibility, uncertainty creeps into actuality, shaking its foundation and certitude. Climacus says that actuality "becomes even less necessary through any apprehension of it."[32] And, "all apprehension,

[29] *PF*, 84.
[30] Ibid.,77.
[31] Ibid., 79.
[32] Ibid.

like all knowing, has nothing from which to give."[33] Contrary to Hegel, thought cannot ground actuality in its possibility, and as a result, actuality stands out all the more as ungrounded and partially opaque to thought, as baring the uncertainty of the possibility from which it came. Actuality is seen as all the more radically contingent, rather than as necessary, predictable, and knowable.

For example, Kierkegaard says that if an individual sees a star, he sees the star as actual and certain. But when thought goes on to consider that the star has come into existence from possibility, the certainty of this actuality begins to dissolve for thought.[34] Thought cannot reconstruct the exact "how" from this "thus and so." Thought cannot solidly ground actuality in its possibility. The certainty of actuality is grounded in the uncertainty of possibility. Actuality's foundation starts to dissolve and its certitude likewise dissolves for thought.

In all of this, Hegel's mistake is that he ignores the transition of coming into existence—the transition through which possibility becomes actuality. For Hegel, possibility simply "passes over" into actuality. Possibility is always already implicitly what actuality is explicitly, so no real transition takes place. Climacus believes, however, that the transition of coming into existence is indeed a decided change, a "break in continuity."[35] A real change takes place between possibility and actuality. Rather than simply becoming what it already was, possibility undergoes a drastic change, and is *destroyed* and replaced by actuality. Climacus writes, "the possible (not merely the possible that is excluded but even the possibility that is accepted) turns out to be nothing

[33] *PF*, 80.
[34] Ibid., 81.
[35] Ibid., 84.

the moment it becomes actual, for possibility is *annihilated* by actuality."[36] Certainly, the possibility that is excluded is destroyed. But more interesting, Kierkegaard says that the possibility that is accepted is likewise destroyed by actuality. The given content becomes actual, but through only one of the infinite possible how's that could make it actual. That is, if +A becomes actual, it becomes actual through only one of the possible sets of conditions that could make it actual, and the rest of these possible sets of conditions is destroyed. The infinite possibility of the how is destroyed forever in actuality.

As we have seen, it is the destruction of the multiple possible how within possibility, the change that happens between possibility and actuality, which prevents thought from moving automatically between possibility and actuality and seeing them as a dialectical unity. The multiple possible how of possibility prevents thought from leaping from possibility over into actuality. And it continues to haunt the certainty of actuality, which prevents thought from moving backward from actuality to its possibility. The transition of coming into existence radically separates, even while it connects, possibility and actuality. Because this transition is opaque to thought, thought cannot rethink these moments as a dialectical unity, necessity. Actuality is always thought and experienced as mysterious and contingent, and never as fully knowable and necessary.

Even if Hegel is correct to say that *if* thought truly had all the information, *then* it would see contingent actuality as necessity, Climacus believes this point is irrelevant in both thought and in existence. Thought *never* has all the information—neither in abstract metaphysics nor in concrete daily existence. Any attempt to know a contingent actuality from its possibility—so that we may say we know it will be such and so—is a silly attempt

[36] *PF*, 74.

to foresee the future. Any attempt to reconstruct the possibility from a given contingent actuality—so that we may say we knew it had to be such and so—is merely Hegel's ill-timed owl of Minerva taking flight at dusk, after everyone has already gone home for the day. Climacus says that "to want to predict the future (prophesy) and to want to understand the necessity of the past are altogether identical, and only the prevailing fashion makes the one seem more plausible than the other to a particular generation."[37] As we will see in Chapter Four, Kierkegaard believes that trying to see contingency as necessity is a distortion of reality. Some of his pseudonymous characters attempt to live according to Hegel's view, and they meet with comical and often disastrous results. Possibility and actuality do not self-converge in thought or in existence; we never see actuality as necessity, neither before nor after it has happened. We think and live under the modality of contingency and not that of necessity.

We have just seen that Climacus questions Hegel's view that particular actualities are necessity. Climacus also thinks Hegel fails to prove that actuality, seen now as the absolute metaphysical whole, is necessity, is self-grounding and self-grounded. We saw in Hegel's discussion of real actuality that absolute actuality (the current overall set of conditions) is grounded in possibility, and this possibility is a previous actuality (a previous overall set of conditions), and this actuality in turn is grounded in possibility, which is another previous actuality. The possibility of actuality is always in a prior actuality, but nowhere in this chain do we have an actuality that is in unity with its own possibility. There is no case where the actual and the possible as such self-converge. Hegel thinks actuality is immanently self-grounded, because actuality is grounded in previous actuality, that is, it

[37] *PF*, 77.

is grounded simply in itself. But this does not explain how the series of possibility and actuality as such is possible (and actual), for there is no place wherein possibility and actuality as such coincide.

Hegel's actuality is not a self-enclosing circle—wherein possibility and actuality of the absolute meet each other—but rather, actuality is an endless line formed by the continual flip-flopping dialectic between actuality and possibility. The possibility and the actuality of the absolute as such are radically separate—though somehow connected—moments. Possibility and actuality look ungrounded. Contingency as a whole looks ungrounded. Contingent actuality as a whole is contingent, and not necessary. We seem to have arrived at a version of the old standby cosmological argument: we are left looking for an ultimate ground for the series of possibility and actuality, for contingency as such.

It is worth noting that Climacus is certainly no great supporter of the traditional proofs for the existence of God. Indeed he spends a few pages criticizing them.[38] He believes that the cosmological proof, in particular, always relies on an illicit leap in thought. Having arrived at the Unknown or the First Cause, the thinker then wants to say that this Unknown is God, but "it is only a name we give to it."[39] This is a leap in thought, a contribution that the individual must actively add to the demonstration. Climacus does not wish to rely on proofs. Rather, the whole of the *Fragments* simply shows that, even when speculative thought is given its fair shot, even when all the rules of Hegelian dialectic are obeyed, thought realizes—if it is honest with itself—that it has limits. Speculative thought can do a lot, but it cannot do everything. The best a "proof" can do is show that there is something outside of thought and outside of immanence, such as the Unknown or the need

[38] *PF*, 39-43.
[39] Ibid., 39.

for a First Cause. The individual must then move to faith to discover something about God. Climacus has little patience indeed for the "God of the philosophers."

But for now, it seems that we are still looking for an explanation as to why the actual is actual. In the *Sickness Unto Death*, Anti-Climacus aptly sums up the ultimate defect of the speculative method, a concern with which Climacus would surely agree. Anti-Climacus writes, "Alas, for speculation's secret in comprehending is simply to sew without fastening the end and without knotting the thread, and this is why, wonder of wonders, it can go on sewing and sewing, that is, pulling the thread through. Christianity, on the other hand, fastens the end by means of the paradox."[40] Hegel sews his dialectic without first securing the end of the thread. He continually moves the thread through the stitches of possibility and actuality, weaving together a picture of absolute actuality, but the ends of his thread are not secured. Possibility and actuality—the ends of the thread—do not loop back to meet each other, and so, the dialectical stitches fall out and the weaving falls apart. It looks like a view of the absolute—just like a row of stitches—needs a knotted end—an absolute, external ground.

Anti-Climacus and Climacus think, then, that contingent actuality as a whole can only be explained by knotting the end of the thread—that is, by grounding contingency in transcendent necessity. What is the ultimate ground of possibility as such? What is the ultimate ground of contingent actuality as such? It is true that possibility and actuality must be grounded in prior actuality, but this prior actuality must be of a completely different metaphysical essence than that of contingency. This absolute actuality (transcendent necessity) must have nothing to do with possibility and coming into

[40] *SUD*, 93.

existence, which are the essence of contingency. Climacus says, "Necessity stands all by itself."[41] And, "the necessary is absolutely different from both [the possible and the actual]…the possible cannot be predicated of the necessary."[42] The essence of necessity is absolute actuality that "is always related to itself and is related to itself in the same way,"[43] and it has no need of coming into existence, for it is eternally full actuality and has no possibility that must come into existence to be actualized.

Thus, the ultimate ground of contingency is not found in contingency itself, but apart from contingency, in a metaphysically separate transcendent necessity. The ground of possibility—that everything is as possible as it is impossible—and the ground of contingent actuality—that every actuality is as possible as it is impossible—is transcendent necessity (God). Anti-Climacus agrees that "the being of God means that everything is possible, or that everything is possible means the being of God."[44] The possible is possible, and the possible is actual, if and only if there is transcendent necessity.

There is a reciprocal relation between contingency and transcendent necessity. But unlike in the Hegelian dialectic, Anti-Climacus and Climacus believe we cannot rethink these moments into a dialectical unity. It is interesting that in a post-Hegelian world Kierkegaard reverts back to a view of the metaphysical absolute that is divided between two separate realms of contingency and necessity. For Hegel, it is clear that "Absolute Necessity is not so much the necessary, still less *a* necessary, but *necessity*…there is only *one* subsistence."[45] According to Hegel, necessity is not a substantial being or force.

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[41] *PF*, 74.
[42] Ibid., 75.
[43] Ibid., 74.
[44] *SUD*, 40.
[45] *SL*, 554.

Necessity is merely the description of contingent actuality as such, a description of the relation between possibility and actuality that allows contingency to be self-grounded and self-grounding. Climacus deliberately contradicts Hegel's view and says that necessity is indeed *The Necessary*—a separate metaphysical being (God) who grounds contingency from the outside. He gives back to necessity its ontological status as a separate metaphysical substance, which has nothing to do with the dialectic of contingency, even though it grounds it. He splits the absolute apart once more into two separate metaphysical realms.

C. Absolute Necessity

In the final section, "Absolute Necessity," Hegel brings together the results of formal modality and real modality, to finish his explanation of why actuality is necessity—is immanently self-grounded and self-grounding contingency. He writes, "Absolute necessity is, therefore, the truth into which actuality and possibility as such, and formal and real necessity withdraw."[46] In formal modality, Hegel shows the necessity of contingency—possibility cannot help but become contingent actuality, through the internal movement of its formal structure alone. In real modality, Hegel shows the contingency of necessity—contingent actuality is self-sustaining because its contingent content continually gives rise to further possibilities and actualities. Hegel now unites the necessity of contingency and the contingency of necessity—the necessity within form and the contingency within content—to form one actuality that is self-grounded and self-grounding.

[46] *SL*, 552.

It is self-grounded, because the form of possibility cannot help but become contingent actuality. It is self-grounding, because its content serves as the material for its continual movement and sustainment. The necessity of contingency and the contingency of necessity form a single immanent actuality that is self-grounded and self-grounding. Actuality is absolute necessity, then, because it is contingent actuality that needs no external ground or force for its foundation and sustainment. Possibility must be actuality and actuality must generate further possibilities. As Hegel says, absolute necessity "*is, therefore, only because it is*."[47] Contingent actuality simply must be, and contingent actuality simply begets further contingent actuality.

Having looked at Hegel's view of modality through Climacus' eyes, we can see why Climacus and Anti-Climacus believe that Hegel does not adequately answer the initial question: how is the actual, actual? In the end, Hegel is unable to show that actuality is necessity, because he cannot show that possibility and actuality necessarily self-converge and self-sustain. Hegel's dialectic cannot get started. Hegel's dialectic cannot sustain itself. There is always a leap between possibility and actuality (the transition of coming into existence), which is opaque to thought and which prevents thought from seeing possibility and actuality as immanently self-grounded and self-grounding. Possibility and actuality are two radically separate, and yet somehow connected, moments. Contingent actuality is indeed contingent, for it lacks a complete ground for its being and justification. Without the free cause of transcendent necessity (God) to push possibility to actuality, actuality (both as a whole and in its moments) does not come into existence. Contingency and necessity are not two views on the same one totality. Contingency and necessity are

[47] *SL*, 552.

radically separate yet connected, and they must be continually connected for actuality to be as a whole and to become through its particular moments. Finally, then, with Climacus' help, we have filled in the steps necessary for understanding why Anti-Climacus says, "The philosophers are mistaken when they explain necessity as a unity of possibility and actuality—no, actuality is the unity of possibility and necessity."[48]

II. Response to Stewart

Before looking at Anti-Climacus' and Climacus' alternative approach to actuality, we should consider an objection to our position that Jon Stewart raises in his book, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered.* Stewart believes that commentators have long made the mistake of seeing Kierkegaard's discussion of modality in the *Fragments* as a critique of Hegel. These commentators do not themselves give an account of Hegel's view of modality, but they nonetheless jump to the conclusion that Kierkegaard is addressing Hegel. Commentators have made a gigantic issue out of a complete non-issue. Stewart argues that Kierkegaard is not attacking Hegel at all, but rather, he is addressing Kant's view of modality.[49]

Stewart is indeed correct to take to task these commentators who do not seem to understand Hegel. It is worth mentioning, though, that even Stewart himself does not give an account of either Hegel's or Kant's or Kierkegaard's views on modality to support his argument. I have taken Stewart's concern seriously, therefore, and I have tried to give a clear, straightforward explanation of Hegel's complex view of modality before bringing

[48] *SUD*, 36.
[49] Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, 355-359.

Kierkegaard into the discussion. Having done this, I have to disagree with Stewart's claim that Kierkegaard is critiquing Kant and not Hegel. I believe our thorough examination of both Hegel and Kierkegaard reveals that Kierkegaard is indeed addressing Hegel. I hope that through the analysis above, I have given, at the very least, a plausible story as to why Kierkegaard is responding to Hegel. I will now address the details of Stewart's main points.

First, Stewart claims that the position Kierkegaard criticizes is not really Hegel's position at all. He says that Hegel does not ever use the schema that possibility and actuality form necessity. Hegel uses more complex and differentiated categories—i.e. the subcategories within formal, real, and absolute modality. It is Kant who explicitly uses this simpler structure. In Kant's table of categories, the third category is the combination of the first two categories, so, necessity is the uniting of possibility and actuality. Since Kierkegaard uses these simpler modal categories, Stewart concludes that Kierkegaard is addressing Kant.[50] But it is incorrect to say that Hegel never uses this schema of possibility and actuality forming necessity. To the contrary, as we have seen, he uses this schema over and over. While he does use more differentiated subcategories, the dialectical movement always ends with contingency (that is, possibility and actuality) and necessity forming a dialectical unity. We see this dialectical structure in formal modality, real modality, and absolute modality. And the final section—which is the unity of the necessity of contingency and the contingency of necessity—is "Absolute Necessity." Hegel's structure easily and consistently maps onto the structure that possibility and actuality form necessity.

[50] Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, 357.

Stewart continues, however, that not only does this view not belong to Hegel, but Hegel wants to distance himself from it. He quotes Hegel in the *Encyclopedia Logic*: "it is true that necessity has been rightly defined as the unity of possibility and actuality. But when it is expressed only in this way, the determination is superficial and thus unintelligible."[51] I think Stewart is misreading this passage. It looks like Hegel is merely saying that Kant's schema is basically correct, but stands in need of further development. Kant's view is "superficial" and "unintelligible" only insofar as he has not thought through all its implications. Thought needs to draw out the internal movement, contradictions, and relations among these modal categories. If this schema is submitted to dialectical thought, we get something that looks more like Hegel's view—Kant's schema played out three times, in formal, real, and absolute terms. Hegel is not distancing himself from Kant, but is taking up and expanding Kant's view. It makes sense to assume that Kierkegaard is responding to Hegel's account, which is the further development of Kant's account.

Second, Stewart points out that Kierkegaard's pseudonym here, Johannes Climacus, never actually says that he is addressing Hegel.[52] Of course, this point can be turned against Stewart too, since Climacus never mentions Kant either. But beyond this point, we can find considerable evidence that Climacus is indeed referring to Hegel. The title of this section in which Climacus discusses modality is: "Interlude: Is the past more necessary than the future? Or has the possible, by having become actual, become more necessary than it was?" In Kierkegaard's *Journals and Papers*, in the section on "Freedom," there is an entry that begins with this same question and then goes on to explicitly reference Hegel. Kierkegaard writes, "Is the past more necessary than the future?

[51] Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, 357.
[52] Ibid., 358.

This can be significant with respect to the solution of the problem of possibility—how does Hegel answer it? In logic, in the doctrine of essence. Here we get the explanation that the possible is the actual, the actual is the possible. It is simple enough in a science, at the conclusion of which one has arrived at possibility. It is then a tautology." [53] Kierkegaard has in mind Hegel's discussion of modality that appears in the "Doctrine of Essence" in the *Science of Logic*. He seems worried that Hegel, by seeing possibility and actuality as a unity, gives a view of modality that is far too smooth, easy, and neatly rational. Of course possibility moves to actuality and actuality moves to another possibility, but, as we have seen, he cannot really show us why or how. Hegel gives us a correct, but useless tautology, a view of modality that does not help us deal with existence, which is full of leaps and limits and is always seen as radically contingent.

Furthermore, we know that Kierkegaard conceives of the Climacus pseudonym as his stand-in for a Hegelian-type metaphysician. Climacus tackles big metaphysical questions in pure thought, believing metaphysical thought alone can embrace the whole. Kierkegaard writes, "Hegel is a Johannes *Climacus* who does not storm the heavens as do the giants, by setting mountain upon mountain—but enters them by means of his syllogisms."[54] Each time, however, his Hegelian method seems to fail him. He continually hits leaps, limits, and paradoxes, and he eventually concludes that metaphysical thought alone cannot embrace the whole, as Hegel would wish it to. The whole can only be fully embraced through existence and religious faith.

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[53] *JP*, vol. 2, 1245; *Pap*. IV C 6.2.
[54] *JP*, vol. 2, 1575; *Pap*. II A 335.

Climacus says that the whole of the *Fragments* is supposed to be an abstract "thought-project,"[55] a "*propositio*,"[56] and a systematically "algebraic"[57] demonstration. The entire work is an "if, then" demonstration worked out in pure thought. He wants to see if thought really does form the self-enclosing Hegelian circle: when the "if" is assumed, the "then" follows, and the "then" reinforces and grounds the presupposition of the "if." Is Hegel right to think that the presupposition and the conclusion form a self-enclosing loop? Climacus concludes, here and elsewhere, that the Hegelian loop does not form. At the end of his thought-project, he writes, "But here I shall stop. Even if I were a better dialectician than I am, I would still have my limits. Basically, an unshakable insistence upon the absolute and absolute distinctions is precisely what makes a good dialectician. This is something we in our day have completely disregarded."[58] There is always a break between the "if" and the "then." It is always a version of the same old "so long—until"; the first term does not pass over into the second term. If the Hegelian is honest, he sees he cannot fully be a Hegelian. Here in particular, possibility does not pass over into actuality, and contingency does not pass over into necessity.

In his attempt to free Hegel from previous commentators' preconceived conclusion that Kierkegaard is always and only engaged in a polemic against Hegel, Stewart goes a bit too far here, and he dismisses a real point of contact between Hegel and Kierkegaard. There is more evidence to support the view that Kierkegaard is addressing Hegel and not Kant. In Ronald M. Green's book, *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt*, which is the only in-depth study written on the relation between Kierkegaard and Kant, Green never

[55] *PF*, 9.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid., 91.
[58] Ibid., 108.

says that Kierkegaard criticizes Kant's view of modality. He actually says very little on this subject—thus further suggesting that there is perhaps not much to be made of a possible point of contact here between Kierkegaard and Kant—but, if anything, he suggests that Kierkegaard agrees with Kant's basic view on modality, in opposition to Hegel's view. Green thinks that Kierkegaard agrees with Kant that speculative reason needs limits and that speculative categories have little relevance in existence. While reason has the innate desire to unify and give necessity to everything in existence, if reason is allowed to go this far, it presents us with a view of the world that stands in opposition to the complexity and messiness we experience within existence. Moreover, Green thinks Kierkegaard values Kant's appreciation of the radical contingency of contingency, that is, that contingency is always seen as contingency and never as necessity, regardless of the fancies of speculative reason.[59] Perhaps, in the end, Climacus ends up not a Hegelian, but a Kantian: the limits he finds in speculative reason allow him to leave room for faith.[60]

III. Kierkegaard's (Paradoxical) View of Actuality:

Possibility and Necessity form Actuality

What does Anti-Climacus mean by saying that "actuality is the unity of possibility and necessity"?[61] As a whole and in each of its moments, actuality is formed by the union of immanent possibility and transcendent necessity. This view emerges in response to the metaphysical flaws in Hegel's account of actuality. Yet, it is still a rather remarkable

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[59] Ronald M. Green, *Kierkegaard and Kant: The Hidden Debt* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 124-127.
[60] "Thus I had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith." Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 117.
[61] *SUD*, 36.

account of actuality, given Climacus' and Anti-Climacus' view of the absolute. As we have seen, due to the leaps and gaps in Hegel's account, they believe it is more honest to hold a non-Hegelian view of the absolute, as divided between two separate metaphysical essences (transcendent necessity and immanent contingency). Transcendent necessity "stands all by itself,"[62] completely apart from immanent possibility and from the dialectic of coming into existence, which characterize contingent actuality.[63] What Hegel attempts to bring together in speculative reason, Climacus—an initially would-be Hegelian—keeps separate, given the limits he finds even in speculative reason. How, then, can these two radically separate metaphysical essences unite to form contingent actuality? How can actuality be the unity of transcendent necessity and immanent possibility?

Immanent possibility and transcendent necessity are not united through necessity—through Hegel's logical "ground."[64] If they are not united by necessity, then they must be united by freedom, by Climacus' "freely acting cause."[65] Transcendent necessity freely descends into possibility, creating and continually sustaining (or, recreating) contingent actuality, both as a whole and in each of its moments. The necessary being's free descent into immanent possibility is repeated at each moment, creating and recreating actuality. Each actuality is a repetition of divine causation.[66] At each moment, actuality is recreated, and "behold all things have become new."[67] If God had not willed this repetition, then

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[62] *PF*, 74.
[63] Ibid., 74-75.
[64] Ibid., 75.
[65] Ibid.
[66] "God's willing of repetition is the condition in which there is a world at all…The world as a whole is not to be thought starting from presence or being but, from its very inception, as a recommencing. Every present, every span of duration, refers to a prior instant that does not fall within a continuum of presence. Each instant starts with itself, or is an absolute beginning." David J. Kangas, *Kierkegaard's Instant: On Beginnings* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), 101.
[67] II Cor. 5:17.

actuality would not be at all and it would not continue to become through its particular actualities. Constantin Constantius writes in *Repetition*, "If God himself had not willed repetition, the world would not have come into existence…Therefore, the world continues, and it continues because it is a repetition."[68] Actuality came into existence and continues to come into existence, because God wills its initial and continued existence. Climacus and Anti-Climacus emphasize that contingent actuality is indeed radically contingent, completely dependent upon this repeated paradoxical union, at each moment. Hegel's absolute actuality is nothing other than, and must exhibit itself as, contingent actuality. Kierkegaard's absolute actuality stands apart from and needs nothing from contingent actuality, but it freely decides to create and recreate contingent actuality.

Actuality, as a whole and in its moments, is a paradox, is absurd.[69] A paradox is the union of two self-contradictory elements, even while each element retains its own nature. A paradox is "offensive" to rationality, because it purports to unite two contradictory things that cannot be rationally united in thought.[70] Actuality is a paradox, because it unites two contrary metaphysical essences, even while each retains its own nature: transcendent necessity and immanent possibility—or, the Eternal and the temporal, the Idea and the concrete, Being and becoming, God and creation. It recalls the metaphysical structure of the "absolute paradox,"[71] the Incarnation: necessity enters contingency; eternity enters the temporal; God becomes man. There is nothing more

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[68] *FTR*, 133.
[69] Kierkegaard uses the terms "paradox" and "absurd" throughout his writings. While these terms generally refer to the "absolute paradox," the Incarnation, he uses these terms in other places without specific reference to the Incarnation as such. I am assuming that whenever he uses these terms, he has in mind the same general metaphysical and religious structure of the Incarnation, namely, the union of transcendent eternity and immanent temporality.
[70] *PF*, 50, 195-196; See also *CUP*, 585-586, 589-599.
[71] *PF*, 61-66; See also *CUP*, 213-234, 560-569.

absurd than to say that the eternal freely descends into and joins with the temporal. To say that actuality is this metaphysical paradox is the most offensive, ridiculous, and awkward conclusion that reason could achieve, yet Climacus believes he has shown it has to be so.

For Hegel, "what is rational is actual; and what is actual is rational." [72] Actuality takes the form of the Concept, and therefore, speculative reason sees actuality with the stable eye of rationality and necessity. For Kierkegaard, we might say that "what is paradoxical is actual; and what is actual is paradoxical." Actuality takes the form of paradox, and therefore, it is always seen as contingent and not completely knowable. The most familiar element, actuality, is the most unfamiliar, contingent, and absurd thing. As we recall, Anti-Climacus believes that, "speculation's secret in comprehending is simply to sew without fastening the end and without knotting the thread, and this is why, wonder of wonders, it can go on sewing and sewing, that is, pulling the thread through. Christianity, on the other hand, fastens the end by means of the paradox."[73] Hegel thinks he fastens down actuality with the most secure tool: reason. Anti-Climacus responds that actuality is best fastened down by the seemingly least secure tool: paradox, that which is "offensive" to reason. The thread of actuality is only secure when it is continually knotted, at each moment, to the paradox.

Paradox and absurdity are not words we expect to hear in a philosophical world after Hegel. Did Hegel not show us, once and for all, that there is no absolute, unmovable contradiction, and that all contradiction dissolves itself? Climacus thinks that Hegel convinces us only if we buy into the Method ahead of time and enter into the dialectic already believing that speculative thought is indeed a self-moving, self-enclosing,

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[72] *PR*, 20.
[73] *SUD*, 93.

teleological circle. We must assume as our presupposition the very outcome we hope to establish.[74] Using speculative reason to dissolve a paradox requires that we assume from the outset that speculative reason can dissolve paradox. As Climacus notes in the *Postscript*, this is a rather unfair "preliminary agreement," because "speculation judges between itself and the opposite of itself [paradox] and consequently is itself party and judge."[75] Speculative reason wishes to be both prosecutor and judge at the trial.

Both here and in Chapter One, Climacus shows us that if we do not agree to the presupposition of speculative reason—that it dissolves its own contradictions and is teleological and self-enclosing—and we simply follow Hegel's dialectic as it comes, we find that the dialectic can neither get itself going nor sustain itself. While Climacus wishes to be a good Hegelian, he finds himself disappointed at every turn. There are indeed limits, leaps, and paradoxes in thought. There is an outside to thought and to being. In fact, the most fundamental and seemingly familiar concepts—transition and actuality—the very foundations and crevices of metaphysics and existence, are the most paradoxical, insoluble, and transcendent. The very things Hegel wants most to explain—transition and actuality—are the ones he can least explain. Rather than freeing us form paradox, leap, and transcendence, in the end, Hegel only highlights their persistence all the more.

The only way to properly deal with paradox is to continually reaffirm what a paradox is—namely, the unity of two contradictory elements that cannot be dissolved in thought—and that actuality is indeed an instance of paradox. Climacus writes in the *Postscript*, "[T]he only possible understanding of the absolute paradox is that it cannot be understood. 'But then speculative thought cannot ever grasp it.' 'Entirely correct, this is

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[74] *PF*, 78.
[75] *CUP*, 376.

just what is said by the paradox in existence.'"[76] We think it foolish not to explain that which can be explained through reason. It is equally as "ludicrous" [77] to try to explain that which cannot be explained through reason. We must resist the temptation to become like the "assistant professors,"[78] who wish to show off by artificially explaining away all paradox and transcendence. We should fear that day "when the fullness of time finally comes, that matchless future, when a generation of assistant professors, male and female, will live on the earth" [79] and paradox will cease to exist.

Just as Socrates is wise because he respects the *aporia* in thought, here too, the wise man is wise because he respects the leaps and paradoxes in thought.[80] Rather than adopting the motto of his day to "go beyond Hegel,"[81] Climacus is more inclined to "go back to Socrates," we might say. Climacus succeeds in the mission he had originally set out for himself as a graduate student, sitting in the garden, cigar in hand, wondering what, if anything, there was left to accomplish in philosophy. Hegel and wanna-be Hegelians have made things a bit too *easy* for us all, for they have allegedly brought every part of being into the territory of the rational and the knowable.[82] Climacus had concluded that the only thing left for him to do, quite naturally, was to "make difficulties everywhere."[83] He returns to existence its contingency, paradox, and difficulty.[84]

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[76] *CUP*, 218.
[77] Ibid., 561-562.
[78] Ibid, 221
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid., 227-228.
[81] Ibid., 370.
[82] Ibid., 185-188.
[83] Ibid., 187.
[84] For a good summary of the main differences between Kierkegaard and Hegel, see Jean Wahl, *Ètudes Kierkegaardiennes* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1949), 130-158. "Par opposition au hégélianisme, Kierkegaard portera les termes à l'extrême et aiguisera les problèmes. La médiation ne peut réussir que lorsque les termes des problèmes sont émoussés…A la synthèse il opposera le dilemme, « *Enten Eller,* » mot de passe du Paradis, clef du ciel, à la médiation le saut et le paradoxe, à l'immanence la transcendance » 130

For Hegel, we embrace the whole by imitating the form of the whole—the rational. For Kierkegaard, we embrace the whole by imitating the form of the whole—the paradoxical. The individual brings together the divisions of the whole, by imitating and existing as the paradoxical form of actuality, by continually uniting in his existence transcendent necessity and immanent contingency. This is best achieved through the religious mode of existence. The knight of faith puts the whole back together, at each moment, by repeatedly imitating its paradoxical form in existence. The knight of faith repeatedly unites the transcendent and the immanent, the eternal and the temporal, the necessary and the contingent. How do we deal with a paradox? If we cannot mediate it, then we must repeat it. When dealing with true paradox, repetition is the only alternative to mediation. We cannot integrate the paradox by simply getting rid of it through mediation, by dissolving and subsuming it and moving on to the next term. We integrate the paradox by continually re-imitating the paradox at each moment. The paradox of actuality stubbornly repeats itself at each moment, so we must also stubbornly repeat it in existence, by continually existing as it, at each moment. The paradox of actuality cannot be gotten rid of once and for all. The division between transcendence and immanence cannot be gotten rid of once and for all. It takes a repeated effort, at each moment, to continually express the paradox of actuality, to continually unite transcendent necessity and immanent contingency.

Hegel wishes to encompass the absolute by speculative reason. Climacus finds this quite unattainable, but he does respect Hegel's great lesson that metaphysical contraries must be connected, and the transcendent must be brought back into the immanent. Climacus agrees with Hegel that it is the individual's privilege and responsibility to

encompass the entirety of the absolute—just not through speculative reason. We encompass the absolute by another way—through existence. While speculative reason reveals the absolute as divided and paradoxical, the absolute is put back together as one in existence, by the existing individual.

Part II:

Does Hegel's Metaphysics Apply to Everyday Life?

(What is it like to be a Hegelian in daily life?

Chapter Three

Navigating Transition in Everyday Existence

We have carefully followed Kierkegaard's pseudonyms as they work their way through the basic principles of Hegel's metaphysics. Even though their comments are cryptic, incomplete, and scattered across various texts and different pseudonyms, when these comments are pieced together, Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms collectively present a coherent and relevant metaphysical critique of Hegel's view of the Absolute. By going after Hegel's most basic metaphysical claims about transition and actuality, they arrive at an alternative view of the Absolute, which is divided between the divine and the human, radically dependent upon the divine, and apprehended by faith and not (solely) by reason.

Metaphysical critiques aside, Kierkegaard is even more known for his existential critiques of Hegel's system. Throughout his texts, Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms keep a constant eye on the "existing individual." They wonder whether Hegel's metaphysics is relevant to the individual in his concrete, temporal, daily existence. Hegel's principles were not meant to apply solely in abstraction or solely in pure metaphysics. The principles of Hegel's metaphysics are likewise the principles of concrete existence. At the end of the *Science of Logic*, the Concept goes forth from mind into nature, from the divine to the human, from the abstract to the concrete.[1] The Concept is the form not just of metaphysical categories, but also of existential beings. The principles that govern metaphysical transition and metaphysical actuality—namely, that each entity is internally self-contradictory movement and has the urge to dissolve this internal self-contradiction and

[1] *SL*, 842-844; see also *EL*, 138-139.

become a new unity—are the same principles that govern existential transition and existential actuality. Even if Hegel's views on transition and actuality work in metaphysics—though, as we have seen, Kierkegaard thinks that they do not work even in metaphysics—do these principles also work in concrete existence?

Having considered Hegel's system from the metaphysical perspective, we will now look at it from the existential perspective. In this chapter, we will discuss existential transition, and in the following chapter, existential actuality. Here we will look at the following questions: Does mediation explain transition in everyday existence? What allows the human to move forward into the future?

I. Skepticism about Transferring Mediation from Metaphysics to Existence

In the *Postscript*, Climacus complains that if the Hegelian philosopher is honest with himself, then he must admit that he does not believe in or use his own philosophy in daily life. The Hegelian is "transmogrified into speculative thought," [2] dragged out into the indeterminateness of abstraction, and required to become a "ludicrous creature" [3] that does not resemble the human being. He abstracts from temporal, concrete existence in order to assume the abstract viewpoint on being *sub specie aeterni*. This abstract perspective is convincing only in those occasional moments when he becomes this abstract being that observes abstract Being. When he comes back down to the firm ground of existence, he quickly forgets these speculative fancies. [4] When the Hegelian reemerges as

[2] *CUP*, 117.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., 115-120, 189-193.

one of the "pleasant people" [5] of daily life and becomes once more "like the rest of us," [6] he must acknowledge that his metaphysics has little sway over his existence. Hegel's metaphysics may not quite apply to concrete existence. This is something even "the honored professor himself admits, if not always, then every three months when he draws his salary." [7] Climacus suggests that the impressive edifice of abstract thought does not shelter the individual from the hustle and bustle of existence. Perhaps it is true that Hegel is "like a man who builds an enormous castle and himself lives alongside it in a shed." [8]

Climacus—Hegelian-minded as he is—readily concedes that "mediation looks fairly good on paper." He continues, "[t]he process is quite simple, really. First one assumes the finite, then the infinite, and then one says on paper: this must be mediated. An existing person has unquestionably found there the secure foothold outside existence where he can mediate—on paper." [9] A category is internally contradictory, and it is tempting to make the transition to the next term, especially when Hegel has already provided us with the next term ahead of time. Hegel's metaphysical system is eternally past. Since the entire series of terms is given in advance, it is easy to cheat a little and to ignore the leaps that exist between terms. A likely story is constructed about how the first term dissolves itself and "necessarily" moves to the next term.

Climacus worries, though, that mediation might indeed only work "on the paper" of metaphysics, if it works anywhere at all. Existence, unlike metaphysics, is never fully given. Existence is "at no moment finished," [10] and is a "continual striving" [11] lived forward

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[5] *CUP*, 115.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid., 192.
[8] *JP*, vol. 3, 3308; *Pap*. VII A 82.
[9] *CUP*, 333.
[10] Ibid., 124.
[11] Ibid.

into an indeterminate future. Hegel cannot hand us the next term ready-made and in advance. Even if the individual could ignore the leap between terms in metaphysics, he cannot cheat and ignore the leap in existence. In existence, the leap between terms stands out all the more as extended, intimidating, and transcendent to reason.

When mediation is lifted out of abstract metaphysics and placed into daily existence, it may not work in such a tidy fashion. Mediation already seems mysterious on the paper of metaphysics, and perhaps it becomes even more mysterious when applied to everyday life. Climacus writes,

> There is this continual talk about mediation and mediation. Is mediation, then, a human being[?]…How does a human being go about becoming something of that sort?...Just try to become involved with these and other similar simple questions raised by a simple human being, who would so very much like to be mediation if he could become that in a legitimate and honorable manner, and not by saying *eins*, *zwei*, *drei*, *kokolorum* or by forgetting that he himself is an existing human being.[12]

Has there ever been a human being who lives by mediation? What would a life governed by mediation look like?

What if Hegel cannot answer these simple, commonsense questions? At worst, the earnest student should feel irritated and a bit mistreated. He has spent much time straining to gain an "absolute knowledge"[13] that seems irrelevant to life. Hegel has disappointed a youth who wanted nothing more than to understand Hegel and to find in his philosophy a truth in which he could live. Climacus writes, "And even though it takes an eminently logical head to recast Hegel's logic, only sound common sense is needed…to perceive that in many places Hegel behaved irresponsibly, not toward grocers—who believe only half of what a person says anyway—but toward enthusiastic youths who believed him." [14]

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[12] *CUP*, 198.
[13] The final stage of consciousness in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Sprit* is titled "Absolute Knowing."
[14] *CUP*, 117-118.

Climacus is likely speaking from experience. In his autobiographical text, *De Omnibus Dubitandum Est*, Climacus tries to enter into modern philosophy and to see if the individual can relate to modern philosophy.[15] The text ends unsuccessfully; he abandons the work, leaving it unfinished. Perhaps Climacus himself feels like Hegel dealt "irresponsibly" with him when he was an eager student.

At best, the earnest student should just laugh at the manifest contradiction in which Hegel lands himself. His comprehensive system cannot answer the most basic question: Does this philosophy work for the existing individual? The student should allow laughter to "consume in Hegel what laughter may legitimately claims as its own."[16] A system that promises everything delivers both everything and nothing. Although, with his love of dialectically contradictory unities, perhaps Hegel would love for the student to see just exactly this ironic conclusion. Maybe the one who honors Hegel the most is not the one who simply accepts and repeats his philosophy verbatim—like many "Danish Hegelians" of Climacus' day—but the one who recognizes and laughs at the contradiction forever at the center of his philosophy.[17] But then, we are still rightfully tempted to ask Hegel: What was the point of all of this? Why should the individual care about your philosophy? This is the question Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms repeatedly ask of Hegel.

II. Putting Mediation into Existence: The Aesthete as Hegelian Philosopher

Kierkegaard's aesthete attempts to answer Climacus' concerns. The aesthete is an astute and dedicated student of Hegel. Having understood Hegel's metaphysics, he

[15] *JC*, 147-156.
[16] *CUP*, 118.
[17] Ibid.

advances the Hegelian cause and applies these principles to concrete, daily existence. The aesthete believes that a human can indeed live according to mediation. A human can "be mediation," and not just a human who happens to mediate on paper and only occasionally when the metaphysical mood strikes.[18] The aesthete writes, "I am continually *aeterno modo*. Many believe they, too, are this when after doing one thing or another they unite or mediate these opposites. But this is a misunderstanding, for the true eternity does not lie behind either/or but before it." [19] Thus, "[t]he philosopher, then, is continually *aeterno modo* and does not have, as did the blessed Sintensi, only specific hours that are lived for eternity." [20] Speculative thought applies even to concrete existence, to movement lived forward into an uncertain future. But as we will see, the aesthete meets with some unfortunate and puzzling results. Speculative thought does reveal the important Hegelian truth that all things in existence—as well as in metaphysics—are internally mediated and restless. But this truth does not inspire the aesthete to move forward, as Hegel promises it will. The aesthete does not move at all. Mediation does not fully explain how movement happens in existence. In transferring mediation from metaphysics to existence, Kierkegaard's concern that Hegel has never explained transition is exposed once more and all the more.

Let us quickly review how Hegel uses mediation to explain transition. In brief, we recall from Chapter One that each category is the mediation of itself and its negation, and therefore, since each category is internally self-contradictory movement back and forth

[18] The aesthete can be described in many ways, each of which highlights different aspects of the aesthetic perspective on life, and it is not our intention to simply reduce the aesthete to this one trait of Hegelianism. However, in many cases, and perhaps in all cases, the aesthete does display this Hegelian mindset in one way or another, and this is what we will focus on here.
[19] *EO1*, 39.
[20] Ibid., 40.

between itself and its negation, it has the urge to dissolve this internal contradiction and to move to a new category that incorporates these contrary moments into a new unity. Hegel illustrates this process particularly well in his discussion of the laws of non-contradiction and excluded middle. According to the traditional understanding of the law of non-contradiction, a thing is equal to itself and only to itself, is a self-enclosed unity. (+A = +A and –A = –A). But, in rethinking the law of non-contradiction, Hegel says that when we think of +A, we automatically also think of its negation, –A. +A can only be +A if it excludes that which is different from it, –A. +A depends upon –A in order to +A at all. +A is the mediation of itself and its negation, –A. +A is not a simple, self-subsistent identity, but rather, +A is internal contradiction and restless movement between itself and –A. In the same way, –A depends upon +A to be –A. –A is also internal self-contradictory movement between itself and +A. +A and –A are not opposed contraries, but rather, they have the same internal truth. They are both internal movement between the one and the other, which Hegel calls "ground." Ground has the urge to dissolve itself and to move to a new unity. The principle of non-contradiction is not the most basic principle of all things. Internal contradiction and restless movement are the truth of all things and are likewise the source of all transition to new being.[21]

Hegel illustrates this process once more when he discusses the law of excluded middle, which is simply another iteration of the law of non-contradiction. According to the traditional law of excluded middle, a thing is either +A or –A, and there is no third term between them. But Hegel says that there is a third, and this third is already given in the law itself: "A." "A" is neither endpoint, is neither +A nor –A, but is also both +A and –A,

[21] *SL*, 409-447; *EL*, 81-87.

because it is the common ground on which each rests and which makes this exclusionary relation between the two possible in the first place. There is no strict either/or between these contraries. They both fall to this common ground and have the same internal truth (A). This internal truth, Hegel's ground, is once again the self-contradictory movement back and forth between each contrary, and ground has the urge to dissolve itself and to move to a new unity.[22] (We recall from chapter one, of course, that Kierkegaard objects to this move, because he thinks that we only ever get as far as ground, the zero point, and never to a new, third term. We get as far as the internal truth of each thing as mediation, but this internal movement does not produce movement between terms, movement forward to a new term.)

In the "Diapsalmata," the aesthete adopts Hegel's rethinking of the laws of non-contradiction and excluded middle to show how mediation helps us to navigate transition in existence.[23] According to Judge William, the aesthete thinks all life and all movement can be summed up in one principle, in his one "pet theory"[24]: "Do it, or do not do it—you will regret it either way."[25] For the aesthete, the seemingly contradictory options of +A and –A both yield the same result. They have the same internal truth (regret). The aesthete

[22] *SL*, 438-489; see also *EL*, 85-86.
[23]Many scholars have mentioned that the aesthete's position is Hegelian. But no scholar has ever explicitly shown why it is Hegelian, shown how Hegelian metaphysics and mediation underlie his existential position. They simply take for granted that his view is Hegelian without explaining why, specifically, this causes the aesthete to annul the disjunctive either/or. See Clare Carlisle, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Becoming* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 51-58; Shannon Nason, "Opposites, Contradictories, and Mediation in Kierkegaard's Critique of Hegel," *Heythrop Journal: A Bimonthly Review of Philosophy and Theology* 53, no. 1 (January 2012): 27-30. But ignoring the Hegelian philosophy underneath the aesthete's position predisposes us to easily write off the aesthete's position as merely comical, naïve, and deficient—which is often the case among scholars. But when we pay attention to the Hegelian context, we see that the aesthete's position is metaphysically grounded, and therefore, quite serious and accurate to life. The aesthete is often not given the credit he is due. As we show here, however, the aesthete—and therefore also Hegel—is not so easy to dismiss.
[24] *EO2*, 147.
[25] Ibid.

agrees with Hegel that the law of non-contradiction is not the truth of all things. In Kierkegaard's *Journals and Papers*, the aesthete provides extra commentary on this passage from the Diapsalmata. He writes:

> Either it is this or it is that; since nothing in life is either this or that, it [the Either/Or] does not, of course, exist. I have watched conjurers do their acts, heard them explain it, seen the crowd amazed, but all the same I have done far more singular things with my magic formula. One can explain everything away—indeed, one can help oneself superbly.[26]

Since nothing is simply "either this or that," it is not the case that a thing is equal to itself and only to itself. Seemingly contrary options are not rigid, self-enclosed, contradictory identities. Rather, each is a mediation of itself and its opposite, and both fall to the same common ground. +A is only +A in relation –A, and –A is only –A in relation to +A. They share the same internal truth: self-contradictory movement between the one and the other.

In the same way, since nothing is "either this or that," the aesthete also agrees with Hegel that the either/or, the law of excluded middle, is a superficial view of existence. Judge William sums up the aesthete's "motto"[27] saying, "these words are not, as grammarians think, disjunctive conjunctions; no, they belong inseparably together and therefore ought to be written together in one word, since in union they form an interjection that you shout at mankind" [28]: that is, Either—Or. Since the one cannot be without the other, they are not strict disjunctions. Rather, they share the same internal truth and should be written together as the single dialectical unity that they in truth are: –A —+A (or simply, A). Each contrary option is both +A and –A, and neither +A nor –A, because they fall to the same ground, to the missing middle of the law of excluded middle. This common

[26] *Pap*. III B 179:62.
[27] *EO2*, 159.
[28] Ibid.

ground is neither endpoint. Yet, it is also both, because it is their common internal truth—Hegel's ground—as this restless movement between the one and the other internal to both.

The aesthete follows Hegel as far as ground, but here he gets stuck. Mediation does not provide a determinate way forward. As the aesthete sees it, the two options are not different at all. Whether the one or the other comes to pass does not really matter, because they share the same internal truth. It is not the case that +A or –A comes to pass, as simply either this or that nice, neat self-identity. Instead, in each case, it is always their common internal truth that happens: Hegel's ground or mediation. The one that happens necessarily brings with it the thought and essence of its excluded negation. It is impossible to escape the negation completely, because the one comes with its sublated other. They come together as a packaged deal, as a Hegelian dialectical unity. The aesthete uses speculative reason to see into the truth of (seemingly) contrary options, in order to see how best to move. But mediation gives no determinate way forward. It gives no singular best move. The truth of all future events is always the same: ground, the restless movement of mediation internal to a situation. There is no reason to move here or there or anywhere.

Consequently, the aesthete concludes: Do it or do not do it—you will regret it either way, and "[t]his gentlemen, is the quintessence of all wisdom of life." [29] Regret is the concrete, existential experience of being caught up in the endless dialectic of Hegel's abstract ground (of being caught up in mediation itself). When Hegel's metaphysics is placed into existence, the individual experiences Hegel's great insight that all things are internally mediated and restless as "regret." Regret has the same internal dialectical movement between the one option and its negation. If an individual regrets something, he

[29] *EO1*, 39.

sees that one option has come to pass at the necessary exclusion of its contrary option—it is a mediation of itself and its excluded negation—and since he cannot completely escape the thought of this excluded negation, he is always aware of and wonders whether it could have or should have been instead. He regrets that he cannot escape the excluded other. He continues to feel its presence, even though it is an absent, sublated moment.

No matter what, the individual will always experience regret as the fundamental outcome of all future events. One option will come to pass, but since it relies on the exclusion of its opposite, the individual will experience the thought and essence of this excluded negation along with the one that happens, and he will always wonder whether it should have been instead, or even wish that it could have been instead. He will always regret that it cannot simply be "either this or that" neat and tidy event, but that each comes as a mediation of itself and its negation, and he cannot ever leave the other behind. The individual is painfully aware of the negation. He is painfully aware of the metaphysical instability at the heart of all things. He cannot stop wondering what could have been instead.

The aesthete laments, "I feel as a chessman must feel when the opponent says of it: that piece cannot be moved." [30] There are no moves available in this game. He does not move here or there, because each move has the same result: game over, checkmate. No matter the situation, any movement forward ends in the same place: the dead end of regret. Since no move makes rational sense, the aesthete opts out of movement altogether. Instead, he lets life decide for him and carry him along. Hegel is correct that mediation (ground) is the truth of all life and all movement, but he does not tell the individual how to deal with

[30] *EO1*, 22.

this metaphysical instability. Metaphysical instability is experienced as existential instability and dissatisfaction, as regret. This instability inspires paralysis, and not movement forward into the future. Speculative reason and mediation alone cannot explain or help the individual to navigate transition forward in existence.

The aesthete throws in the towel. Movement forward always ends in regret, so movement forward is foolish and should be avoided. He reflects, "Time passes, life is a stream, etc., so people say. That is not what I find: time stands still, and so do I. All the plans I project fly straight back at me; when I want to spit, I spit in my own face."[31] Any plan he ventures boomerangs back to him with the same message: regret, futility, there is no reason to bother with the one or the other. If he moves, he deserves all the regret he will assuredly receive. He might as well spit in his own face, for he knowingly brings mockery and disgust upon himself. The aesthete stands still, and he advises the prudent person to do the same. After all, his principle applies to all situations—without exception.

For example, he declares, "Marry or do not marry, you will regret it either way."[32] It is not the case that marrying is simply marrying and not-marrying is simply not-marrying. Marrying depends upon not-marrying to be what it is, and when we think of marrying, we automatically also think of its negation, not-marrying. In the same way, not-marrying also depends on its negation, marrying, to be what it is. Marrying—committing one's life to a spouse and family—relies on excluding its negation from itself, not-marrying—committing one's life to oneself, or living one's life free to do as one chooses. Not-marrying—living one's life freely for oneself—requires the exclusion of its negation, marrying—sharing one's life with someone else. The one cannot be without the other.

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[31] *EO1*, 26.
[32] Ibid., 38.

They share the same internal truth. They fall to the same ground: each is internally self-contradictory movement between itself and its negation. Consequently, there is no rigid either/or between them. It is an either—or; it is marrying—not-marrying. Marrying—not-marrying is the missing middle of the law of excluded middle, because it is neither endpoint and yet both. It is the internal movement between the one and the other that lies at the center of both marrying and not-marrying.

Marrying and not-marrying are not two different options. What comes to pass is the packaged deal of marrying—not-marrying, which is experienced as regret. If the individual marries, he drags along the thought and essence of not-marrying. If he commits to a wife and family, he will always wonder about and perhaps even wish for what could have been had he reserved more freedom for himself. Maybe he could have taken that interesting job, or moved to that exotic country, or at least had fewer daily annoyances like being blamed by his wife for leaving his wet towel on the bathroom floor. Or, if he does not marry, he lugs along the thought and essence of marrying. If he lives with greater freedom for himself, he will always wonder about and wish for what could have been had he shared his life with a wife and family. Maybe he would have liked having a lifelong companion and having holiday meals surrounded by children and grandchildren. The excluded negation always haunts and unsettles the option that happens. The negation remains all too present even though it is absent, and the individual regrets that it refuses to go away. Either way, he feels like he cannot get it quite right. He cannot feel settled. Mediation gives no clear path forward. Marry or not-marry? They are—regrettably—the same. He lets life decide.

The aesthete gives us another, very different example: "Laugh at the stupidities of the world or weep over them, you will regret it either way." [33] The individual cannot do one or the other, for the essence of laughing depends upon the essence of weeping, and the essence of weeping depends upon the essence of laughing. Laughing at the world—brushing things off, not taking things too seriously—depends upon excluding its negation, weeping over the world—taking things seriously enough to mourn them when they are gone. Weeping over the world—taking things seriously enough to mourn them—depends upon excluding its negation, laughing—taking things lightly enough to brush them off with a chuckle. They share the same ground, the same internal truth: restlessness between the one and the other.

It is not laugh/weep. It is laugh—weep. The one always comes with the excluded other. If the individual laughs over the world, he wonders if he should, and even wishes that he could, weep over it instead. He regrets that he does not take things more seriously and that he does not see himself, his life, and the world as meaningful enough to mourn. Shouldn't that relationship that has ended meant more to him? Shouldn't that job that he lost been more valuable to him? But if he weeps over the world, he wonders if he should, and even wishes that he could, laugh at it instead. He regrets that he cannot take himself less seriously, that he cannot brush things off, lighten up a little, and laugh more. Why is he so attached to this particular relationship or job that has ended? Shouldn't he be able to just move on? If he laughs, he wonders why he is not weeping. If he weeps, he wonders why he is not laughing. He always feels like he is in the wrong. Or, at least, he never feels like he is fully in the right.

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[33] *EO1*, 38.

In his *Journals and Papers*, Kierkegaard himself notes this pervasive feeling of regret: "I have just now come from a gathering where I was the life of the party; witticisms flowed out of my mouth; everybody laughed, admired me—but I left, yes, the dash ought to be as long as the radii of the earth's orbit ——————————————— and wanted to shoot myself."[34] He cannot seem to win. The negation lies alongside the one that happens, destabilizing it. Weeping and despairing lie alongside laughing and rejoicing. Knowing the speculative truth of future events makes it rationally impossible to move. It is better to opt out and to let life decide how much of a sense of humor he will have toward it.

The aesthete gives us a final example: "Hang yourself or do not hang yourself, you will regret it either way."[35] Hanging oneself—making oneself into nothing—depends upon the exclusion of not-hanging oneself—remaining in being—and vice versa. What comes to pass is always their common ground: hang oneself—do not hang oneself. If the individual remains in being, he is continually aware that he could take himself out of being at any moment. He continually wonders what it would be like to make himself into nothing and to simply end this whole charade. If he becomes nothing, he does so knowing that he could, and wondering whether he should, remain in being. When he is in being, he wonders what it would be like to be nothing. When he becomes nothing, he wonders what it would be like to continue being. He regrets that he cannot simply be or not be. He always lives as this dialectical unrest between being and nothing. He is always this metaphysical

[34] *JP*, vol. 5, 5141; *Pap*. I A 161.
[35] *EO1*, 38.

instability of becoming. The aesthete cannot help but ask himself, "What am I good for? For nothing and for anything whatsoever."[36]

In his daily existence, the aesthete concretely experiences the metaphysical instability that Hegel describes in the opening of his *Logic* (and throughout the entire *Logic*). The truth of all Being—concrete, existential Being as well as abstract, metaphysical Being—is always Becoming, is always the movement internal to Being between Being and Nothing. The truth of all life and all movement is instability, is internal mediation and restlessness between the one and its negation. In Hegel's metaphysics, this internal Becoming is teleological. Metaphysical instability produces the next term and the next term, all the way to its ultimate, self-enclosing *telos*. But in existence, the next term(s) and the ultimate *telos* are not given ahead of time. It is more difficult for the individual to deal with this restless Becoming and instability at the center of all things, because Hegel is not standing at the end of the existential dialectic, coaxing the individual safely along, term by term, to a purposive end. In the face of an open, indeterminate future, it is difficult to know what to do with the mediation of all things. Each situation is Becoming…but becoming toward what? The individual is Becoming…but becoming toward what? For the aesthete, recognizing the Becoming of all things is the source of paralysis and not movement forward into the future.

The aesthete sums up his attitude toward life saying, "I don't feel like doing anything. I don't feel like riding—the motion is too powerful; I don't feel like walking—it is too tiring; I don't feel like lying down, for either I would have to stay down, and I don't feel like doing that, or I would have to get up again, and I don't feel like doing that,

[36] *EO1*, 26.

either. *Summa Summarum*—I don't feel like doing anything."[37] Mediation shows him that he will never be satisfied. He will never get it right. Satisfaction can only come from outsmarting the dialectic of regret, from sidestepping the instability of all things, by not moving at all and letting life move him whichever way it will. The aesthete feels best when he hides from the dialectic: "When I get up in the morning, I go right back to bed again. I feel best in the evening the moment that I put out the light and pull the feather-bed over my head. I sit up once more, look around the room with indescribable satisfaction, and then good night, down under the feather-bed."[38] If only he could avoid the dialectic all of the time, and not just some of the time, like when he is hiding under the covers.

But perhaps the story is not over yet. In *Either/Or*'s "Rotation of Crops," the aesthete tries out another solution for dealing with the mediation of all things. Boredom, which is similar to regret, does not have to end in paralysis; it can inspire continual movement and discovery of new being. The aesthete makes the humorous diagnosis—and it is humorous because it is true—that all human beings are boring. He writes, "People with experience maintain that proceeding from a basic principle is supposed to be very reasonable; I yield to them and proceed from the basic principle that all people are boring. Or is there anyone who would be boring enough to contradict me in this regard?"[39] The common truth of all life and all movement is boredom. Whatever comes to pass, it is really boredom that comes to pass.

Boredom has the same structure as regret. Boredom is another way of experiencing in concrete existence the Hegelian metaphysical instability of all things. An individual

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[37] *EO1*, 20.
[38] *EO1*, 26.
[39] Ibid., 285.

experiences boredom when his present situation is uninteresting, tiresome, or somehow unsatisfying, and he wishes he were doing something else. He finds the present situation unsatisfying because he is aware that it depends upon the necessary exclusion of its negation, and since he is aware of the negation along with the present situation, this other becomes more appealing, for it presents a new and different alternative. If the individual could experience either this or that as a nice, neat self-identity he would not experience boredom, because he would be unaware of the negation along with the present situation, and he would be resigned to simply accept the situation as it is. But since what comes to pass is always "either—or," the Hegelian packaged deal of the two, all situations ultimately cease to satisfy. The negation continually unsettles the one that happens, and it becomes a more interesting option. It is an alternative, a lingering perhaps.

Whether it is the student who is uninterested in class, the child who tires easily of a single activity, or the adult who it dissatisfied with his job or relationship, all discontent and restlessness in life is boredom. It is the concrete experience of the Hegelian mediation and instability of all situations. The individual is always aware of, wonders about, and even wishes for the lingering negation. The situation is never stable—it is internally mediated restless—and the individual never feels stable or full while doing it. He is conflicted and unsettled, wishing he could recapture the absent other. The individual never gets it quite right, because what comes to pass is itself never quite right. The aesthete might as well say, "do it or do not do it, you will be bored either way." Borrowing a verse from Aristophanes for the frontispiece of his text, the aesthete claims, "At last one has too much of everything. Of love, rolls, the arts, and sweets. Of honor, cakes, bravery, and dried figs.

Of fame, of scrambled eggs, of authority, of vegetables."[40] The situation is always more interesting on the other side. The situation is always more boring on this side.

Instead of remaining paralyzed in the face of boredom, the aesthete of "Rotation of Crops" attempts to embrace and to live according to the Hegelian metaphysical instability of all things. In Hegel's metaphysics, ground is always the pivotal moment in the dialectic when reason sees that the current term is, in truth, mediated and wants to dissolve itself and pass over to a new term. For the aesthete, boredom—the concrete experience of Hegel's ground—likewise serves as the pivotal moment in the existential dialectic when the individual sees that the current situation is, in truth, mediated and unstable and wants to move to something new. When the situation falls to the ground of boredom, the individual should take this as a sign that it should be dissolved and that he should move to something new. The aesthete thinks that the individual should always be open to the inevitable passing over of all situations. He should move as the situation moves. The antidote to boredom is to continually move with boredom.

The aesthete advises the individual to avoid long-term commitments, such as a long-term relationship or job, which would project him forward indefinitely into a determinate future and would prevent him from moving continually. In the "Diapsalmata," the aesthete is paralyzed because he sees movement as a giant, determinate leap forward into the future, either to this or to that, which locks him into one situation. And if he moves to this or that, once and for all, he surely dooms himself to the boredom (or regret) of the either—or, to forever wondering about the negation left behind at the beginning. The excluded negation is even more appealing against the backdrop of sameness, repetition,

[40] *EO1*, 284.

and duration. Therefore, the aesthete now thinks that the individual should engage in activities that do not commit him to anything in the future. The solution to boredom is continual movement between short-term, aimless, amusing pursuits.

The individual can take on a job or relationship, as long as he does not fully commit himself to it. He should commit only for the short-term, only partway and for a while, so that he "has enough reserve speed to run away from them," should boredom loom.[41] When the commitment is only short-term, the negation is only excluded for the short-term. The individual does not doom himself to boredom from the get-go, for he can retrieve the negation a bit later on, if he wants to. The negation is not excluded once and for all, but is simply placed aside temporarily, to be retrieved later as an interesting alternative. The individual does not have to worry about choosing either this or that, and dooming himself to the boredom of the "either—or," because he can choose this, then that, then this other, than that other, and continually move along with rootless ease. If all things are the restless tension of the "this—that," then do "this—that." Do this, then that, then this other, etc. The aesthete advises the individual to use boredom as the impetus for continual movement. Boredom is the sign that the self-contradictory nature of the situation has risen to the surface, and it is time to dissolve it and move on.

For example, a couple should never vow to stay together forever. They should commit themselves to a certain period of time, and then reevaluate their relationship: Is the relationship interesting enough to continue or has it become boring and should be ended? The aesthete writes, "If instead of saying, 'throughout eternity,' they would say 'until next Easter, until next May Day,' then what they say could make some sense, for then they

[41] *EO1*, 295-296.

would be saying something and also something they perhaps could carry out."[42] Otherwise, the situation quickly becomes like that "of the gypsy woman who carried her husband on her back throughout life, [which was] very tiring in the long run—for the husband."[43] The aesthete thinks that Hegel is correct: everything is unstable and temporary. The individual's commitments and paths of motion should likewise be unstable and temporary. He should not impose artificial existential stability on metaphysical instability. It is better to embrace this Hegelian truth and to move with the restlessness and boredom of all things. While everything is boring in the long-term, everything is satisfying in the short-term.

In all that he does, the individual should pursue activities that can be easily left behind. He should chase the arbitrary, the accidental, and the amusing. For once these are over, they are simply over. They have no larger *telos* or broader context. They do not project him forward into the future or entangle him in a larger context of norms. The individual does not become bored, because the situation is over so quickly that the individual does not miss the other. The aesthete recommends many amusing and arbitrary activities. For example, boredom could be avoided if money is given out to the people of Denmark to spend on games of all sorts. Or, someone could kidnap the emperor, as this unexpected heist could engage the Danes for a while. Then again, the emperor could be sold to the Turks, and this money added to the public fund to keep the games coming.[44] (Of course, the emperor might be relieved to be sold and to be rid of his boring duties as emperor. He might enjoy being free like everyone else to engage in pleasant distraction. Without his own diversions, Denmark's emperor is just as miserable as Pascal's *roi sans*

[42] *EO1*, 296.
[43] Ibid., 297.
[44] Ibid., 287.

la divertissement.) Grander schemes aside, the aesthete also provides examples of everyday accidental amusements: the individual could see the middle of a play, read the third section of a book, or focus on the sweat collecting on a boring lecturer's brow rather than on his presentation.[45] Any amusement will suffice, provided it is short-term and aimless. It must be easily left aside in favor of continual, directionless movement.

We admire the aesthete's ingenuity, but we wonder if something is still not right. Even the aesthete himself worries about his solution. He writes, "My life is utterly meaningless. When I consider its various epochs, my life is like the word *Schnur* in the dictionary, which first of all means a string, and second a daughter-in-law. All that is lacking is that in the third place the word *Schnur* means a camel, in the fourth a whisk broom."[46] Though the aesthete constantly moves, he does not really move at all. He gets nowhere and does nothing. He passes his life running in circles, aimlessly "rotating crops." His movement produces a series of disparate and dispersed points. No connection can be made between the "daughter-in-law" era and the "whisk broom" era of his life. There is no cohesive path of motion through his life. He avoids the essential and intimidating element of movement in existence: the future. In moving, he actually flees from movement.

Here again, the aesthete opts out of movement. Here again, mediation inspires stasis. He accomplishes just what he accomplishes in "The Diapsalmata"—avoiding the dialectic and getting nowhere—though he arrives there by the opposite way. The aesthete tries to move according to the Hegelian mediation of all things. When a situation falls to

[45] *EO1*, 299.
[46] Ibid., 36.

the "ground" of boredom in the existential dialectic, he recognizes that its self-contradictory nature has risen to the surface and it is time to dissolve this situation and to move to a new one. But in Hegel's metaphysical dialectic, the mediation of all things is guided by and anchored in teleological movement. Though each term passes away, there is order between terms and a progressive path of motion toward an ultimate, self-enclosing *telos*. In existence, the instability of all things is more difficult to deal with, because the individual does not know what term comes next or what the *telos* should be. For the aesthete, each situation dissolves itself, but that is it. The aesthete's life is a series of unconnected moments that simply pass away, one after another.

At the end of the day, the aesthete stumbles. But he also stumbles upon an important truth: Hegelian mediation *is* the truth of all things, in existence as well as in metaphysics. All situations are restless duality. All individuals are restless duality. Hegel's mediation gives metaphysical structure to Augustine's restlessness, Pascal's ennui, the anxiety of the later existentialists, and the run-of-the-mill dissatisfaction all individuals feel—philosopher and non-philosopher alike. Hegel gives us this great truth. But, contrary to what Hegel himself thinks, he does not give us a way of dealing with it and using it. The aesthete discovers in existence what we already discovered in metaphysics: mediation is the truth of all things, but mediation does not really help us to understand metaphysics or to live in existence. The problem of Hegel's metaphysics repeats itself all the more forcefully in existence: mediation gets us as far as movement internal to the present term, but it does not help us to move forward or between terms. Johannes Climacus seems to have discovered this bottom line long ago: [t]he chimerical proficiency of mediation, if it belongs anywhere at all, is an expression—for the beginning…it [speculative philosophy]

confuses the end of this work with the end of everything, but instead the end of this work is *höchstens* [at best] the beginning of the real task."[47] Contrary to what Hegel thinks, mediation does not help us to navigate mediation. Mediation poses more questions than it answers. Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms constantly struggle to deal with mediation in metaphysics and in existence. They continue on where they believe Hegel stopped prematurely. How do we make mediation work in metaphysics and in existence? Mediation is right, but mediation is not very helpful, is not very user-friendly. Hegel is (almost) right, but because he is only almost right, he is not too helpful.

III. A Reply from Judge William: Getting Back Contradiction and Movement

The aesthete is not wrong. Actually, he is quite right. Mediation unsettles all life and all movement. We often deal with this existential instability just as the aesthete does. Either, we opt out of movement and let life decide for us. Or, we ignore it through endless busyness and vain diversion. The aesthete's Hegelian perspective on existence is not absurd. Why, then, do we feel that the aesthete has an inadequate view of life and movement? Why can Judge William insist upon a disjunctive either/or as the source of motion, even though the aesthete convincingly shows all things to be an either—or?

The answer is simple: the aesthete does not believe his own conclusion. His view is rationally and metaphysically convincing, but it is not existentially convincing. The aesthete feels that "the inner is not the outer."[48] Reason cannot reach everything that matters. Mediation does not move him forward, but rather, it makes him wait for the future to become the past, for life to pass him along and be past. He is bothered that he never

[47] *CUP*, 420.
[48] *EO1*, 3.

moves forward and never develops an integrated personality and enduring life. He has an odd obsession with the past and the dead, with whatever is gone-by and yet unfulfilled.[49] His life is pervaded by an obvious mood of melancholy, resignation, and emptiness.[50] By transferring mediation to existence, the aesthete produces a view of life that is rationally compelling and yet existentially inert.

According to the Judge, the only way to restore movement to life is to reinstate the either/or. How can the disjunctive either/or still prevail? The Judge gives the aesthete simple advice: take a break from mediation, come back down to the perspective of everyday existence, and now say the words again—"plainly and by themselves."[51] He thinks that the aesthete will see the situation anew, and the either—or will be suddenly and decisively transformed back into the either/or. When the aesthete looks at the situation "plainly," he suddenly remembers that he is not free-floating mediation. He becomes "once more like the rest of us,"[52] and realizes that he is, first and foremost, an existing individual with passion, freedom, and concrete personal experiences. He realizes that he is already personally invested in "either this or that." When he puts himself back into the dialectic, his passion easily tips the scales from indifference back to difference, contradiction and movement. He now says either/or "with pathos."[53] The individual's passionate investment in the dialectic enhances the one option and makes it stand out as different and compelling.

According to the Judge, the individual's personal investment in the dialectic is the source of the disjunctive either/or and of movement forward either to this or to that. The

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[49] *EO1*, "Silhouettes," 168-215; "The Unhappiest One" 219-230.
[50] *EO1*, 21, 31, 36, 37, 42-43.
[51] *EO2*, 157.
[52] *CUP*, 115.
[53] *EO2*, 157.

source of the either—or is reason, but the source of the either/or is outside of reason, "behind the back of reason." [54] Passion's either/or overrides reason's either—or. As Vigilius Haufniensis reminds us, "contradiction is always the expression of a task." [55] It is the individual's task, suggests the Judge, to be the source of contradiction and of movement forward. He alone, his passionate investment in the dialectic, is responsible for making the options different and for moving toward one or the other. He alone is responsible for creating a way forward, without much decisive help from reason. Of course, this is exactly what the aesthete cannot stomach, for he dis-passionately observes the situation, hoping reason gives him the answer.

We can imagine how the Judge might admonish the aesthete. He might say, "Come on now, you are being rather silly. Yes, the options look the same to reason. But look again. There, now, tell me what you see. Is it not true that you already know, deep down, what you want to do? Regardless of the stalemate of reason, do you not feel yourself already passionately invested in and moving toward one or the other?" The Judge would talk to the aesthete as one talks to a friend who has overthought a situation to the point of ridiculous rational paralysis. When dealing with this type of individual, one need only ask, "But what do you want, really?" The either—or immediately morphs back into the either/or. When the aesthete becomes "once more like the rest of us," the puzzles of speculative reason melt away and cease to paralyze him. Speculative reason eliminates the source of the either/or—passionate investment in the dialectic—from the outset, so it is little wonder everything turns up as an either—or. Speculative reason decides the outcome in advance.

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[54] *PS*, 56.
[55] *CA*, 28.

The Judge makes sense, which is fitting for a man of commonsense, rules, and respectability, such as he is. We can imagine an everyday example: an individual makes a pro and con list to decide—by objective, detached reason—a future event, but the columns keep coming out equal and no determinate way forward is given. But if he steps back and looks at the situation plainly, he sees that, despite the rational stalemate, he already knows what to do. He already feels personally invested in one side. When the individual puts himself back into the equation, the columns are once again unequal and a determinate way forward emerges. The Judge is telling the aesthete to rip up the pro and con list and to just act. Mediation is overcome by everyday commonsense: we act according to passion and not reason, according to what we want to do, what we feel invested in. Marry or do not marry? The aesthete already knows which one he is invested in. He knows they are not indifferent, and that one is better—or less "regrettable" and less "boring"—*to him*.

Passionate investment in the dialectic is the initial source and the continued source of movement forward into the future. This movement is governed by two principles: leap and repetition. The instant when the either—or is first transformed back into the either/or and movement forward is simultaneously restored is a leap.[56] This initial source of motion, or the transition that makes transition itself possible in the first place, is characterized as a leap, because it happens by such a sudden breach of immanence and decisive interruption

[56] For a general discussion of the leap in Kierkegaard, see Ronald R. Johnson, "The Logic of Leaping: Kierkegaard's use of Hegelian Sublation," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (January 1997): 155-170. Johnson agrees with what we have said so far about the leap, namely, that Kierkegaard believes that the transition to a new quality always happens by a leap, by a transition that is opaque to reason. Johnson shows that Kierkegaard agrees with Aristotle—we cannot demonstrate first principles—and with Plato—we cannot perceive or think the moment of transition. While Johnson does note that Kierkegaard thinks Hegelian mediation—whether Hegel realizes it or not—is simply another form of the leap and still relies on the leap, he does not explain *why* Kierkegaard thinks this or why, in particular, mediation fails. Throughout this project, we have tried to fill this gap in the literature, by showing why Kierkegaard thinks mediation fails, in both metaphysics and in existence.

in the dialectic of reason that it seems to come from nowhere, or at least, from nowhere within immanence or reason. [57] This transition happens by something transcendent to reason, "behind the back of reason." The leap is a-rational; it happens by the individual's freedom and passion, by his sudden decision to intervene into the dialectic of reason—to leave aside the perspective of the passive observer of speculative thought—to cut off the "so—long until" of mediation, and to move determinately forward, without the go-ahead of reason, even despite the paralysis of reason.

Reason alone cannot explain or help the individual to navigate transition. Reason never comes to a conclusion by itself, but only gets the individual as far as the endless movement internal to mediation, as far as the either—or. Johannes Climacus further explains this point by claiming that the Hegelians try to fool us into thinking that reason comes to its own conclusion, but this does not work in either metaphysics and or in existence. [58] Reason never gives the individual the answer. The Hegelians should be more honest and "speak of a leap." [59] They should admit that "reflection cannot be stopped objectively, and when it is stopped subjectively, it does not stop of its own accord, but it is the subject who stops it." [60] Reason must always be cut off by the leap, by something transcendent to reason, by the individual's decision to intervene in and give his "contribution" to the dialectic.[61] Transition never occurs by the "necessity" of mediation, but always by the freedom and passion of the individual, by his decision to see the either—or as an either/or and to move according to it.

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[57] "A movement toward the future, where logic holds no sway, is transcendent—it is a leap." Carlisle, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Becoming*, 62.
[58] *CUP*, 112-117.
[59] Ibid., 115.
[60] Ibid., 116.
[61] *PF*, 43.

According to Climacus, and the aesthete and the Judge would likely agree, mediation provides the "running start" that leads to the transition (to the leap), but it does not help the individual to make the transition itself.[62] Mediation leads the individual forward gradually, through the step by step process of rethinking the laws of non-contradiction and excluded middle, all the way up to the crucial point of the transition—of seeing the situation as restless and ready to move. But mediation does not help him to make this transition itself. Hegel gives the individual a strong running start, but the momentum halts at exactly this crucial point of take-off. Mediation gets the individual almost there, but only almost there. And as Climacus tells us, almost doing something is as good as not doing that something:

> to want to be satisfied with a 'mostly,' an 'as good as,' a 'one can almost say that,' and 'if you sleep on it until tomorrow, you may well say that' merely shows that one is related to Trop, who little by little went so far as to assume that having almost taken the bar examination was the same as having taken it. Everyone laughs at this, but when one chatters speculatively in the same manner…then it is good philosophy—genuine speculatively philosophy… [But] an infinitely little distance makes the ditch infinitely broad, because the leap itself makes the ditch that broad.[63]

If anything, the running start of mediation only emphasizes the necessity of the leap. It shows exactly where the leap must occur, exactly where the individual must intervene into the dialectic and decide to move, despite the stalemate of reason.[64] Otherwise, the individual does not move. Trop does not take his bar examination. The in-betweens of metaphysics and existence—the very elements that Hegel hopes to explain—remain transcendent to reason.

Kierkegaard's pseudonyms often describe the leap as a vertical motion performed by the individual, straight up and straight back down again on the same spot.[65] This

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[62] *CUP*, 99.
[63] Ibid., 115.
[64] *PF*, 42-43; *CA* 32-33, 60, 77.
[65] *CUP*, 124, 365; *FTR*, 36-50, 170.

reinforces that the leap—or transition in general—is a sudden and decisive break with immanence.[66] Transition happens by something transcendent to reason, and this is represented as a vertical movement, a motion that breaks with immanence for a brief moment. The individual goes up to transcendence and comes back down to immanence, but he comes back down with this transcendent viewpoint of passion and will. The individual goes up from the either—or, to the either/or of passion and will that is outside of immanence and reason, and then comes back down to the either—or, but he now sees reality decisively transformed into the either/or, transformed according to the transcendence of his freedom and passion. Through the leap, the individual transforms the static either—or into the dynamic either/or through the transcendence of his passion and will. The leap is a drastic transition, like that of coming into existence or of being (re)born, wherein something fundamentally new comes to be.[67] The individual's ethical consciousness, that is, his willingness to see himself as invested in the dialectic and as the very source of contradiction and of movement forward comes into existence for the first time. The very source of contradiction and of movement comes into existence for the first time. [68]

The Judge suggests that the individual's willful, passionate investment in the dialectic is also the continued source of movement forward in existence. This happens through repetition, that is, through repetition of the leap. Each future transition is also a breach of immanence—all transition is a leap—which happens through the transcendence

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[66] *CUP*, 109-117; *PF*, 42-43; *CA*, 32-33, 60, 77, 132.
[67] *PF*, 42-43; *CA*, 30-33.
[68] "Freedom is not an 'immediate' aspect of man *because it is a movement*. It is something—a form of consciousness—which comes into being, which is 'born' from the individual's confrontation with either/or. Freedom *brings itself to birth*; it is a self-movement whereby the individual's consciousness undergoes a qualitative transformation." Carlisle, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Becoming*, 60.

of the individual's will and passion. Each future transition is a repetition of the original leap that makes transition itself possible. We recall from the first chapter that the Danish word for repetition (*gentagelse*) means to take back, to take again, and to renew. The individual must continually take the transcendence of his passion back into the dialectic of immanence. At each moment of transition, he must continually renew his passionate investment in the dialectic, renew himself as the very source of both contradiction and of movement forward.[69] The individual repeatedly leaps up from the immanence of speculative reason to the transcendence of his will and passion and then comes back down to immanence, in order to continually transform all future either—or's into dynamic, decisive either/or's. To go forward in existence, the individual must repeatedly go vertically up and down. Movement forward continues only if the individual repeats the leap.

The aesthete shows us that, according to detached speculative reason, reality is indeed the either—or of mediation. If the individual does not constantly renew his investment in the dialectic, he easily reverts back to the aesthete's rational paralysis. In everyday life, if an individual cannot move forward, because all options are equally regrettable, he should check to see if he has taken himself out of the dialectic, if he has forgotten the perspective of transcendent inwardness and is assessing the situation through reason alone. Paralysis in the face of movement comes from overthinking—or from *merely* thinking about—the situation from the viewpoint of detached objective reason. But as soon as he repeats the leap and brings passion back into the dialectic, he knows which option he is invested in. The either—or turns back into the either/or and movement begins again.

[69] *EO2*, 134, 139.

Whenever the individual is stuck, it is because he has forgotten the leap. (We should check to see if he is making an ineffectual pro and con list.)

Let us illustrate how leap and repetition function with the concrete example of marriage—the Judge's favorite example.[70] Let us imagine that the aesthete takes the Judge's commonsense advice and realizes that he is indeed already passionately invested in the option of marriage. In this case, the original leap occurs when the individual realizes that he is invested in marriage. He must then continually repeat this original leap, must continually renew his passionate investment in marriage, at all points of transition in the future. Clare Carlisle puts this point nicely: "Because its [passion's] continuity is 'momentary,' passion is preserved only through renewal: a relationship to a loved one (whether human or divine) is not achieved 'once and for all,' but at every moment."[71] Louis Mackey agrees, "[T]he choice itself is not a once-for-all bit of derring-do (the sort of thing an aesthete might try off and on), but a daily reengagement of the whole personality in the terms and consequences of the original decision."[72] The individual must continually bring the perspective of his passionate commitment to marriage back into the dialectic.

The Judge suggests that repeating the leap makes movement forward into the future fairly easy, because it provides the individual with "constancy" and a "law of motion" that guides and generates all future movements.[73] The law of motion is: the individual should, at all points of transition in the future, move toward whatever renews the original commitment to marriage and avoid whatever does not. He should continually repeat the leap by doing whatever re-instantiates and manifests this original commitment in each

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[70] *EO2*, 94.
[71] Carlisle, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Becoming*, 19.
[72] Louis Mackey, *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1971) 52.
[73] *EO2*, 98.

particular instance. He continually transforms all future either—or's into either/or's. The options will never again appear indifferent and equally regrettable to him. His passionate commitment to marriage always tips the scales in favor of one or the other option. He always feels invested in one option and feels himself moving toward it. One option will always stand out as better, because doing it allows him to renew his commitment to marriage.

Repetition of the original commitment guides and generates all future movements whether the movement is significant—like deciding whether to start a new job, to move to a new city, to have children, or to keep a certain circle of friends—or more mundanely everyday—like deciding what to do on weekends, what to cook for dinner, or how to resolve a marital disagreement. The individual need only follow the rule of motion and he knows what to do: he does whatever brings the commitment to marriage back into the particular situation. As Louis Mackey writes, the Judge has "both an antecedent and a consequent clause, while the aesthetic has only a protasis followed by a suspicious dash."[74] The aesthete is stuck in the "if" without a "then," in the "so long" without the "until." But the Judge's formula supposedly provides both the "if" and the "then," both the in-put and the out-put. The Judge believes he has both parts of the equation needed for motion into the future. (This rule of motion presumably applies to other long-term commitments an individual makes, such as a job or other relationships, though the Judge does not say what happens if these different commitments should come into conflict with each other. Which commitment is primary and should be repeated? Could paralysis return if these commitments come into conflict?)

[74] Mackey, *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet*, 78.

So the Judge thinks that movement forward is quite easy. The rule of motion is given and the individual need only play according to this rule. The formula is given and he need only input the variables as they come. When the individual looks into the future, he does not wonder what to do or whether he gets it right. From the outset, certain movements are included and certain movements are excluded, depending on whether they renew the leap. It is much easier to move when the individual knows what to do, when the future is not so open-ended. A determinate path has been laid through the indeterminate future. For the Judge, movement acquires a horizontal, temporal dimension. He says, "Marital love manifests itself as historical by being a process of assimilation; it tries its hand at what is experienced and refers what it has experienced to itself. Consequently, it is not an uninterested witness to what happens but is essentially participative—in short, it experiences its own development."[75] Life is no longer the aesthete's scatterplot of unconnected points. Movement goes forward in a line, in a timeline. One point—the initial leap—is continually repeated and extended forward into the future. [76] The initial commitment is progressively spelled out in particular moments and in various details throughout time.

IV. The Religious: Getting Back the Absolute Source of Movement

There is calm confidence in the Judge's words. He always knows how to move, and he thinks he always gets it right. After all, he has never even had to ask his wife for forgiveness. He is not regretful, not bored, and not restless. He is settled and satisfied. But such unqualified confidence and marital bliss are suspicious. Has he really never

[75] *EO2*, 97.
[76] Ibid., 138.

hesitated in the face of movement (like the aesthete does)? Has there really never been a time when he and his wife disagreed about the best course of action? Does the Judge silence the aesthete's feelings of metaphysical and existential instability?[77]

The Judge seems a bit over-confident and maybe even a little dishonest. There must be times when the Judge, just like the aesthete, wonders about the excluded negation. He will undoubtedly have disagreements with his wife, and he will think one course of action is correct and she will think the opposite course of action is correct. There will be times when some of his duties conflict with each other, and he will not know which commitment to renew. No matter how good his life seems, he will always wonder if it could have been even better had he selected the other option in any given case.

Perhaps the aesthete is right, and the individual cannot ever know if he gets it right. Even the Judge might have to admit that he feels like he is "always wrong."[78] To know what the right move is, he would need the perspective of an absolutely transcendent being, one who is not subject to the instability and regret of all human situations. The Judge starts to wonder if maybe he cannot do it all by himself. Maybe human freedom and passion alone are not enough for the human to move forward confidently into the future. Maybe movement is ultimately dependent on something absolutely transcendent to the human.

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[77]Commentators often suggest that we should follow the Judge's advice and answer the aesthete's concerns by simply keeping the spheres of metaphysics and existence separate. In metaphysics, mediation rules, and in existence, freedom and contradiction rule. As long as the two realms are not mixed—like the aesthete tries to do—we do not have to worry about Hegelian mediation in everyday existence. See for example Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, 202-203; Carlisle, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Becoming*, 60. This solution, however, ignores how convincingly the aesthete shows that mediation does apply to existence. It privileges the Judge's position without taking seriously the aesthete's position. We should remember that even Victor Eremita, the editor of *Either/Or*, reminds us that there is no final verdict in favor of either the aesthete or the Judge. Both positions are convincing and both positions are flawed (*EO1*, 13-14). Banishing mediation from existence ignores how important Hegelian mediation is to Kierkegaard's view of existence. Existence is difficult precisely because mediation is (almost) correct but is not entirely helpful. Kierkegaard continually struggles to expose and compensate for the "almost" of Hegelian mediation.

[78] *EO2*, 341-354.

Another leap occurs—or should occur, Kierkegaard hopes. We recall that in the initial leap to ethical consciousness, the individual realizes that he is passionately invested in either this or that in the human realm, and he sees that he himself—his willful, passionate investment in the dialectic—is the source of contradiction and of movement forward. But in the initial leap here—the initial leap to religious consciousness—the individual feels passionately invested not in either this or that in the human realm, but in something completely transcendent to the human: God. He suddenly feels radically dependent on God to move forward in existence. His perspective on reality undergoes another decisive, sudden change—another leap—and his religious consciousness "comes into existence," or is "born," for the first time: he realizes that he is radically dependent on God for everything. Indeed, everything in the human, earthly world—including movement—is radically dependent on God. What comes into existence in the leap to religious consciousness is the ultimate source of all movement and contradiction in the human realm: God, that is, absolute transcendence.[79]

All transition does indeed occur by a leap, by something transcendent to reason and immanence. But transition does not occur through human transcendence alone—like the Judge thinks. Rather, the individual now realizes that movement depends, first and foremost, on absolute divine transcendence. While the Judge is correct that the human's willful investment in the dialectic is the source of movement, he forgets that this power of movement is fundamentally dependent on God's willful investment in the dialectic. Movement depends on God's radically free decision to create and continually sustain

[79] For an excellent discussion of faith and the transition to the faith, see Carlisle, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Becoming*, 91-110. I am adopting here Carlisle's excellent insight that faith, for Kierkegaard, is embracing absolute dependence on God and receiving the finite world back as a "gift" from God.

movement. Each transition is a leap, because it depends on God's "contribution," on God's willful investment in the dialectic of human immanence, on the interruption of human immanence by divine transcendence. God continually repeats the leap at each moment of transition in the future. At each moment, God renews his investment in the dialectic and his decision to keep movement in existence. He continually renews movement, bringing it into existence again and again.

The structure of the leap—or of all transition in general—still has the same vertical structure as before: transition happens by a leap up from immanence to transcendence and back down again to immanence. But in religious consciousness, the individual sees that the structure of the leap is on a "higher plane," as Carlisle puts it so well.[80] The image of the vertical line is exaggerated to its utmost. The endpoints are no longer just within the human, are no longer human immanence and human transcendence. The endpoints are human immanence and divine transcendence. In religious consciousness, the individual realizes that each moment of transition requires that God bring together two radically separate realms: human immanence and divine transcendence, temporality and eternity, finitude and infinitude, contingency and necessity. The individual leaps up from human immanence to divine transcendence and back down again to human immanence, but he brings the perspective of divine transcendence back down into human immanence, transforming reality according to the perspective of divine transcendence.[81] He sees human immanence the way God sees human immanence, even if just imperfectly and just for a brief moment—i.e. movement is absolutely dependent on God.[82] The human power for

[80] Carlisle, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Becoming*, 91-110.
[81] *FTR*, 38-41.
[82] It is worth noting that from God's point of view, transition in the human realm is more of a descent, rather than a leap. God freely descends into the human realm and creates and sustains movement at each

movement is not nullified, but the individual recognizes that it is dependent, first and foremost, on divine transcendence.[83]

In this initial leap to religious consciousness, reality is transformed according to a new either/or. It is transformed into the absolute, primary disjunctive Either/Or. Either, the individual can embrace and express his dependence on God at each moment of transition. Or, the individual can ignore this dependence on God and rely on his own human transcendence to move, like the Judge does. Either, he can passionately invest himself in the God-relationship and let his commitment to the God-relationship guide his movements. Or, he can passionately invest himself in a human relationship, first and foremost, and let his commitment to this human relationship guide his movements, like the Judge does. Either, he can affirm that transition is a radical leap, is grounded in divine transcendence. Or, he can affirm that transition is only the "lesser" leap of human transcendence alone, like the Judge thinks. Either, he can invest himself in the divine, or he can invest himself in the human.

But when the individual looks at the absolute disjunctive Either/Or "plainly and by itself" and "with pathos," as the Judge himself might suggest, he realizes that he is, indeed, already passionately invested in one option and moving according to it. He already feels

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moment. However, from the human's point of view, transition looks like a leap. Transition comes from nowhere within human immanence, but comes, ultimately, from divine transcendence, from something "above," we might say. The human must "leap up" to the divine to see where transition comes from; the human's consciousness must be "elevated" to the viewpoint of the divine. The image of the vertical line holds in both cases. It just has more of the sense of a descent from the viewpoint of the divine and more of an ascent from the viewpoint of the human.

[83] « [I]l reste toujours entre la dialectique de Kierkegaard et celle de Hegel des différences fondamentales…[celle de Kierkegaard] est pleine de décisions, de disjonctions qualitatives. Elle est faite de moments hétérogènes, et de sauts qualitatives, de conversions. Il n'y a plus de médiations, mais des instants de rupture…D'une façon plus générale, la nouvelle qualité vient toujours par un bond, avec le caractère du mystérieux. » Jean Wahl, *Etudes Kierkegaardiennes,* 144.

invested in the God-relationship, because, as we have seen, he feels absolutely dependent on God, feels his human power for movement is not enough. His passion tips the scales of the Either/Or in favor of investing himself in the God-relationship and having this relationship guide his movements. After all, he already knows that the option of going it alone leads to the restlessness of the aesthete and the Judge. The individual of faith agrees with the Judge that transition happens through the human's passionate investment. But his passionate investment is not to either this or that in human realm, but is to God, first and foremost, since his power for transition is grounded in God.

To move forward in existence, the individual must repeat this leap at each moment of transition in the future. As de Silentio tells us, "But the person who has come to faith (whether he is extraordinarily gifted or plain and simple does not matter) does not come to standstill in faith…he does not go further, does not go on to something else."[84] He must leap up from human immanence to divine transcendence and back down to human immanence, transforming immanence again and again according to the perspective of the divine—i.e. the finite is absolutely dependent on God. He must constantly reaffirm God as the ultimate source of movement and constantly renew his investment in the God-relationship. To go forward in existence, the individual must repeatedly go vertically up and down. He must leap up from the human to the divine and back down to the human, transforming all the either—or's and either/or's of human immanence into the one, absolute disjunctive Either/Or.[85] If the individual does not constantly repeat the leap, he will easily revert back to the dissatisfaction of the aesthete or the Judge.

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[84] *FTR*, 123.

[85] It is worth noting, however, that the leap to religious consciousness is difficult to make even once, and seems almost impossible to continually repeat at each moment of transition. None of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms claim to be such a knight of faith, and Johannes de Silentio admits that it would be impossible

What does the life of faith look like? What does it mean for the religious individual to express the God-relationship in everyday life? At each moment, the individual leaps up to the transcendent, "infinitely resigning" his control over the finite and accepting his complete dependence on God for everything.[86] But in the same moment, he comes back down again to immanence, receiving the finite (and movement in the finite) back again as a pure "gift," as Carlisle says, given freely by God.[87] To express the God-relationship, the individual must, at each moment, affirm his dependence on God and joyfully, thankfully re-accept the finite as a gift given by God.

In everyday life, when someone gives a gift, he does so (hopefully) purely voluntarily, out of sheer love and generosity. There is no necessity or external reason compelling him, but rather, his gift is an act of radical freedom and goodness. And since the recipient of the gift does not expect to receive anything in the first place, he accepts whatever he receives with pure joy and gratitude. He is (hopefully) satisfied with what he receives and has no desire to trade it in for something else. When an individual should have had absolutely nothing at all, he is happy with whatever he does receive.

The knight of faith expresses this same attitude of joy and gratitude. When he accepts his dependence and accepts that the finite did not have to be at all, he suddenly realizes that whatever there is, whatever happens, it is more than good enough, and he receives it as an unexpected gift. There could have been nothing—and there is something only because of God's free and generous act of creation—and so the individual is happy with whatever he receives. Everything—each moment and each movement—becomes a

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to know if anyone has ever been a knight of faith in real life, since he looks just like everyone else. Christ, Job, and Abraham are perhaps the only clear examples we find in Kierkegaard's works.

[86]*FTR*, 40-41.

[87]Ibid., 106-107.

bonus, a privilege, or a pleasant surprise, and he has no desire to exchange it for something else. When nothing is expected, everything is accepted with joy and gratitude.

By accepting everything as pure gift, the knight of faith is able to move (or leap) through existence quite easily. He invests himself fully in the finite, and he "finds pleasure in everything, takes part in everything."[88] He has a job, a wife, friends, and a number of hobbies. He looks like the perfect society man. Indeed, he "belongs entirely to the world; no bourgeois philistine could belong to it more."[89] Unlike the Judge and the aesthete, he does not feel even a twinge of uncertainty or dissatisfaction. When he chooses either this or that, he is not bothered by the excluded negation. He knows that it could have just as easily been *neither this nor that*; the entire finite world and the entire either/or (either—or) structure of the finite world could have not been at all. Knowing it could have been neither this nor that, he is perfectly happy to receive either this or that. He is grateful to have something, anything, even one side of the either/or (either—or). The knight of faith is the happiest of all individuals, because he sees every movement and every moment as pure gift, as unexpected privilege, as more than enough for him. He moves through existence just like everyone else, but he does so with a peaceful, joyous attitude and a steady, graceful gait. Though he is constantly performing the most difficult movement—leaping up and down between the two realms—he is the most settled of anyone. He does not worry if he is getting it right. Whatever he gets is more than good enough for him, an individual who could have had nothing at all. To the aesthete, the knight of faith responds, "Do it or do not do it, it will be perfectly fine either way."

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[88] *FTR*, 39.
[89] Ibid.

Chapter Four

Navigating Actuality in Everyday Existence

In the previous chapter, we saw that Kierkegaard is skeptical as to whether the individual can be a Hegelian in daily life, whether the individual can use the principles of Hegelian metaphysics to live in everyday concrete existence. Johannes Climacus thinks that Hegelian metaphysics works only "on paper,"[1] if it works anywhere at all. The Hegelian quickly forgets his metaphysical fancies when he becomes "once more like the rest of us,"[2] and has to make his way through the world. But in the last chapter, we only looked at one of the two foundational elements of Hegel's metaphysics—i.e. transition, how mediation (supposedly) produces movement. In this chapter, we will look at the second foundational element of Hegel's metaphysics—i.e. modality, how possibility, actuality, and necessity combine to form contingent actuality. Let us not dismiss Hegel too soon; maybe the individual can still use Hegel's view of modality to navigate actuality in concrete daily existence. We will explore the following questions: Can we transfer Hegel's metaphysical view of actuality to actuality of concrete daily existence? Can we use Hegel's view that "contingency is necessity" to live in everyday contingency?

I. Johannes the Seducer as Hegelian Philosopher

Here again, it is Kierkegaard's aesthete who attempts to be a Hegelian in daily life and to use the Hegelian view of modality in concrete existence. The aesthete of "The

[1] *CUP*, 333.
[2] Ibid., 115.

Seducer's Diary," Johannes the Seducer, is a particularly good example of an individual who tries to live according to the Hegelian view that "contingency is necessity." Johannes has a distinctly Hegelian attitude toward existence. He views the dialectic of everyday existence just as abstract thought views the metaphysical dialectic of Hegel's *Logic*: he watches existence from above, observing it from a rational and personally disinterested viewpoint. Johannes "did not belong to the world of actuality, and yet he had very much to do with it. He continually ran lightly over it, but even when he most abandoned himself to it, he was beyond it."[3] Johannes wants the higher viewpoint *sub specie aeterni*, that holy and godlike viewpoint that gives him rational mastery over existence. As Johannes says, "one ought to be on a somewhat higher level—not just as someone being baptized but also as the priest."[4] He prefers to stand above the baptismal font and dunk others in the waters of contingency. He does not want things done unto him; he wants to do unto others. Johannes the Seducer will serve as our case study of what it is like to live according to the Hegelian view that contingency is necessity.

But let us first quickly review what Hegel means by saying that contingency is necessity. We recall from Chapter Two that Hegel's view of modality is complex and multi-step. He discusses modality in formal, real, and absolute terms. If the individual, here Johannes the Seducer in particular, wants to be a Hegelian in daily life, he will have to use Hegel's view of "real modality." It is here that Hegel explicitly takes into account the material conditions of reality and considers how a particular actuality comes to be in concrete daily existence.

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[3] *EO1*, 306.
[4] Ibid., 342.

In the section on real modality, Hegel explains that concrete actuality—the totality of the current material conditions in the concrete world—eliminates the uncertainty and duality inherent to possibility—i.e. that both possible contents are equally possible and so we cannot know which content will become actual—because concrete actuality makes one content "really" possible and the other content merely formally, hypothetically possible. For something to be "really" possible, it must fit into and already be implicit within the current conditions of actuality. A real possibility emerges when all the conditions are in place for this possibility to become actual.[5]

A real possibility, then, cannot help but become a real actuality. As soon as real possibility is—as soon as all the conditions are in place—it automatically passes over into actuality. What is really possible is simultaneously really actual. Contingent actuality, then, is necessity. Given these conditions, it is necessary that this possibility become actual. Given these conditions, it cannot be otherwise; nothing else can follow. According to Hegel, therefore, contingency and necessity are simply two different ways of describing the same actuality. Thought can know contingency under the mode of necessity. When thought has a real possibility, when it knows all the conditions are in place, it also has a real actuality; it knows that this real possibility must necessarily become actual.[6]

What does it mean for the individual to live according to this Hegelian view that contingency is necessity? Kierkegaard suggests that Hegel is giving the individual the ability to see into and control the future. Since the individual can get from possibility to actuality in speculative thought, he can decide in advance which actuality he wants to come into existence in the future, and he can see into the speculative truth of this desired actuality

[5] *SL*, 546-550.
[6] Ibid.

to know which possibility (which set of conditions) will have to be in place in reality for this possibility to be "really" possible and necessarily actual. Then, armed with this abstract, speculative blueprint, he can intervene into reality and put into place this real possibility (this set of conditions) that will lead to the desired actuality. Hegel eliminates the uncertainty inherent to possibility and to the leap that exists between possibility and actuality—that is, that we do not know which of the two possibilities will become actual until after it becomes actual, until after the future becomes the past—which prevents us from knowing contingency as necessity, prevents us from knowing in advance which actuality will come to be from possibility. Kierkegaard suggests that Hegel is, basically, trying to take the contingency out of everyday contingency, trying to take the uncertainty and unknowability out of the future.

Johannes the Seducer takes Hegel up on his offer to take the contingency out of contingency. Whatever else Johannes might be doing through his odd antics, he is certainly trying to treat contingency as necessity, to speculatively see into and then existentially control the future. Johannes decides in advance which actuality he wants to come into existence, and he uses his speculative knowledge of which possibility (which set of conditions) must be in place to make this possibility "really" possible and therefore necessarily actual. Armed with this speculative blueprint, he intervenes into reality to put into place the conditions that will bring about this actuality. Johannes believes that if he creates the perfect and complete real possibility, if he puts into place the correct arrangement of conditions, then his desired actuality will necessarily follow. He thinks he can eliminate the uncertainty inherent to possibility and that he can speculatively think his way through and existentially control his way through the transition between possibility

and actuality. In short, Johannes thinks he can see into and control the future. We will see, however, that Johannes meets with difficulty and comical results. The main problem we saw in Chapter Two with Hegel's metaphysical view of modality—that we cannot get from possibility to actuality in thought—repeats itself and repeats itself all the more forcefully when transferred to everyday existence.

II. Treating Contingency as Necessity: The Seduction of Cordelia

Specifically, Johannes has one (admittedly rather perverse) goal: to seduce the young Cordelia into becoming engaged to him, but only so that Cordelia herself will willingly break off the engagement shortly thereafter, without harboring any ill feelings for a love lost. He wants to "poetize [himself] into a girl" and then "poetize [himself] out of her."[7] Johannes' desired actuality is: a broken engagement to Cordelia, which Cordelia herself calmly breaks off. Which set of conditions will make this actuality "really" possible and guarantee that it will become actual? What does its real possibility look like?

Johannes thinks that the possibility must be made up of two principle, all-important conditions: 1. The seduction must proceed gradually and unobtrusively. Cordelia cannot suspect or flee from the trap that is being laid for her. Their eventual engagement must seem perfectly natural to her.[8] 2. No significant bond of affection can be formed between them. Even as their relationship gradually develops, it must remain completely insignificant and empty.[9] It must be insignificant—though Cordelia will not realize this at first—so that Cordelia herself will break off the engagement. She will eventually realize

[7] *EO1*, 368.
[8] Ibid., 372.
[9] Ibid., 307, 351, 372.

that there was nothing in their relationship to begin with, and so nothing is lost by ending it.[10] Overall, Johannes must put into reality the following possibility: he must gradually lure Cordelia into an engagement that is really no engagement at all.

And Johannes decides that this possibility must be put into place through four steps, through four sub-conditions: 1. He must gradually become Cordelia's acquaintance, even while not becoming her acquaintance. 2. He must gradually become her suitor, even while not becoming her suitor. 3. There must be an engagement that is not really an engagement, an engagement that is completely empty and meaningless. 4. Cordelia must gradually realize that the entire affair has had no significance at all, and she must want to break it off. Once these conditions are in place, once Cordelia realizes that the entire affair, natural-seeming though it was, has been completely meaningless, the real possibility will be complete and it will automatically pass over into his desired actuality. Given these conditions, it cannot be otherwise: Cordelia will calmly break off the engagement. And with incredible patience and cunning, Johannes spends months carefully creating this possibility.[11]

The first condition that Johannes must put into place, the "first web into which she must be spun,"[12] is to gradually become Cordelia's acquaintance, even without really becoming her acquaintance. He seizes the opportunity to arrange their first meeting when he overhears that she will be at the museum the next day to meet a friend. At the exhibit, he notices that her friend is late and he takes this fortuitous opportunity to offer her a few

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[10] *EO1*, 425-426.

[11] We readily admit that Johannes himself does not explicitly name and list these conditions as we have done here. He does not so explicitly divide up the seduction into conditions and sub-conditions. We are doing so here for ease of analysis. But we do think this summary of the seduction remains faithful to Johannes—even if it is a bit too ordered or neat. These are indeed the major steps he takes and the major requirements he mentions.

[12] *EO1*, 341.

words of sympathy, but only a very few words, because he does not want to appear suspicious or forward. Cordelia offers him a smile of thanks and Johannes knows that this is just perfectly enough to establish them as casual, congenial acquaintances.[13]

A little while later, Johannes befriends Cordelia's aunt so that he can manufacture more of these natural-seeming meetings. At first, their visits do not overlap. He purposely arranges his visits so that he is leaving the house just as Cordelia is arriving. They exchange a few greetings as they pass each other, but do not converse at length. He deliberately keeps these interactions causal and brief, tangential and at-a-distance. He writes, "I do not approach her, I merely skirt the periphery of her existence…[I] always strive for distance. Presumably our repeated encounters are clearly noticeable to her; presumably she does perceive that on her horizon a new planet has loomed, which in its course has encroached disturbingly upon hers in a curiously undisturbing way."[14] To Cordelia, it seems like they are naturally becoming closer acquaintances, since they now run into each other several times a week, sort of. But their interactions are always peripheral and empty. A bond has been formed, but it is a shallow and insignificant bond. Johannes has become her acquaintance, even without becoming her acquaintance.

With the first condition in place, Johannes turns his attention to the second condition. He must become not just her acquaintance but also her suitor, even while not becoming her suitor at all. Johannes learns that Cordelia already has a suitor, Edward. Edward is a boorish and tiresome fellow, which makes him, therefore, the perfect disposable prop, the perfect "unwitting instrument." [15] Johannes befriends Edward and

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[13] *EO1*, 319-323.
[14] Ibid., 341.
[15] Ibid., 364.

accompanies him when he visits Cordelia at her aunt's, claiming to offer him the extra support he needs to win over Cordelia. Edward desperately needs the help, so he readily and foolishly agrees. [16] As time goes on, Cordelia notices that her conversations with Edward are always more boring than Johannes' conversations with her aunt, and Cordelia grows "weary of listening to Edward." [17] Johannes knows that "the rhythmical conversation [between the aunt and him] produces the most disagreeable contrast with Edward's lack of assurance." [18] Johannes becomes Cordelia's suitor merely by default; he just happens to be there and to be more appealing than her own current suitor. Yet he has never expressed interest in her or talked to her at length or spent time alone with her. Their interactions remain shallow and at-a-distance. Johannes has succeeded in becoming her faux suitor.

Johannes can see the set of conditions forming; he can see the possibility taking shape in reality. Satisfied with this progress, he adds in the third condition. There must be an engagement that is no engagement at all, an engagement that is devoid of meaning. Their relationship must take the most decisive step, even while it retains its character of absolute insignificance. In his proposal to Cordelia, Johannes is "dispassionate again and solemnly obtuse, as is befitting when one is about to cause something full of meaning to happen in such a way as to make it mean nothing." [19] He uses no emotional language or grand declarations of love. Instead, he "talks like a book," keeping to strict "formulas" and neutral words. [20] Surprised by the odd proposal, Cordelia defers to her aunt, who

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[16] *EO1*, 346-354.
[17] Ibid., 352.
[18] Ibid., 353.
[19] Ibid., 374.
[20] Ibid.

encourages her to accept. So now they are engaged. The seduction has been so unobtrusively gradual that it all seems quite natural to Cordelia. [21] And yet, their relationship is just as superficial as it was that first afternoon at the museum exhibit. It remains completely empty, from top to bottom. Johannes has seduced Cordelia into an engagement that is no engagement at all. He has built the rickety construction that will easily topple.

At long last, Johannes can put into place the final condition that will complete the real possibility. As he says, "*Jacta est alea* [the die is cast]. Now the turn must be made."[22] He must cause Cordelia to want to willingly break off the engagement. He must cause her to realize that the entire relationship has been meaningless and is, therefore, in need of termination. He must depart from her life just as unobtrusively as he came into it. She must think that a broken engagement is just as natural as the engagement itself was in the first place. Johannes gradually becomes distant from Cordelia. His visits become less regular and his letters become less frequent. When they are together, Johannes is aloof and does not interact with her. He writes, "I was with her today but was completely engrossed in thinking about an idea that totally occupied me. I had neither eyes nor ears for her." [23] Cordelia begins to realize what Johannes wants her to realize: the entire relationship has been completely meaningless.[24] Breaking the engagement seems just fine, because she will be ending something that was never really anything at all. By breaking the engagement, she is really just breaking even. (Johannes thinks it is better if Cordelia herself breaks off the engagement. If he is a bit distant from the action, if he is indeed the "priest"

[21] *EO1*, 375.
[22] Ibid., 421.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., 420-426.

and not the "baptized," then he can sit back and watch with satisfaction as the possibility he has so carefully constructed turns over into his desired actuality. He can enjoy knowing that he has speculatively seen into and then controlled the future, that he has taken the contingency out of contingency.)

The set of conditions is complete. Johannes eagerly waits for the possibility to necessarily pass over into actuality. He has been waiting for this moment of passing over throughout the entire seduction: "how much I have gathered into this one moment that is now at hand! Damned if I should fail now!"[25] And so it happens: Cordelia calmly breaks off the engagement without, it seems, harboring any bitter feelings.[26]

It seems like Johannes is successful. But perhaps we are still a bit suspicious. Did Johannes really know and experience contingency as necessity? Did he really speculatively see into and then existentially control the future? If we look more closely at the diary, we notice that Johannes does, in fact, meet with considerable difficulty, which we do not notice when we look at the diary only in outline, as we did above. If we look again, we begin to wonder whether Johannes really does take the contingency out of

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[25] *EO1*, 445.

[26] Of course, we can question whether Johannes tells us the truth here, whether Cordelia really did break off the engagement without any ill feelings and whether Johannes reports things as they really happen. In the prefatory material to the diary, the aesthete who (allegedly) finds the diary tells us that it is "poetic" (*EO1*, 305) and that "his diary is not historically accurate or strictly narrative; it is not indicative but subjunctive" (Ibid., 304). The diary seems to be more a work of fiction or at least a partially fictive recreation of what really happens. Perhaps it did not go according to Johannes' plan. Cordelia may have been very bitter indeed when she broke off the engagement. Or, she may not have broken off the engagement at all; it may have been Johannes himself. Indeed, we also find in the prefatory material a letter from Cordelia that suggests that the engagement did not end in a neat and tidy way. Cordelia writes to Johannes, "I do call you [Johannes] 'mine': my seducer, my deceiver, my enemy, my murderer, the source of my unhappiness, the tomb of my joy, the abyss of my unhappiness…Yours I am, yours, yours, your curse" (Ibid., 312). The situation looks different when reported by Cordelia. But, we will go ahead and give Johannes the benefit of the doubt here and assume that what he tells us is what happens. It is more interesting to assume that his Hegelian method works well, so that we can examine more closely whether Johannes really does treat contingency as necessity, does see into and control the future.

contingency, whether the individual really can live according to the Hegelian view that contingency is necessity.

But before we move on to consider this, we should first acknowledge an important question: is it naïve for Hegel (and Johannes) to think that we can treat contingency as necessity, that we can see into and control the future? Maybe. But we all do it, often, if not all of the time. Kierkegaard recognizes that, whether or not we can truly be Hegelians in daily life, Hegel is right that we *want* to be Hegelians in daily life. We want to, and often act like we can, treat contingency as necessity. We want to, and often act like we can, see into and control the future. While Johannes is certainly a diabolical character who pursues a perverse goal, he still models the Hegelian attitude that we all have toward living in everyday contingency. While we pursue more ordinary and less sinister goals, we approach the uncertainty of possibility and of the future with the same Hegelian strategy as does Johannes: we try to think our way through and control our way through the transition between possibility and actuality. We try to see into and control the future.

Hegel is right that the truth of possibility—in metaphysics as well as in existence—is restless duality, is mediating activity back and forth between the one possibility and the other possibility. In everyday life, we concretely experience the mediation of possibility as anxiety. We are anxious—unsteady, restless, impatient—because we feel ourselves painfully caught up in the internal, contradictory movement (the mediation) of possibility. Moment to moment, we are thrown back and forth between the one and the other possibility, for the one seems "really" possible at one moment and the other seems "really" possible at the next moment, and we do not know which will become actual until after it becomes actual. We are anxious in the face of the future precisely because the future is

pure possibility; it is the uncertainty and restlessness of possibility, of not knowing which will become actual until after it becomes actual, until after the future becomes the past.

Here again, Hegel gives metaphysical structure (i.e. the structure of mediation) to a pervasively-studied philosophical phenomenon and a pervasively-felt everyday phenomenon. Mediation is the structure of the lofty anxiety of the existentialists and the garden-variety anxiety of the everyday everyman. We are anxious in the face of possibility and in the face of the future, because it is unsettling to confront the uncertain and unknown. We dislike being caught up in the mediating movement of possibility, oscillating between the one and the other possibility, not knowing which is going to happen. We are anxious in the face of existence itself, because existence is lived through possibility and forward into the future, is constantly lived into the uncertain and unknown.

We would do anything to jump out of the anxiety of possibility ahead of time. And just as speculative thought in Hegel's metaphysical *Logic* wants to escape this restless duality of possibility and pass over into the next term (actuality), so too do we, in concrete daily life, want to escape this restless duality of possibility and jump forward to the safety of actuality. We do not want to wait in the anxiety of possibility, to wait for possibility to pass over into actuality and for the future to become the past. We want to speculatively think our way through and then existentially control our way through the transition between possibility and actuality, between the future and the past, in advance.

Johannes the Seducer models how we use this Hegelian strategy to jump out of possibility. He jumps out of the duality of possibility ahead of time by deciding which of the two possibilities he wants to become actual (the broken engagement to Cordelia that Cordelia herself breaks off) and he thinks through what the real possibility has to be to lead

to this actuality (the two overall conditions and four sub-conditions), and then he puts into reality this possibility (and its actuality). He leaps out of possibility by making his desired actuality "really" possible in both thought and existence and by making the contrary possibility (that there is no broken engagement) merely formally, hypothetically possible in both thought and existence. Johannes tries to leap forward to actuality before actuality has arrived, while actuality is still possibility. He wants to know and have a say in what is happening even before it happens; he wants to see into and control the future. Johannes runs ahead of existence and waits on the safe side of actuality, waits for existence to catch up and do what he has already arranged for it to do.

Like Johannes, we all use this Hegelian strategy to escape the restless duality, the anxiety, of possibility. No matter the future goal—whether it be major or minor—we approach possibility and the future in the same way. We decide in advance which of the two possibilities we want to become actual, figure out what its real possibility looks like, and then put into reality this possibility (and its actuality). We think through all the conditions that have to be in place and all the counter-conditions that have to be avoided, and we try to arrange reality according to this speculative blueprint.

Like Johannes, we often construct painstakingly detailed plans: we think through the conditions, sub-conditions, sub-sub-conditions, etc., and we plan it all out step by step by painstakingly minute step. We believe that if we work out all the kinks in thought first, then we can approach reality with a foolproof plan. If we just think hard enough, if we just plan carefully enough, if we just approach existence with a good enough plan, then we can know and have control over what is happening even before it happens. Don't we often convince ourselves that if we just do this, then that, then this other, then that other, then all

the conditions will be in place and we will get what we want? Don't we often believe that if we just know exactly what we have to do and we do it, then it should get done? Don't we try to peek into the future and to arrange the future ahead of time? We are uncomfortable waiting in the uncertainty and anxiety of possibility, waiting for the future to become the past. Like Johannes, we want to jump the fence between possibility and actuality. We want to know and control what is coming, even before it has arrived.[27]

Once again, Hegel is right that mediation is the truth of all being, both abstract metaphysical being and concrete existential being, and that we want to escape this restlessness and pass over into the next stable term. Anxiety is one of the main ways we concretely experience mediation in daily life. Anxiety is at the base of daily existence, because we live through possibility and forward into the future. We spend our life caught up in the restlessness and uncertainty of this possibility, then that possibility, then this other possibility, and so on, as we trudge into the future. We constantly struggle to manage this anxiety, in any way that we can. Hegel is right that we *want* to jump out of the anxiety of possibility and forward to the safety of actuality; we *want* to see into and control the future, to treat contingency as necessity. But is Hegel right that we really *can* do this? Did Johannes jump out of the anxiety of possibility; did he treat contingency as necessity?

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[27] Johannes represents the diabolical extreme of this natural desire we all have to want control over contingency. He takes the Hegelian method to an alarming, and perhaps exaggerated, extreme. The whole seduction is simply an attempt to exercise control itself. Johannes does not care about the particular actuality itself (Cordelia), but simply wants mastery over actuality itself. This is why his goal is a broken engagement, why he wants Cordelia only for a catch-and-release. It is fitting that Johannes calls himself a "seducer" and not, perhaps, a lover or a spouse. A lover or a spouse wants to possess the person he has been chasing. But seduction is more about the very exercise of power itself, more about being able to bring someone (to bring actuality itself) under one's control. He tries to "seduce" actuality itself, to seduce contingency into surrendering to his power. Quite simply, Johannes wants control over actuality, but he cares rather little about the particular actuality involved. Johannes represents the diabolical extreme. Most of us do not want mastery for the sheer sake of mastery, but we try to control actuality in order to attain particular actualities, particular future goals that we care about.

III. Problems with Treating Contingency as Necessity

We recall from Chapter Two that Johannes Climacus rejects the Hegelian view that the individual can know contingency as necessity, can speculatively see into the future. Climacus thinks that the transition between possibility and actuality is a decisive "break in continuity," a leap that is opaque to thought.[28] The individual cannot think his way through the transition between possibility and actuality, and so he cannot know with necessity which actuality will come to be from possibility. The problem is that the individual cannot construct in thought a complete real possibility (a complete set of conditions), and so he cannot know that one content is "really" possible and therefore necessarily actual. As Climacus says, the individual never knows the "how," so he never knows the "thus and so."[29]

The individual never knows all of the requisite conditions and how they must fit together. No matter how intricate a web of conditions he constructs, some conditions remain hidden from thought. And the individual never knows all of the counter-conditions that could arise and make the contrary content "really" possible instead. No matter how long a list of counter-conditions he keeps, he can never foresee and forestall all counter-conditions. He may know some or even many of the conditions, but this partial set yields only a probability or a good guess. He must "stand *in pausa*"[30] and wait for "the pause of coming into existence and the pause of possibility,"[31] must wait for actuality to come into existence and either confirm or disconfirm his guess.[32] Since the individual cannot

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[28] *PF*, 84.
[29] Ibid., 82-83.
[30] Ibid., 80.
[31] Ibid., 80.
[32] Ibid., 83-85.

construct a complete real possibility in thought, he remains stuck within the uncertainty and duality inherent to possibility. He does not know which possibility is "really" possible and will necessarily become actual until after it becomes actual. He does not know the future until after the future becomes the past. Since the individual cannot jump the fence between possibility and actuality, he cannot know contingency as necessity and cannot speculatively see into the future.

This problem that Climacus identifies repeats itself, and it repeats itself all the more forcefully, when the individual transfers Hegel's view of modality from abstract metaphysics to concrete existence. The absurdity of treating contingency as necessity becomes all the more pronounced in everyday existence. Johannes the Seducer tries to construct in abstract thought a real possibility that will lead with necessity to a desired actuality, and he then uses this speculative blueprint to construct this real possibility (and its actuality) in concrete existence. Climacus would object that Johannes cannot even construct a real possibility in speculative thought to begin with, and it is foolish of him to think that he can use this incomplete speculative blueprint to construct reality. Johannes approaches existence poorly armed with only a sketchy plan, with only an incomplete set of directions. If even one of the conditions or counter-conditions is missing from his blueprint, he does not know with certainty that he will get the desired actuality; he does not know whether his half-finished plan will produce the desired actuality or the contrary actuality.

It is as if Johannes were using an incomplete set of directions to arrive at a precise destination. If even one of the directions is missing, he does not know whether he will arrive there. He may still get there, or he may miss a turn-off and become irremediably

lost. Or, it is as if Johannes were using incomplete instructions to build a cabinet or bake a cake. Both may turn out fine, or the cabinet doors may not open and the cake may not rise. Climacus would caution that, since Johannes approaches existence with only an unfinished speculative "how," he does not know which "thus and so" will come to be in concrete reality.

Even though Johannes tries to think through every condition and sub-condition, he cannot foresee in speculative thought what is perhaps the most fundamental condition of all: the concrete, material conditions of reality. Johannes does not have a complete set of conditions, because he does not know the conditions of his conditions; he does not know the material conditions of his speculative conditions. He does not have a complete "how," because he does not know the how of his how; he does not know the material "how" of his speculative "how." Johannes cannot speculatively foresee how reality will be and whether it will be favorable or unfavorable for instantiating his abstract conditions in material reality, for transferring his speculative plan to concrete existence. He does not know the particular people, places, situations, happenstances, moods, etc. that he will have to work with.[33] Will reality hand him conditions or counter-conditions? Will reality make the desired actuality "really" possible or the contrary actuality "really" possible? Johannes may have a fairly good speculative blueprint, but he does not know if he will find suitable building materials. He may find solid materials and skilled workmen, or he may find flimsy

[33] Johannes can certainly think through different combinations and prepare for how he might deal with them: if the conditions are this way, then he will instantiate the conditions this way, or if the conditions are this other way, then he will instantiate the conditions this other way. But he cannot think through the infinitely many combinations he might encounter, and he cannot foresee the exact, particular combination that he will encounter.

materials and clumsy workmen. Since he does not know how things will be, he does not know what will be.

Johannes readily admits that it is frustrating not knowing the material conditions on which his speculative conditions depend. He constantly struggles to account for "chance." Chance is the all-purpose term he uses to describe the material conditions of reality, the details of daily life that he cannot prepare for in speculative thought. Johannes concedes that chance is the one condition that continually frustrates his attempt at rational and existential mastery over existence, at treating contingency as necessity. Chance is such an inconsistent and threatening force. Johannes cannot account for chance in thought, because he never knows whether chance will be his friend or his foe. He writes, "Cursed chance! You, my only confidant, the only being I deem worthy to be my ally and my enemy, always similar to yourself in dissimilarity; always incomprehensible, always an enigma!"[34] Sometimes the material conditions are favorable and sometimes they are unfavorable. Sometimes chance hands him a condition and sometimes a counter-condition. Sometimes the people, places, and situations make the desired actuality really possible, and sometimes they make the contrary actuality really possible. Louis Mackey puts this point nicely:

> The aesthete has lost the mastery of life on which the success of his aestheticism depends. That he can be so surprised [by chance] is clear. Though he is prepared to transport everything that happens to him into the never-never land of reflection, he must nevertheless wait for it to happen. However effete, he is always liable to be taken unawares by immediacy, by some mood or happenstance that he did not and could not neutralize *a priori* and in the concrete—and that on the terms of his own metaphysic.[35]

The condition on which Johannes' speculative conditions depend is the most unpredictable condition of all. His rational plan depends on the a-rational, on something completely opaque to thought. The "necessity" of his plan depends completely on "chance."

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[34] *EO1*, 327.
[35] Mackey, *Kierkegaard: A Kind of Poet*, 47.

At times, chance is cruel to Johannes. Indeed, Johannes is anxious throughout much of the seduction, because he realizes that his speculative plan depends on one giant perhaps: perhaps the material conditions of reality will not cooperate. For example, Johannes battles with the material conditions to even get the seduction off the ground at all, to even put into place the first condition (becoming Cordelia's acquaintance). After he first sees Cordelia in the street and chooses her for the seduction, he does not see her again for weeks. Though he anxiously searches for her everywhere, he cannot find her anywhere. Perhaps she does not live in the city; perhaps he will never see her again; perhaps he cannot even meet her at all. [36] (Their meeting at the museum exhibit, fortuitously perfect though it seems, comes on the heels of weeks of frustration). And he originally plans to carry out the seduction at Cordelia's house (not the aunt's house), but she lives in an isolated area. There are no buildings to hide behind as he follows her in secret and no neighbors to befriend so that he naturally runs into her when she visits them. [37] Perhaps he cannot infiltrate her world; perhaps he cannot become her acquaintance at all. Johannes complains, "perhaps, perhaps—I can fly into a rage over all these perhapses, and the angrier I become, the more perhapses."[38] There is a speculative blind spot: Johannes cannot foresee the material conditions of his speculative conditions.

In addition, Johannes struggles to put into place the third condition (becoming engaged to Cordelia). He plans out the proposal carefully in thought and is certain he knows what will happen. Cordelia will be surprised, but precisely because she is surprised, she will simply accept. But Cordelia does not say "yes" (or "no") but refers the decision

[36] *EO1*, 328.
[37] Ibid., 337-338.
[38] Ibid., 328.

to her aunt. Johannes is caught off guard: "Very strange. When I was deliberating on the matter during the preceding days, I was resolute enough about it and sure that in her surprise she would say 'Yes.'…the matter did not turn out that way."[39] Perhaps the aunt will not give her consent; perhaps the engagement will not happen; perhaps the plan will fall through even this late in the game. Johannes' elaborate thought preparations may all be for naught. What good is the most carefully thought out plan if the people, places, and circumstances of daily life do not cooperate?

At other times, chance is kind to Johannes. The material conditions are fortuitously (though still unforeseeably) favorable for transferring the speculative conditions to concrete existence. For example, chance is his ally when he puts into place the second condition (becoming Cordelia's suitor). Chance hands him an unbelievably perfect faux suitor: boorish, pitiful Edward. Had Edward been more appealing, Johannes might have had difficulty seducing Cordelia away from him, and he might not have become her suitor at all. Or, he might have had to invest extra effort and emotion into winning her over, causing the relationship to lose its essential character of insignificance. In addition, since Edward is such an insecure, cowardly fellow, Johannes does not have to worry that Edward will reveal the cunning plot to Cordelia. And even if Edward does tell Cordelia, she will not take his complaints seriously. Johannes writes, "He [Edward] wants to speak with Cordelia, wants to describe for her all my cunning. It will be a shocking scene: Edward unshaven, disheveled, and speaking loudly with Cordelia…However angry he is with me, I am sure he will take no step without consulting me; he does not forget what benefit he has had from me as his mentor."[40] So many potential difficulties are avoided, all because

[39] *EO1*, 375.
[40] Ibid., 376.

chance kindly hands Johannes poor, pathetic Edward. What good is the most carefully thought out plan if the people, places, and circumstances of daily life cooperate even better than he himself could plan for in speculative thought?

So even though Johannes' desired actuality does (allegedly) come into existence, he still experiences this actuality as contingency and not as necessity. He does not know in advance or at any point while it is happening whether it is really possible and will necessarily become actual. At one moment, chance makes the desired actuality look "really" possible. At the next moment, chance makes the contrary actuality look "really" possible instead. Since the material conditions are unpredictable, Johannes remains painfully stuck in the duality and anxiety of possibility until the bitter end. Moment to moment, condition to condition, Johannes feels himself thrown back and forth within the mediating activity of possibility. He cannot jump out of possibility and forward to the safety of actuality ahead of time, though he desperately wants to. He has to wait in the anxiety of possibility, wait for actuality to come into existence and show him which was really possible and was to become actual. He has to wait for the future to become the past. The fence between possibility and actuality, between future and past, is just too tall for Johannes to jump over.

Johannes does not have mastery over contingency. He does not have the calm, all-knowing viewpoint from above *sub specie aeterni* that sees contingency as necessity. Instead, he has the anxious, uncertain viewpoint of someone who is painfully stuck in the thick of it, not knowing what will happen. Johannes approaches existence with a wait-and-see attitude. He restlessly waits in the uncertainty of possibility for actuality to come into existence and show him if each condition and if the actuality as a whole is "really" possible

and will become actual. Johannes cannot jump out of the mediating activity internal to possibility, cannot escape the anxiety of possibility. He tries to merely tolerate this back and forth tossing. He laments, "I am almost unable to find a foothold; like a water bird, I am seeking in vain to alight on the turbulent sea of my mind. And yet such turbulence is my element. I build upon it as the *Alcedo ispida* builds its nest upon the sea."[41] And he adds, "I find rest in this restlessness. The motion of the waves lulls me; their slapping against the boat is a monotonous lullaby…I lie in the same way now, haul in the sails, unship the rudder. Longing and expectancy toss me in their arms."[42]

Johannes is still very much the "baptized" and not the "priest." He waits for possibility to become actuality, for the future to become the past, for Hegel's owl of Minerva to take its ill-timed flight. Living in contingency is still living in the anxiety of possibility and toward the uncertainty of the future. Hegel tells us what we *want*: we want to escape the anxiety of possibility and to treat contingency as necessity. But Hegel does not tell us what *is*: we are stuck in the anxiety of possibility and we cannot take the contingency out of contingency.

Does Johannes—and Kierkegaard—take Hegel too seriously? Does Hegel really think that we can treat contingency as necessity, that we can see into and control the future? Whichever way the answer goes, it does not look too good for Hegel. If Hegel is serious, then we have shown why this view falls short—i.e. we never know all of the conditions, especially the material conditions, so we cannot get from possibility to actuality. And even if Hegel is indeed correct that *if* we could know all of the conditions, then we could treat contingency as necessity, the problem is precisely that we *never* know all of the conditions.

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[41] *EO1*, 325.
[42] Ibid.

As we said in Chapter Two, our viewpoint on existence is limited; we never have all of the information, which Johannes would agree with. We always know and experience contingency under the mode of contingency and never under the mode of necessity. If Hegel is not so serious, and if he acknowledges that we never have all of the information and cannot really treat contingency as necessity, then his view is rather useless. And then, Johannes—and Kierkegaard—has the right to ask of Hegel: "What, then, is the point of this? What are we supposed to do with your view?" Should Johannes laugh at the clever joke that Hegel has trapped him in; or should he feel irritated that Hegel has taken him for a ride?

IV: The Contingency of Contingency: The Aesthete Gives In and Gives Up

The Hegelian method backfires. Johannes ends up with the opposite of what he had worked for. By focusing on necessity, he ends up focusing on contingency. By trying to gain control over existence, he ends up finding what is beyond his control. What if Cordelia did not live in the city; what if her friend had not been late to the museum exhibit; what if Edward had not been a gullible idiot; what if the aunt had not grown so fond of Johannes; what if Cordelia did not want to break off the engagement? What if, what if, what if? Perhaps, perhaps, perhaps. When Johannes tries to treat contingency as necessity, contingency stands out as all the more contingent. And the more he tries to control existence—step by step by painstakingly minute step—the more he realizes that even a well-thought out and well-executed plan depends entirely on what is out of his speculative control.

But perhaps Johannes learns his lesson, because he takes the opposite attitude toward contingency in *Stages on Life's Way*, in "*In Vino Veritas*." In this curious episode, Johannes and his friends (the other pseudonymous authors of the other aesthetical writings: Victor Eremtia, Constantin Constantius, and the Young Man) relinquish control over the future and embrace the contingency of contingency. They completely dismiss the idea that we can treat contingency as necessity and that we can see into and control the future. The aesthetes declare that it is impossible to successfully plan in thought and then create in reality a desired actuality, here in particular, a banquet. They know that they cannot foresee in thought and then control in existence the material conditions on which their speculative conditions depend. They cannot prepare for chance or "luck." As Victor Eremita says (using comically Hegelian language),

> A banquet in and by itself is a difficult matter, for even if it is planned with all possible taste and with skill, it nevertheless still needs something else—namely, good luck. By that I do not mean what a worried hostess most likely would think of but something else that no one can be absolutely sure about: a happy interplay of moods and of the small details of the banquet…This is why it is risky to begin, for if something goes wrong, perhaps even at the very beginning, then the mood of a banquet can take off in such a wrong direction that it will take a long time to overtake it.[43]

The aesthetes believe that all frustration with actuality comes from having expectations and plans—comes precisely from trying to see into and control the future, from trying to treat contingency as necessity—and then finding out that reality does not match the speculative blueprint. It is foolishly risky to try to create a real possibility in thought and in existence, to try to plan it all out condition, by condition, by condition—just as Johannes did with the seduction. They will encounter too many perhapses of existence—just as Johannes did with the seduction. When we plan for the future, William Afham observes, we experience the "anxiety that something might suddenly happen, the

[43] *SLW*, 24.

most trifling thing that nevertheless is powerful enough to upset everything!"[44] It is safer, then, not to plan for or try to control the future at all. There is no disappointment if there is no expectation or advanced planning. It is safer to simply let actuality happen to them, however it will, without their input.

The aesthetes all agree that if a banquet is to be satisfying, it must simply happen to them, all of a sudden and without any preparation or arranging on their part. As William Afham says of Johannes, "a banquet he [Johannes] could not wait for…he insisted on one condition—that it be arranged so that it was *au einmal einzunehmen* [to be partaken of all at once]. Everyone agreed on that."[45] This time around, Johannes refuses to go through the whole process of thinking through what the possibility would have to be to lead to his desired actuality (a satisfying banquet) and then feeling disappointed when he inevitably cannot put into reality this possibility. He would prefer that the banquet just happen to them, whenever, wherever, and however. If he cannot control for the material conditions, then he might as well accept the uncontrollability of the material conditions and accept whichever banquet happens to happen. In contrast to the method Johannes uses in the seduction, here he gives up wanting contingency to be necessity, and he gives into the very contingency of contingency. He embraces actuality (a banquet) that happens by chance and accident and completely without his planning or control. Here, Johannes does not want mastery over existence; he wants existence to simply happen to him, however that might be. Perhaps in trying to live according to the Hegelian view that contingency is necessity,

[44] *SLW*, 27.
[45] Ibid., 22-23.

Johannes ends up succumbing to the opposite view: contingency is contingency and he cannot control it, so he might as well give up trying to control it altogether.[46]

In fact, throughout the aesthetical writings, the aesthete (Johannes the Seducer and all the other versions of the aesthete) continually struggles with contingency. After all, we cannot forget that the very publication of the aesthetical writings themselves, of *Either/Or* and *Stage's on Life's Way*, happens by sheer chance, by accidents buried in accidents. Had Victor Eremita not purchased that curious writing desk in the secondhand shop, had he not needed to retrieve money from the desk's money drawer, had he not needed to use a hatchet to force open the drawer, had the hatchet not forced open a secret, unknown compartment that contained these papers, *Either/Or* would not have been published.[47] In the same way, had Hilarious Bookbinder not forgotten to return the papers to the author's relatives after the author died, had he not let his children practice their penmanship and reading skills by copying and reading passages from the papers, had the children's tutor—the "normal-school graduate and candidate in philosophy"[48]—not noticed that these papers the children were using contained remarkable content, had the tutor not encouraged Hilarious to publish the papers, *Stages on Life's Way* would not have reached the public.[49] The aesthetical writings are constantly haunted by the accidental and the arbitrary. It seems comically

[46]Of course, there are problems with this alternative way of dealing with contingency. The aesthetes acknowledge the difficulties of just letting actuality happen to them. They realize that a banquet will not simply happen to them without any planning or controlling on their part, and so they abandon the idea of the banquet altogether, abandon the idea that they can live by simply letting actuality happen to them by accident. If it had not been for Constantin Constantius, who plans the banquet in secret and surprises the others one fine day with the completely prepared banquet, the whole thing would not have happened. Living according to the view that contingency is contingency and cannot be controlled may be just as impracticable as living according to the view that contingency is necessity and can be controlled (*SLW*, 21-26).
[47] *EO1*, 4-6.
[48] *SLW*, 5.
[49] Ibid., 3-6.

fitting that papers that contain writings on necessity and the mastery of existence should be found by sheer chance.

The aesthete is just as preoccupied with chance, the accidental, and the arbitrary as he is with necessity. He oscillates between necessity and chance, between wanting control over existence and wanting to give up control altogether and let existence simply happen to him at random. At one moment, the aesthete is Johannes of "The Seducer's Diary," who wants mastery at all costs. At the next moment, the aesthete is Johannes of "*In Vino Veritas*," or even better, the aesthete of "Rotation of Crops," who completely relinquishes his control over existence and embraces the accidental and the arbitrary. He would rather accept what happens to happen, like catching a fly under a nutshell and watching the shell move as the fly flails about underneath, or listening to the raindrops on the roof, or laughing at the sweat collecting on a boring lecturer's brow. In the end, perhaps the aesthete realizes that when he uses Hegelian speculative reason to live according to the higher viewpoint of necessity, he is always eventually and inevitably shoved back down into the everyday viewpoint of contingency. Perhaps the aesthete realizes that when he wants control, he often finds what is beyond his control; when he wants necessity, he often finds what is contingent and accidental.

The Hegelian method miscarries. Johannes—and the aesthete in general—realizes all the more that contingency is contingency and that he does not have control over contingency. The aesthete gets frustrated. He starts to wonder, why try to do anything at all? If the future is always different from how he plans, if even the most well-thought out and well-executed plan depends on what is out of his control, then why try to plan for and take control of the future at all? Why bother desiring, planning for, and working toward

future goals? Why bother moving toward and living toward the future at all? As we saw with *In Vino Veritas,* the aesthete would rather not plan for or work toward anything. He would rather do nothing and simply wait for existence to do whatever it wants with him. We saw in Chapter Three that when the aesthete tries to use Hegelian meditation to move forward into the future, he ends up in the opposite result, in paralysis. Here again, when the aesthete tries to use Hegelian modality to move forward into the future, he ends up in the opposite result, in paralysis in the face of the future. Instead of taking matters into his own hands, the aesthete simply washes his hands of everything altogether.

Once again, the aesthete of the "Diapsalmata" gives us the last words. He writes, "Alas, fortune's door does not open inward so that one can push it open by rushing at it; but it opens outward, and therefore one can do nothing about it."[50] The individual cannot open fortune's (chance's) door by himself and ahead of time to see what is the on the other side. He can rush at the door all he wants—he can give himself a good running start by preparing in thought and arranging in existence the possibility that should lead to his desired actuality—but the force of his running starts always stops just short, always halts at fortune's doorstep. No matter how powerful the running start, no matter how much he tries to prepare and control, he cannot open the door by his own force. Fortune's door must be opened unto him. If he rushes at the door, he ends up in a painful, head-on collision with the closed door. And the faster he rushes at it—the more he tries to plan and control—the harder and more painful the collision will be. (When we plan something carefully and it still does not go according to our plan, don't we feel all the more disappointed and don't we feel the force of fortune all the more?) So, the aesthete concludes, if it all ends in a

[50] *EO1*, 23.

painful collision with fortune, then perhaps it is safer not to bother planning for and trying to have control over the future at all. Perhaps it is safer not to move forward at all. The aesthete prefers to wait on fortune's front stoop and wait for fortune itself to open the door and reveal whatever happens to be on the other side.

Perhaps in his younger years the aesthete tried to be a Hegelian in daily life (perhaps he was Johannes the Seducer), but he suffered so many disappointments and failed attempts that he has now arrived at an important life lesson: it is foolish to want anything and to try for anything:

> It takes a lot of naiveté to believe that it helps to shout and scream in the world, as if one's fate would thereby be altered. Take what comes and avoid all complications. In my early years, when I went to a restaurant, I would say to the waiter: a good cut, a very good cut, from the loin, not too fat. Perhaps the waiter would scarcely hear what I said. Perhaps it was even less likely that he would heed it, and still less that my voice would influence the chef and even if all this happened, there perhaps was not a good cut in the whole roast. Now I never shout anymore.[51]

There are so many perhapses. There are so many conditions beyond his control. His plans can fall apart at any moment, so why take the risk? If he does not have control over something as simple as his evening meal, then he certainly does not have control over important, complex, long-term future goals, such as securing a certain job or relationship. So, why bother? It is safer to do nothing and just "take what comes," whatever that might be. The aesthete could shout until his voice grows hoarse, but he knows he will not be heard. His protestations, plans, and preparations will all be in vain. He might as well remain silent in the face of the future and at least save his voice.

We can add in the aesthete's words that we already quoted in Chapter Three: "Time passes, life is a stream, etc., so people say. That is not what I find: time stands still, and so do I. All the plans I project fly straight back at me; when I want to spit, I spit in my own

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[51] *EO1*, 33.

face."[52] Any plans he makes for the future boomerang back to him with the same message: it will not turn out as he plans; he will be disappointed; it is not worth it. He might as well spit in his own face, for deserves the disgust and mockery he brings upon himself if he tries to plan for and control the future. Once more, the aesthete's motto is: "*Summa Summarum*: I don't feel like doing anything."[53] We should not be too quick to condemn the aesthete for his melancholic laziness. We cannot really blame him for wanting to give up. Who among us has not felt, at least at some point, that planning for and arranging the future is useless, because we know from past experience that it never goes according to our plan? The aesthete resides in all of us, that temptation to give up and let existence decide things for us.

At the end of the day, the aesthete feels mistreated and duped by Hegel. The aesthete cautions us, "What philosophers say about actuality is often just as disappointing as it is when one reads on a sign in a secondhand shop: Pressing Done Here. If a person were to bring his clothes to be pressed, he would be duped, for the sign is merely for sale."[54] Hegel engages in a little false advertising. He hangs a sign in the window of actuality that says "necessity done here." But when the aesthete walks into the store, he quickly realizes that what the sign advertises does not match what is sold in the store. Necessity is nowhere to be found in the store of actuality. The aesthete feels disappointed and irritated that the sign Hegel posts does not match the merchandise.

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[52] *EO1*, 26.
[53] Ibid., 20.
[54] Ibid., 32.

V: Dealing with Anxiety

But let us get back to anxiety, since Hegel has not gotten the aesthete (or us) out of anxiety.[55] Vigilius Haufniensis writes in the *Concept of Anxiety* that "anxiety is about tomorrow."[56] The individual feels anxious in the face of possibility, in the face of the future.[57] The individual experiences the metaphysical restlessness of possibility (the mediation of possibility) as psychological, emotional restlessness. Anxiety is an inner agitation and disharmony, an eerie feeling that something is about to happen but the individual does not know exactly what.[58] The individual feels anxious in the face of a future event, because he does not know which possibility will become actual, and he feels himself restlessly tossed between the two, worrying about and wondering which will happen. He feels anxious in the face of the future in general, because the future is pure possibility. In the future, everything is just as possible as it is impossible. The future may be filled with the good or with the bad, with the fulfillment of his greatest dreams or the suffering of his greatest nightmares. The individual feels himself restlessly tossed between the hope for the good and the fear of the bad, wondering which awaits him.

Anxiety is dread; it is that foreboding feeling that something is about to happen, but he does not know what. The individual dreads the future, because there is nothing more unsettling than knowing that something is coming, but not knowing what that something

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[55] For an excellent discussion of anxiety in Kierkegaard's work, see Gordon D. Marino, "Anxiety in *The Concept of Anxiety*," in *Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. Alastair Hannay and Gordon D. Marino (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 308-328. My discussion of anxiety is much indebted to Marino's article.

[56] *CD*, 80.

[57] Marino, "Anxiety in *The Concept of Anxiety*," 319-320.

[58] In *The Sickness Unto Death*, the description that Anti-Climacus gives of despair is similar to that of anxiety: "There is not one single living human being who does not despair a little, who does not secretly harbor an unrest, an inner strife, a disharmony, an anxiety about an unknown something, an anxiety about some possibility in existence or an anxiety about himself" (*SUD*, 22).

is. It could be disaster or triumph. It is as if the individual were hearing footsteps coming down the hall, but he does not know who is approaching. It could be his best friend or his mortal enemy.

Ultimately, we are anxious that the future will not be what we want it to be, what we plan for it to be. Even worse, we fear that everything will go wrong. All unwanted possibilities will become actual, and all the most fearful misfortunes will befall us. We fear that we will not even achieve a minimally good life. Gordon Marino writes of anxiety, "Deep inside, Everyman is afraid of being alone, unrecognized, invisible."[59] We fear that we will have nothing to show for ourselves and no one to cling to. In his *Journals and Papers*, Kierkegaard writes, "Deep within every human being there still lives the anxiety over the possibility of being alone in the world, forgotten by God, overlooked among the millions and millions in this enormous household."[60] And anyone who has gone through a little life—as Johannes and the other aesthetes would surely agree—knows from experience that the good is indeed equally as possible as the bad. We come by our anxiety honestly. What we anticipate rarely happens, and what we do not anticipate often happens. Sometimes the best things happen out of nowhere; sometimes the most horrifying things happen out of nowhere.[61] Haufniensis writes this striking description:

> No, in possibility all things are equally possible, and whoever has truly been brought up by possibility has grasped the terrible as well as the joyful…he knows better than a child knows his ABC's that he can demand absolutely nothing of life and that the terrible, perdition, and annihilation live next door to every man, and when he has thoroughly learned that every anxiety about which he was anxious came upon him in the next moment…[o]nly in his way can possibility be educative.[62]

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[59] Marino, "Anxiety in *The Concept of* Anxiety," 320-321.
[60] *JP*, vol. 1, 100; *Pap*. VIII A 363.
[61] Marino, "Anxiety in *The Concept of Anxiety*," 324-325.
[62] *CA*, 156.

We have this unsettling feeling that perhaps nothing is owed to us, perhaps nothing is guaranteed to us, neither by man nor by God. Don't we often convince ourselves that if we just work hard enough and plan carefully enough that we should be guaranteed something, that life should owe us something? When anxiety confronts us with its full force, it reminds us that life owes us nothing at all.

According to Haufniensis, we have a few different ways of dealing with anxiety. Most of us spend our lives trying to deflect and ignore our anxiety. It is too difficult to face this unsettling feeling that the future is not in our control and that life owes us nothing. Instead, we convince ourselves that we are overreacting. We summon our inner Judge William, perhaps, and take refuge in commonsense: things are never as bad as all that, and we can always make the best of things. Haufniensis writes, "In actuality, no man ever became so unhappy that he did not retain a little remnant, and common sense says quite correctly that if one is cunning, one knows how to make the best of things."[63] We continue on, probably using some form of the Hegelian method (of Johannes' method). We reassure ourselves that things will work out better next time. If we just try a little harder, plan a little better, control a little more, then next time it will go according to plan and we will get what we are owed. We get busy making lots of plans and putting these plans into action. (Even Johannes himself, as the seduction of Cordelia draws to a close, begins looking for his next victim, planning his next seduction, probably thinking he can get it right the next time). We continue to ignore anxiety by jumping out of it, over and over again. But, if pressed, Haufniensis thinks that we would admit that the undertow of anxiety still pulsates underneath the busyness. Anxiety is still there and we wish we could be cured of it.[64] But

[63] *CA*, 158.
[64] Ibid.,155-156.

we do not *really* want to be cured of anxiety, because we are not willing to deal with it head-on. We cling to our anxious way of life, because at least this is familiar. We cannot even imagine what a life without anxiety would look like. [65]

If the individual has enough courage to face anxiety head-on—to admit that he does not know what awaits him in the future and that he is owed nothing by either man or God—then, Haufniensis thinks, there are two new options: the individual will either commit "suicide" or will be cured of his anxiety.[66] The aesthete of the "Diapsalmata" belongs in the category of suicide. Realizing that everything is possible but that perhaps nothing is "really" possible for him, the aesthete takes himself out of existence. He stops planning for or working for anything, stops living toward the future altogether. He adopts the "why bother?" attitude and lets existence happen to him without this input. The rules of the game are unfair, and there does not even seem to be a referee to arbitrate or to complain to. It is better not to enter the game at all.[67]

But if the individual is able to stay with his anxiety and to learn to be "anxious in the right way,"[68] then he can be cured of his anxiety. He must undergo a profound, decisive change in his attitude toward possibility and toward living in contingency. He must undergo the leap to religious consciousness (which we already saw at the end of Chapter Three). When the individual is brutally honest with himself, and when he no longer tries

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[65] Marino, "Anxiety in *The Concept of Anxiety*," 323-324.
[66] *CA*, 159.
[67] In *Repetition*, the Young Man complains of a similar problem: "Where am I? What does it mean to say: the world? What is the meaning of that word? Who tricked me into this whole thing and leaves me standing here? Who am I? How did I get into the world? Why was I not asked about it, why was I not informed of the rules and regulations but just thrust into the ranks as if I had been bought from a peddling shanghaier of human beings? How did I get involved in this big enterprise called actuality?...If I am compelled to be involved, where is the manager—I have something to say about this. Is there no manager? To whom shall I make my complaint" (*FTR*, 200).

[68] *CA*, 155.

to convince himself that he can "make the best of things" by his own strength alone, he must admit that the situation is pretty dire for him: he never knows what is really possible in his life or in the world, and he never has (complete) control over what is really possible and will become actual in his life or in the world. In short, the individual realizes that he is not the ultimate source of possibility, that possibility does not depend on him, first and foremost. The ultimate source of possibility must be transcendent to him—transcendent to the human, earthly realm and to possibility (and contingency) itself. The ultimate source of possibility (and of contingency) is transcendent necessity: God. The individual realizes that possibility depends not on him, but on God, and so he needs some help from God to navigate possibility and contingency.[69] He cannot go it alone, like the aesthete and most of us try to do.

The leap to religious consciousness occurs. (And we have already described the leap in depth in previous chapters.) The individual leaps up from immanent possibility to transcendent necessity and then comes back down again to immanent possibility, but he brings the viewpoint of transcendence back down into immanence. When he leaps up to transcendent necessity, he catches a glimpse of God's viewpoint on possibility and contingent actuality—even if only a brief, imperfect glimpse—and he sees that immanent possibility and contingent actuality are radically dependent on transcendent necessity (on God), at each moment. At each moment, transcendent necessity freely descends into immanent possibility, forming a moment of contingent actuality. At each moment, God decides to recreate and renew possibility and contingency as a whole and in its particular moments. Contingency is indeed radically contingent: possibility and contingent actuality

[69] *CA*, 155-162.

radically depend on transcendent necessity at each moment and each moment is a paradox, is the absurd union of transcendent necessity and immanent possibility.

In religious consciousness, in the life of faith, the individual repeatedly embraces and expresses his dependence on the God-relationship, first and foremost. At each moment, he repeats the initial leap to religious consciousness. He infinitely resigns his control his control over possibility—the he alone controls what is really possible and actual—and he accepts his dependence on God, accepts that transcendent necessity is the ultimate source of possibility and contingency as a whole. But in the same moment, the individual comes back down again to the temporal, finite realm, and he re-receives possibility and contingency as a whole, but now transformed according to the viewpoint of faith—that possibility and contingency as a whole is freely given gift from God, at each moment.

In faith, the individual is cured of his anxiety. He is not anxious in the face of possibility and the future. He does not know what is coming, but he does not worry about what is coming, because he knows *where* it is coming from. He knows the ultimate source of all possibility and actuality is God. Since possibility is rooted in divine goodness and love, the individual has faith that whatever happens—even amongst the seeming surprises and misfortunes—will be just fine, if not now, then eventually. He has faith that God will not forget him completely. The individual of faith is peaceful in the face of possibility, because he rests in the source of possibility itself. As Anti-Climacus says in *Sickness Unto Death*, the individual is cured of his despair (anxiety) when he "rests transparently in the power that established it."[70]

[70] *SUD*, 14.

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