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A Comparative Analysis on Immanuel Kant's and Soren Abaye Kierkegaard's Theories  
of Human Nature

By

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Thesis Committee Chair: David S. Pacini, PhD, Harvard University

An abstract of  
A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the  
Candler School of Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Masters of Theological Studies  
2012

## **Abstract**

A Comparative Analysis on Immanuel Kant's and Soren Abaye Kierkegaard's Theories  
of Human Nature

By Raymond Perrier

The theory of human nature that is represented by Soren Abaye Kierkegaard's pseudonym Anti-Climacus in the book *Sickness unto Death*, has rarely been compared with the works of the late Enlightenment thinker Immanuel Kant. This project will fill that gap through three essays comparing Kant's and Anti-Climacus's perspectives on the conditions that create a human self, the proper pursuit of metaphysics, and the practical need for morality. My hope is that these comparative analyses will imply a reading of Kierkegaard's theory of human nature, found in the *Sickness unto Death*, which is comparable and even dependent on the Kantian tradition of thinking. In light of this reading of Kierkegaard's *Sickness unto Death*, the relationship between Kant and Kierkegaard will be cast in a positive light, which will suggest that Kierkegaard is only properly understood when his positive relationship with Kant is recognized.

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Theories of human nature are one of the most fruitful areas of study in which a scholar can participate. For, theories on human nature are always geared towards some practical use in everyday life even though they stem from a theoretical framework. As David L. Haberman and Leslie Stevenson say, theories of human nature are “for anyone looking for a ‘philosophy of life,’ that is, an understanding of human nature that gives some guidance for how we should live.”<sup>1</sup> In this sense, a theory of human nature accomplishes several tasks at once:

1. It describes some “metaphysical understanding of the universe”<sup>2</sup>
2. It makes certain claims about “the human condition”<sup>3</sup>
3. A theory on human nature includes a “diagnosis of some typical defect in human beings”<sup>4</sup>
4. This diagnosis is followed by “a prescription or ideal for how human life should best be lived”<sup>5</sup> which typically takes the form of a system of morality

In more general terms one could call a theory of human nature the defining principle used in the creation of an individual’s identity. And even though some individuals never make serious attempts to understand the foundation of their identities, they undoubtedly, and without a thought, work in light of some kind of theory no matter how undefined it may be. It would seem prudent, therefore, for every individual to pursue, however minimal, questions regarding human nature. If not for the purpose of

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<sup>1</sup> Leslie Stevenson and David L. Haberman, *Ten Theories of Human Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

clearly understanding their personal beliefs, then perhaps for defining the underlying ideas of their identity in order to justify their beliefs, whatever they may be.

The goal of this project is to examine and compare two theories of human nature created by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Soren Abaye Kierkegaard (1813-1855). It has come to my attention that the theory of human nature developed by Kant has never been compared to the theory of human nature Kierkegaard introduces through the pseudonymous character Anti-Climacus in the *Sickness unto Death*. My hope, therefore, is that this comparison will fill a much needed gap in the comparative analyses done between Kant and Kierkegaard. Furthermore, this project will imply the strong similarities that Kant and Kierkegaard share regarding human nature.<sup>6</sup>

This comparison will be accomplished through a series of essays which will compare Kant's and the pseudonym Anti-Climacus's<sup>7</sup> theories of human nature. The first essay focuses on demonstrating the conditions of the human existence through the respective concepts of the human self. This will begin the discussion on the second point of aforementioned list, but it will be more truthful to the starting point of Kant and Anti-Climacus. It is a wise starting point, so to speak, since the conditions of human existence undoubtedly influence the metaphysical claims that guide the human's understanding of life.

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<sup>66</sup> I say imply because it is not my intention to directly account for all of the comparative analyses done on Kant and Kierkegaard. I will admit that I believe most of the analyses done between Kant and Kierkegaard largely focus on the theological and moral differences. This series of essays, I think, will shed light on the dependence Kierkegaard has on Kant's work regarding Anti-Climacus's theory of human nature.

<sup>7</sup> From here forward I will respect Kierkegaard's pseudonym by referring to Anti-Climacus throughout the three essays.

The second essay will emerge quite naturally from the conditions of self and will discuss the power and diagnosis of such a self. In this essay I will combine the first and third points of the aforementioned list since, for Kant and Anti-Climacus, metaphysical investigations become a part of the overall problem, or diagnosis, that emerge from the conditions of the human self.

Finally, the discussion will turn to the practical ramifications of these theories demonstrated through a comparison on morality (i.e. “a prescription”<sup>8</sup>). This final essay plays not only a role in the larger scheme of human nature as an example of the practical use of self-knowledge, but it also demonstrates the starting point of a theological system. For our purposes, however, I will limit the comparison between Kant and Anti-Climacus’s theories of human nature to the self and morality, and will only briefly discuss certain theological ideas that could arise from such theories of human nature like a notion of God and freedom.

## I

The concept of self has its roots in the early Modern notions of human reason. Reason, as a power, became the foundation of early Modern philosophers; it was the starting point and internal strength of their pursuit of knowledge. As such, reason became a defining point in the descriptions of the human subject as a “thinking intelligent being”<sup>9</sup> or the “I think” (*cogito*).<sup>10</sup> Overtime the Modern enthusiasm regarding the power of

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<sup>8</sup> Leslie Stevenson and David L. Haberman, *Ten Theories of Human Nature*, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Locke, John, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Philadelphia: Hayes and Zell, Publishers, 1856), Google Ebook, 210.

<sup>10</sup> Descartes, Rene, *Discourse on the Method*, Vol. I, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 111-151, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 127.

reason developed into various investigations about the conditions of human existence. It was evident to Modern philosophers that reason was a powerful force when trying to approach objects of the world through natural science. But what could reason tell us about the human's being? How far could reason go when it was used to reflect on its own origins? Essentially, the Modern philosopher began to wonder if human reason could unify the mind with the body without appealing to a power other than itself like God.

As philosophers pursued answers to such questions, a result was the development of concepts of the human self. The self was a kind of realist approach to human existence that was implemented to unify the mind with the body. Accordingly a concept of the self took on the challenge of describing the conditions of human existence through unifying objective experience with internal reflection. The difficulty of creating this concept, however, is that it needed to account for all forms of experience. A clear and distinct concept of self must be that one thing which underlies all other ideas and experiences that combine to form the human identity.

As every human will admit, our experiences continue to accumulate and redefine or reshape our perceptions of the world and the self. Thus, it seems that with every passing moment the entire self changes. The wide variety of experiences makes the very concept of self seem fleeting to the human mind. As David Hume says in *A Treatise on Human Nature*,

“There are some philosophers, who imagine we are every moment intimately conscious of what we call our Self, that we feel its existence and its continuance in existence and are certain, beyond the evidence of a demonstration, both of its perfect identity and simplicity...If [however] we wou'd have the idea of self pass [as] clear and



intelligible. It must be some one impression, that gives rise to every real idea. But self or person is not any one impression...<sup>11</sup>

Hume's critique of the self is well warranted because the most common approach to determining the nature of selfhood is by rooting it in a thinking apparatus, like the mind, which is indirectly coupled with the experiences of this world by self-reflection. Each experience reveals a new idea or wisdom about the nature of our existence, and, thus, with every new experience the thinking self seems to change. It appears to be impossible to pass the self off as any "one impression" when it stands in relation to the constant flux and change of a lifetime of experiences.

Kant and Anti-Climacus, however, discover a way to pass the self off as a "clear and intelligible"<sup>12</sup> idea through which all ideas and experiences can be related. They succeed in demonstrating that the self, at its core, is a synthesis of various relations that can be brought under one unified self-consciousness (Kant), or self-relation (Anti-Climacus), that presupposes not only human identity but knowledge in general.

The challenge is isolating that single "impression"<sup>13</sup> which defines the human's being. Kant and Anti-Climacus use the language of synthesis (i.e. relation) to imply that the human subject is a single entity that cannot be divided into separate parts. Instead, the relations or components of the whole entity can only be isolated from each other, and

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<sup>11</sup> Hume, David, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), Google Ebook, 251.

<sup>12</sup> Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 251.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

never completely separated. The self as a synthesis represents that single “impression”<sup>14</sup> that can then be related to all other experiences and ideas.

For example, according to Kant, the human mind is a synthesis that involves a complex melding of human experience and the “I think.”<sup>15</sup> Likewise, for Anti-Climacus, the human self is built upon the synthesis between two things like the “psychical and the physical,” which then “relates itself to itself” forming the precursor (i.e. self-awareness) to identity.<sup>16</sup> The task of this essay, therefore, is to demonstrate *what the synthetic self is*, according to Kant and Anti-Climacus.

What the self is follows from a subtle and yet distinct line of questioning that must, for this essay, remain isolated from questions of why or how the self became this way. It would be easy to mistake this essay as a search for identity or the origins of being. Self-identity and the origins of the human’s being, however, are entirely separate issues from what the self is. Questions about identity already assume that there is an enduring foundation in place through which all experiences and ideas are combined to form an individual’s identity.

This essay is focused on the building blocks or conditions of the human self that influence an individual’s existential perspective, or self-identity. In this sense, I will focus primarily on unveiling those components that, when combined, create a concept of self who through its own power creates an identity. The concept of self therefore is

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<sup>14</sup> Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 251.

<sup>15</sup> Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 243.

<sup>16</sup> Anti-Climacus, *Sickness unto Death*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), 13.

distinct from self-identity, since it deals with conditions of human ontology that presuppose an individual's experiences and, thus, their identity. Furthermore, questions about origins seek to understand the underlying reality that created the self, and, thus, do not tell an individual anything about the self as such. I will, therefore, make no attempts at defining the self's origins.

These distinctions are important to recognize for it signifies the unique approach that Kant and Anti-Climacus adopt to begin their respective theories on the human self. The question is not what an identity is or where the self came from. Rather, the question is what are the conditions of the self that, when synthesized, create an enduring foundation to all human experiences. While Kant believes that the self is a synthesis between the conditions (or circumstances) of human experience and the human reflection (the "I think")<sup>17</sup> Anti-Climacus believes the condition of the self is the "relations (experience) relating itself to itself (reflection)"<sup>18</sup>.

This comparison will be structured around two points: the objective and subjective conditions of the self. Objective and subjective are in this case two sides of the same coin that create the self. The comparison will begin with the objective condition of the self or the human experiences of the world without itself. In this sense, the objective condition concerns the human subject's relationship to the realm of objects. According to Kant and Anti-Climacus, experience is the starting point of any concept of self, because it is the condition of human existence that gives rise to self-awareness or human subjectivity. For Kant, this objective condition is the human subject's relation to an

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<sup>17</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 243.

<sup>18</sup> Anti-Climacus, *Sickness unto Death*, 13.

object; the combination of which (i.e. the subject-object relation) creates an experience. For Anti-Climacus, the objective condition of the self is demonstrated through the synthesis between two ideas in the mind that create a “negative unity”<sup>19</sup> like between finite and infinite.<sup>20</sup>

The comparison will then naturally move from the condition of objectivity to subjectivity, or in other words from experience to awareness. Awareness, in this case, specifically refers to the internal sense of one’s being. Thus, the second point of comparison on the synthetic self deals with the inner sense or the self’s reflective nature (i.e. the subject-subject relation) that represents each individual’s condition of subjectivity. For Kant, this internal awareness is manifested in the phrase “I think”.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Anti-Climacus believes that the subjective condition of the human self is represented through the negative unities relation to itself like a kind of self-reflection.<sup>22</sup>

Through the objective condition of the self, the human perceives of things that appear to be distinct and as such appear to be different from one another and can be categorized as such. Anti-Climacus states this quite succinctly in the first pages of the *Sickness unto Death*. He says, “A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short, a synthesis. A synthesis

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<sup>19</sup> Anti-Climacus, *Sickness unto Death*, 13.

<sup>20</sup> To be clear I must note that the objective condition of the self indicates the external experiences of the human self, and as such the experience is ultimately internal though it does not deny the reality of the object. It would have been easier to use the language objective and subjective experiences but at the time of Kant and Anti-Climacus the term experience was used by philosophers to signify the human interaction with the world. To use experience in reference to subjectivity would only confuse the discussion.

<sup>21</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 243.

<sup>22</sup> Anti-Climacus, *Sickness unto Death*, 13.

is a relation between two.”<sup>23</sup> Accordingly Anti-Climacus believes that humans perceive the world in dualistic fashion through ideas that appear to be opposites of one another. The finite exists in relation to the infinite and the psychical to the physical, but by the very nature and content of these ideas they appear to be irreconcilable. Take for example two apples sitting next to each other. To conceive of one finite apple one must simply pick it up and focus the mind on it alone. If, however, one perceives that there are in fact two apples sitting next to one another, then multiplicity is encountered and the notion of infinity becomes possible.

The “synthesis...between two”<sup>24</sup> ideas like infinite and finite, therefore, reflects the human self’s encounter with the world. For without experience of numerous objects the notions of finitude and infinitude would not be an idea to the self at all. Finite and infinite would have never passed before the mind as an idea if there were nothing outside of the self to perceive. There would be no quantification of time (temporality and eternity) or of space (finite and infinite) if the human self had no experiences at all.

Anti-Climacus does, however, acknowledge the difficulty to unify these seemingly opposed ideas, and calls the relation between two ideas, like in the case of the temporal and eternal or the psychical and physical, a “third [relation] as a negative unity.”<sup>25</sup> They are a “negative unity” because the ideas appear to be opposite ideas about the world. This unity illustrates the tensions between ideas that an individual might normally see as negations of each other.

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<sup>23</sup> Anti-Climacus, *Sickness unto Death*, 13.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

C. Stephen Evans claims that, “Anti-Climacus regularly uses ‘contradiction’ to refer to what might today be designated as an ‘incongruity.’”<sup>26</sup> Evans is speaking specifically about passages that are found in Anti-Climacus’s *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, but this tension between ideas also plays a role in the *Sickness unto Death*. The “negative unity”<sup>27</sup> that arises from the synthesis of two ideas that seem to negate one another, like in the case of a synthesis between temporal and eternal, create a tension in human understanding that might be considered a contradiction.

As Evans points out, however, it is not Anti-Climacus’s intentions to displace the “law of noncontradiction” with a Hegelian concept of “mediation.”<sup>28</sup> Rather these tensions represent the human existence as a relational self. It would be prudent; therefore, that the individual accept that the “negative unity” exists in some kind of harmony that transcends our understanding despite the apparent incongruity.

Kant’s description of the objective conditions is not so different from Anti-Climacus’s even though it is more detailed. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant says,

“...a combination of the manifold of intuition or of several concepts, and in the first case of sensible or non-sensible intuition, is an action of the understanding, which we would designate with the general title *synthesis* in order at the same time to draw attention to the fact that we can represent nothing as combined in the object without having previously combined it ourselves...”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Evans, C. Stephens, *Anti-Climacus on Faith and the Self: Collected Essays*, (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006), 120.

<sup>27</sup> Anti-Climacus, *Sickness unto Death*, 13.

<sup>28</sup> Evans, *Anti-Climacus on Faith and the Self: Collected Essays*, 122.

<sup>29</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 245.

There is a lot that needs to be considered in the quotation above. First, it is clear that, insofar as the self “can represent nothing as combined in the object without having previously combined it ourselves,”<sup>30</sup> then the human subject cannot know an object in itself. That is, the human subject cannot, by means of its objective condition, know what underlies the reality of an object. This limitation on human objectivity is not a weakness, but merely a fact of the condition of the self’s existence that is discovered through the objective form of synthesis. The objective synthesis is the condition of the human subject’s relationship with the world, or in other words, the subject to object relationship.

Kant calls this specific relationship the “transcendental unity of apperception,”<sup>31</sup> which is the most applicable unity of consciousness for the use of physics, biology, medicine, or any natural sciences in general. The “transcendental unity of apperception” allows the human subject to see objects in our world as personal objects. In every particular experience wherein I, through the sense of touch or smell, etc. perceive an object, this experience is a condition of existence that is inescapable.

The subject to object relationship (i.e. the transcendental perception of an object) is best understood by dissecting Kant’s notion of the “manifold of intuition,”<sup>32</sup> which represents the totality of all experiences as they are created through the synthesis of:

- 1.) The data of the world forced upon the human subject by the senses
- 2.) The principles of understanding that filter all sensory data organizing it into the form of knowledge

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<sup>30</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 249.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 250.

<sup>32</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 250.

The manifold, according to Kant, begins with human “sensibility.” Sensibility represents the mind’s “capacity (receptivity) to acquire presentations as a result of the way in which we are affected by objects.”<sup>33</sup> In this sense, Kant approaches the human senses as if they were open to receive data like small windows that let light into a dark room.<sup>34</sup> Sensory data is the first part of the objective experiences that makeup the “manifold of intuition”.<sup>35</sup> The second piece of this synthesis consists of those principles of the human understanding that filter the sensory data and create organized strings of knowledge, so to speak.

This part of the manifold is much more complex than the first part because it deals with an assortment of principles that, when combined, create the entire faculty of understanding intrinsic to the human subject. The understanding, however, has two aspects which can be broken into layers. The first layer consists of the form of knowledge whose “source” is “general logic” or the general understanding.<sup>36</sup> This is where the “transcendental unity of apperception” takes place, and where the synthesis of the subject and object is sustained.

In essence, the relationship between the human subject and the world is an amalgamation sensory data and a principle of understanding created within the human mind that each individual refers to as experience. It is not simply the case that sensory data is presented to the mind and then organized. There is already something in place to receive sensory data in a particular way. Kant calls these principles the “elementary

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<sup>33</sup> Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason: Unified Edition* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1996), 72.

<sup>34</sup> Locke, John, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 109.

<sup>35</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason: Unified Edition*, 72.

<sup>36</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason: Unified Edition*, 105 and 106.



concepts of understanding”<sup>37</sup> or the categories. These principles act like a filter and only let in what the mind is preconditioned to perceive through the senses.

Further, it is only after the subject has an experience that these principles of understanding are fully revealed to the human mind. Take as an example space and time. If the human subject had not seen material objects or extension in the world around them, and if these objects were not changing, either dying or being born, then there would be no reason to see space and time as common principles of the understanding. Thus, the categories are abstractions from sensory data that contribute to the creation of “empirical intuitions” (i.e. experience).<sup>38</sup> Insofar as these categories are discovered when the understanding “[abstracts] from all content of cognition,”<sup>39</sup> they do not represent true claims about the objects in themselves.<sup>40</sup> Rather, the categories represent true claims about the relationship that the subject has with its object.

This means that the categories of understanding, like quantity or quality, are contained within the mind of the human subject, insofar as they can be isolated from sensory data. But ultimately these categories of understanding must be applied and are even dependent upon sensory data to be thought of, like in the case with space and time. To comprehend space the mind must see an object like a red apple (or at least recall the image from memory).<sup>41</sup> The perception of a red apple is an analytic creation of the human mind. It represents a material extension in space that has a quality of redness, sweetness, and a smooth surface. Since the mind can only have experiences through the particular

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<sup>37</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason: Unified Edition*, 135.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 73.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 129.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 115.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 109.

relationship that the subject has with its object, the red apple tells the human subject nothing about the object in itself only how to perceive it as such.

So far the objective form of the synthetic condition of self has been demonstrated. There is, however, another piece to the overall condition of the self that resides within the individual. If the synthetic relation between subject and object, or in Anti-Climacus's words the 'negative relation', represents the self's relationship objectively with the world outside itself, there is still another part of the self that relates within itself. This condition is called self-awareness, and it represents not only the power to think and recognize relationships that the human subject shares with the world, it also represents a condition of the self. The subjective condition of the self reflects a kind of subject-subject relationship more commonly known as self-awareness.

The fact that this self-awareness is a condition of the self's existence is absolutely tantamount to this essay, for, awareness plays a double role in the life of an individual. On one hand it is the power of the individual to assert their being onto the world. Thus, it is the cause for the human compulsion to ask questions and reflect on their relationship with the world and other human beings. This compulsion leads to the creation of larger systems of knowledge that includes all natural sciences, metaphysics, and morality. For now, self-awareness will only be discussed as a condition of our existence that is inherent to the synthetic unity of self-consciousness.

This innate feature of human existence is evident to Anti-Climacus by the end of his first paragraph in the *Sickness unto Death*. He says: "considered [as a synthesis], a human being is still not a self." Here Anti-Climacus is referring to the negative relations

that are the basis of the objective condition of the relational self. These particular syntheses, some may believe, contribute to the creation of a single and constant identity of the self, but they do not in themselves have the power to do so. For, they are mere relations between ideas and, thus, cannot be called a single “impression.” To do so would be to call “the mind...a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, repass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations.”<sup>42</sup> There is, however, a subjective condition of the self that is the other side of the objective condition. Or, in other words, the subject-object relationship makes the individual aware of objects and simultaneously of their subjectivity.

Kant believes that this subjective condition of our existence is a deeper form of understanding that is not covered in the analysis of the “manifold of intuition.”<sup>43</sup> The manifold only represents one layer of logic that creates the understanding of the self’s relation to the world. There are also those judgments of the mind that cannot be demonstrated through an inductive method of logic (i.e. general logic). This second layer of the understanding contains the deductive concepts that Kant calls the pure concepts of judgment.

These concepts bring together our intuitions and thoughts into coherent strings of knowledge. And their source is the “pure” and “transcendental logic,” which indicates an *a priori* solitude from experiences.<sup>44</sup> This solitude, as I call it, means that these principles are completely isolated from sensory data, but only to the extent that they need no image or memory of a particular object to be cognized.

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<sup>42</sup> Hume, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 253.

<sup>43</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 245.

<sup>44</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason: Unified Edition*, 109-111.

One could say that this form of logic operates in the background of the mind organizing knowledge into strings of scientific truth. This is perhaps one of the easiest ways to comprehend the power of judgment. For, the principles of judgment “function” as that power of the understanding that arranges “various presentations under one common presentation.”<sup>45</sup> Necessarily, this kind of cognition occurs through the use of concepts, not intuition, since there is no sensible data involved in the thought or its process.<sup>46</sup> A clear example of this kind of introspection is found in the writings of Rene Descartes. In the *Principles of Philosophy* and the *Discourse on the Method*, Descartes’s proclamation that “I think therefore I exist” (*cogito ergo sum*) is an example of the power of judgment.<sup>47</sup>

The Cartesian *cogito* demonstrates the “I think’s” relationship with the concept of existence, which then indirectly refers to all content of knowledge as evidence for existence. In other words, the individual can reflect on their own thinking ability as proof of their existence without referencing any particular object. Kant uses the example: “All bodies are divisible.”<sup>48</sup> The subjective power of judgment brings the concept of divisibility into a relationship with the concept of a body, which in turn illuminates the various appearances of objects “that we encounter.”<sup>49</sup> Divisibility is henceforward used as a principle of understanding that is applied to all forms of possible experience (until it is proved otherwise through experience).

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<sup>45</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason: Unified Edition*, 121.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: Discourse on the Method*, 127.

<sup>48</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason: Unified Edition*, 122.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

For example, the biologist can take a leaf and continually divide it into parts from the stem to the veins, and now with the microscope the biologists can divide the leaf into individual cells. Divisibility, however, is a concept that can be applied to anything including ideas or mathematics. From these examples it is clear that judgments can be isolated from sensory data since the “objects (of judgment) are presented indirectly through the concept”<sup>50</sup> itself. Hence, the understanding’s power of judgment functions as that which constructs “unity among [all] our presentations.”<sup>51</sup> This power of judgment, allows the scholar to construct large systems of science, interpret, and also classify individual experiences. It is a subjective condition of every human individual that makes them aware of their relationships to the world, and introduces cohesion to the systems of knowledge humans construct.

Anti-Climacus believes, like Kant, that the subjectivity of an individual brings cohesion and unity to the various ideas that come into relation with the self. Unlike Kant, however, it is not the harmonious cohesion of ideas that signifies subjectivity. According to Anti-Climacus, the subjective condition of the self (i.e. self-awareness) emerges from the negative unity of two ideas. If, there were not some underlying relation unifying the ideas, then they would simply “make their appearance”<sup>52</sup> in the mind without any confusion on the part of the subject.

Insofar as these “appearances” deeply trouble the individual, it suggests that there is further unity or relation of the self other than just the basic synthesis of two ideas. The mind is somehow creating the “negative unity,” and bringing the ideas into seemingly

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<sup>50</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason: Unified Edition*, 122.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 253.

paradoxical relationship. The mind is sustaining the relation between two incongruous ideas.

Anti-Climacus says that, “if...the relation (i.e. negative unity) relates itself to itself, this relation is the positive third, and this is the self.”<sup>53</sup> This “positive third”<sup>54</sup> represents the subjective condition of human existence, and the individual’s awareness of their existence as a being in relation to a “negative unity” of ideas.<sup>55</sup> For example, as a human being I am at once a body and a mind. I would, however, be unaware of this if I did not stand in relation to this body/mind. In essence, the objective relationship between the body and mind reveals nothing more than the mechanistic nature of the human subject. Since this objective relationship relates itself to itself, then the subjective result is self-awareness, which, according to Anti-Climacus, is the positive third relation.

This positive third is analogous to Kant’s notion of the “I think.” Why is the “I think”<sup>56</sup> or “positive third relation”<sup>57</sup> so significant to Kant and Anti-Climacus? For one reason it is that condition that can be described as human curiosity, which compels the individual to discover new sense data that can either augment or provide further proof for scientific theories. In fact, it is this kind of apperception that makes scientific analyses possible. If humans were not aware of their surroundings, then I could not perceive an object as “an object for me.”<sup>58</sup> In this sense, subjectivity empowers the human self by encouraging it to develop and seek after the truths within the experiences of this world.

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<sup>53</sup> Anti-Climacus, *Sickness unto Death*, 13.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 243.

<sup>57</sup> Anti-Climacus, *Sickness unto Death*, 13.

<sup>58</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 249.

Thus, self-awareness is as much a condition of our self as it is the curiosity or compulsion our being.

And yet the awareness of an object, like a red apple, would not be possible to conceive without the conditions of the “synthetic unity of consciousness”<sup>59</sup> that is, the mysterious relationship between subjectivity and objectivity. For, it is “the unity of consciousness...which alone constitutes the relation of representations to an object.”<sup>60</sup> In this sense, the “synthetic unity of consciousness” is the “objective” and universal condition of all cognitive processes.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, the unity of consciousness brings the “I think” (Kant) or “positive third” (Anti-Climacus) into relation with experience.

This “*I think*” in so far as it is a condition of our being “must be able to accompany all *my* representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me that could not be thought at all, which is to say that the representation would either be impossible or else at least would be nothing for me.”<sup>62</sup> (Emphasis mine) In other words, an individual cannot be aware of itself without experience from the world, and simultaneously could not comprehend the world without the principles of understanding inherent to the self. Thus, Kant and Anti-Climacus believe that there is some synthetic unity in our being that presupposes the knowledge of ourselves.

Since self-awareness arises from experience it did not arise from our own willingness and volition. Kant believes that “we must therefore seek this unity someplace higher, namely in that which itself contains the ground of the unity of different concepts

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<sup>59</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 249-250.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 249.

<sup>61</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 249.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 246.

in judgments.”<sup>63</sup> The human self must look to something higher than its own self-awareness to determine what holds the “I think” in relation to the objective world. Kant says that,

“the empirical consciousness that accompanies different representations is by itself dispersed and without relation to the identity of the subject... Therefore it is only because I can combine a manifold of given representations in one consciousness that it is possible for me to represent the identity of the consciousness in these representations itself, i.e., the analytical unity of apperception is only possible under the presupposition of some synthetic one.”<sup>64</sup>

It appears that the preconditioned form of the human self brings into a single consciousness all ideas and concepts whether transcendental (i.e. general logic) or transcendent (i.e. pure logic). Without this precondition to unite the “I think” with all forms of experience the self would be “dispersed” over a string of experiences and, thus, would have no “relation to the identity of the subject.”<sup>65</sup> If the self were not a synthetic unity, then there would be no “one impression”<sup>66</sup> to act as the foundation of an individual’s identity.

For, even the concepts of understanding, which are “applied to *a priori* intuitions (as in mathematics), provide cognition” only if they can “be applied to empirical intuitions.”<sup>67</sup> The principles of understanding like the categories, “have no other use for the cognition of things except insofar as these are taken as objects of possible experience.”<sup>68</sup> In fact, without experience and without the objects of the empirical world

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<sup>63</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 246.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 247.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 251.

<sup>67</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 254.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 255.



an individual could never become aware of these categories of knowledge in the first place.

An individual devoid of experience, which includes an object accompanied by awareness, could never become a thinking self who has the power of judgment. Without experience the concepts of pure logic are nothing but “empty concepts,”<sup>69</sup> and the human subject would be a mere machine, but the self is not so simple an idea. The only hope of having a true understanding of our experiences of this world, that takes into account the object and awareness of a said object, is if there is some synthetic unity of the self that is inherent to our existence. And in this sense, Kant and Anti-Climacus do not rely on a higher being, like God, to reconcile the self’s existence as a mind and body, among other dichotomist ideas.

They, rather, take a realist approach to human existence, and dissolve the problem between mind and body under the supposition that a synthetic and relational self is all that experience reveals to an individual. The self is a synthetic unity (or relation) between the objective and subjective conditions that the individual becomes aware of through experience. To associate the constitution of this self with some higher being surpasses the question of what a self is, and effectively moves to speculation regarding how or why the self came to be this way. These questions become a separate issue all together.

## II

Awareness is essential for the creation of all systems of knowledge from physics and biology to theology and metaphysics, since it is the foundation for the curiosity of

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<sup>69</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 255.

every individual. In this sense, self-awareness plays a double role, one, as a condition of the human existence, and two, as the power of the human individual. As a power, self-awareness drives the individual to ask questions, seek knowledge, and study the world around them, while simultaneously giving the individual the power to choose to accept or reject such knowledge depending on the subjective beliefs on an individual.

The task of this essay is to reflect on the natural inclinations that arise from self-awareness, human curiosity and critical judgment. It is my opinion that these manifestations of awareness represent not only the power of self but also the tool that the self utilizes to pursue its desire for knowledge. But it is not enough to be aware that there is knowledge waiting to be discovered. Self-awareness welds the tool of reason for the purpose of devising questions and discovering answers. The two, awareness and reason combine, to create human curiosity, and at the same time play the role of judge and jury. The critical judgments of an individual decide whether or not the knowledge and experiences received from experiences are worth including or rejecting from the existential reality of the self. Both Kant and Anti-Climacus, because of the objective and subjective conditions of self, must now confront a new issue, the power of self-awareness.

While reason is often seen as the power of a philosopher, scientist, or a scholar in general, it alone has no power to compel the individual to seek after knowledge. By itself, reason can only organize sensory data into categories and answer empirical questions of an inductive nature. But when it is coupled with self-awareness, reason can take on the important role of critiquing our perceptions of the world, and mostly those perceptions

that arise from our subjectivity like faith and belief.<sup>70</sup> The critique of reason “is a precondition for rationality or, what amounts to the same, the character of rationality.”<sup>71</sup>

The critical nature of reason, when coupled with awareness, makes the pursuit of knowledge a compelling endeavor insofar as it helps quench the thirst for knowledge (i.e. curiosity) by satisfying any inconsistencies amongst human perceptions. This assumes, however, that the human subject submits to their curiosity and the evidence from experience.

Thus, in light of the power of self-awareness, Kant and Anti-Climacus propose that the self’s pursuit of knowledge must be carefully critiqued by its own tool, pure reason. It suffices to say that the highest form of pure reason is its subjective use, which can ultimately be used to relate the self’s experiences to transcendence (the supposed underlying reality of our existence). The relation to transcendence in turn affects the individual from the internal to the external, that is, beliefs about transcendence affect our perceptions of experience.

Therefore, a proper critique of pure reason also starts from within; for, it does not allow an individual to push the limitations of the self’s power, and especially the self’s speculative power of belief. The critique of pure reason is at work and is chiefly located in subjectivity. It plays a role in influencing the human subject’s appropriation and use of knowledge for practical needs in everyday life; it is the background for the foundation for our systems of knowledge and belief.

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<sup>70</sup> This not only applies to religious faith, but to scientific faith or the belief in a scientific theory.

<sup>71</sup> Pacini, David S. *Through Narcissus’ Glass Darkly* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 40.

In other words, the subjective use of reason defines and constitutes the identity of every individual. Subjectivity is the existential framework which guides the formation of an identity. Hence, Kant's and Anti-Climacus's concern for human subjectivity is warranted, and not because the pursuit of knowledge is problematic, but because there is always a possibility that the appropriation of knowledge will lead to ill-founded beliefs and despair. While Kant's concept of the self reflects a tendency for the human subject to misappropriate reason, which in turn leads to ill-founded beliefs, Anti-Climacus's concept of the self emphasizes the tendency to misrelate one's self existentially, which in turn causes human despair.

To complete this comparison one must look at two points regarding the objective and subjective use of pure reason and the results of its misuse. I must, however, take liberty with the term reason and re-describe it in order to make the comparison between Kant and Anti-Climacus effective. For Kant, reason takes on a role typically prescribed by any enlightenment thinker. Reason, according to enlightenment thinkers, is an internal lens through which the human subject can interpret the world. It is a critical force or tool inherent to an individual that waits to be awakened and put to work. And while reason was conceived of as a power of the individual during the enlightenment period, there was little discussion about the implications of its chief location in the subjective condition of the self. How does human subjectivity misuse pure reason?

One of Kant's greatest accomplishments was to locate pure reason in the same condition from which the individual's self-awareness arises. In this sense, Kant emphasized reason's subjugation to the condition of an individual's being, which is as much as saying that human subjectivity (i.e. feelings and desires forged by the power of

judgment), and not reason in itself, hold the key to upholding, maintaining, and sustaining the integrity of knowledge as it is passed down from generation to generation. The subjectivity of an individual rejects or accepts knowledge despite reason's criticism. Accordingly, I make the distinction between self-awareness (the self's power) and reason (the self's tool). The synthesis of self-awareness with reason manifests as human curiosity (the objective use of pure reason) and critical judgment (the subjective use of pure reason).

Reason, according to Anti-Climacus, is merely a complex series of relations, wherein individual ideas and concepts are synthesized to make larger systems of knowledge. This relational self applies to the objective expression of human experience as well as the personal convictions of human subjectivity. If reason is re-described as a complex series of relations that are manifested through objectivity and subjectivity, then Anti-Climacus's depiction of the relational self is comparable to Kant's rational self.

The comparison will begin with the objective use of reason, and say that it is more than a coincidence that the objective use of reason parallels the objective condition of the self. The self's objective investigations of knowledge are, of course, contingent upon the objective condition of the human self. Reflecting on the objective use of reason will then reveal the principles of understanding, like space and time, which are rooted in the faculty of understanding. As a result of investigations into the nature of objectivity, these transcendental principles hint at an underlying reality to our experiences.

How do an individual's questions about the world progress from experience to complex concerns about the realm of transcendence? This progression starts from the

very beginning of an individual's life. As a human's curiosity develops (i.e. as their personal experiences of the world accumulate) there is a greater compulsion to ask questions about the nature of an object's essence. Essentially, an individual becomes more aware about their surroundings and overtime their reason becomes sharper and keener until they begin wondering if there is an underlying reality to all human experiences.

Here I imagine the child who asks an adult question after question without regard for how annoyed they become. How tall are Giraffes? What do they eat? Do Giraffes eat from the ground? What color are they? How fast do they run? What? How? What? How? Overtime the child naturally proceeds from asking questions about what or how something is the way it exists, and they begin asking why something is that way. This is a crucial moment in the development of an individual's awareness; for, now the goal surpasses the wonderment of what an object is or is not. Instead, the child has developed a keen awareness that something underlies the reality of their experiences of the natural world. They wonder why Giraffes are tall or why must they run fast. Questions of this kind emerge from cognitive process that surpasses the measurements or observations of an object.

Naturally an individual's curiosity compels them to continue asking questions about that reality which rests behind observations of the objects they encounter. As Kant says, while the human subject cannot "form a definite notion of what things in themselves may be...we are not at liberty to abstain entirely from inquiring into them."<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Kant, Immanuel, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2001), 86.

The curiosity of a human cannot help but coerce the individual to ask questions about that realm which transcends our experiences.

For, no “experience...satisfies reason fully but, in answering questions, refers us further and further back and leaves us dissatisfied with regard to their complete solution.”

<sup>73</sup> This is the power of self-awareness that, despite our limitations to discover what a thing is in and of itself, the individual is compelled by reason to seek out this underlying reality. As Kant say, the very pursuit of knowledge will inevitably lead to questions regarding the metaphysical characteristics of human experience. In this sense, the human’s objective inquiries, overtime, develop and become essential precursors to transcendent investigations.

One must also remember that the synthetic unity of the human self makes it impossible to absolutely separate experience from transcendence (i.e. the subjective from the objective). It is only possible to isolate one from the other; thus, moving from one kind of investigation to the other is very natural result of human existence. As Kant says, questions about the world inevitably lead us “further and further back”<sup>74</sup> beyond our experiences. The transcendent investigations occur in two forms of transcendental investigation. One form of investigation relates to the world of experience and indirectly to transcendence, while the other form relates directly to the realm of transcendence and indirectly to experience. The former is the objective investigation and the latter is the subjective investigation.

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<sup>73</sup> Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, 86.Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

The principle rule of cause and effect is a prime example of a transcendental notion that has been abstracted from experience by means of an objective investigation. This philosophical principle is a product of objective (i.e. inductive) inquiry, that is, it is made aware to an individual after seeing a sequence of events. Cause and effect represents the action of one object interacting with another object. Insofar as this principle is observable in the world of experience it is analytical because it is used to analyze the experiences an individual accumulates overtime.

Kant calls these “analytic”<sup>75</sup> *a priori* principles because they are discovered by reflecting on experience like in the case of the subject-object condition of the self. For example, when a rain droplet hits a puddle of water it makes ripples. The logical progression of questions that emerge from observing this sequence of events reflects the principle of cause and effect. First, one asks what caused the ripples. After seeing a rain droplet fall into the puddle immediately prior to seeing the ripples, then one can logically conclude that the rain droplet caused the ripple. Second, how did these ripples form? Third, why did the rain droplet hit the water puddle? The questions can go on forever, and they all reflect the principle of cause and effect. The individual observed the sequence of events and curiosity compelled the self to use objective reason to discover the cause and effect.

Insofar as these analytic principles are rooted in the objective condition of an individual, they are comparable to Anti-Climacus’s “negative unity” or synthesis between two things like the psychical and physical. A self would never be aware of any body or psyche if it were not brought into relation with either itself or the world of beings that

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<sup>75</sup> Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, 86.



surrounds itself. Further, the self would never be aware of the concepts of the finite and infinite if it were not brought into a relation with a physical world filled with objects. The analytic principles of reason, or as Anti-Climacus says, the unity between incongruous ideas, are the closest glimpses of an objects essence any individual can hope to ascertain from experience. No amount of reduction, which is a method that moves from one particular truth about an object to another particular truth, can assume that there will one day be a moment of absolute clarity about an object's essence.

The objective investigations of transcendence cannot by means of analysis inquire into the essence of an object. In fact, it would be an error to use objective reason for this task. This error, however, does not occur by any fault in the senses or the self's synthesis between the subject and object. The senses are never in error, according to Kant, "not because they always judge correctly but because they do not judge at all."<sup>76</sup> The senses simply encounter an object, so to speak, and transfer information to the understanding to be processed. Furthermore, it would be unwarranted to assume that the objective condition of our existence (i.e. the condition that maintains a relation between subject and object) is in error or flawed. Objectivity is a strong point of the human's existence since it effectively and consistently keeps the human subject in relation to an object, a relationship that is the basis of all scientific inquiry of the physical world.

The error or, misuse of reason and misrelation of the self's objectivity, stems from an internal issue concerning an individual's subjective condition of existence. Misunderstanding transcendence is chiefly located in the subjective condition of the human's being. In a subjective investigation (i.e. internal reflection) an individual asks

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<sup>76</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason: Unified Edition*, 347.

what defines their relation to that reality which underlies our experiences. Furthermore, the subjective use of reason decides what knowledge (including experiences and sensory data) is applicable and relevant for particular circumstances like solving problems. While objectivity reflects human curiosity about the world of objects they exist within, subjectivity reflects the human power to criticize their own beliefs.

For Kant, the subjective use of reason is manifested in the power of judgment whose content is “synthetic” principles, which are isolated from experience. For Anti-Climacus, subjectivity emerges from the self’s relating itself to itself. In this sense, human subjectivity is analogous to an individual’s self-awareness. Human subjectivity decides what is the appropriate approach needed to interpret any experience. Subjectivity determines whether the individual utilizes knowledge for any particular task like when a carpenter chooses a hammer over a screw driver or when an individual accepts or rejects a certain belief.

It is here that the critique of pure reason is necessary. With the use of human subjectivity there arises the concern for how the self interprets, understands, and even uses the knowledge that is derived or made aware through experiences. According to Kant, the subjective and objective natures of a self place an individual in a position that is “neither suspended from heaven nor anchored on earth.”<sup>77</sup> The human self is, essentially, strung between a reality of experience and a reality of transcendence. Likewise, a relational perspective of the self that is, the synthesis of human subjectivity and objectivity, suggests that the self is simultaneously in a relation with the world and something other than that. Anti-Climacus believes that “the human self is such a derived,

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<sup>77</sup> Pacini, *Through Narcissus’ Glass Darkly*, 173.

established relation, a relation that relates itself to itself and in relating itself to itself relates itself to another.”<sup>78</sup> This other represents that realm which is transcendent to human experiences.

And while the objective expression of reason is limited to ideas that arise from conditioned experiences, the subjective expression of reason can work unchecked using whatever knowledge it would like to construct a metaphysical picture of the mystery that is transcendence. The rational and relational self reveals a realm of transcendence beyond all reality as we know it, which in turn confronts the human subject with a dilemma. How does an individual interpret a realm that rests beyond their experiences?

Every individual that is confronted with this dilemma begins asking questions about the realm of transcendence. In reasons objective use, every individual is limited to extrapolating knowledge from experience, but the subjectivity of the self desires to know what constituted its experience. Furthermore, human subjectivity wants to know what constituted its existence. What power sustains, grounds, and brought humans into existence? From what power was the human established? What is our purpose? What is the meaning of life?

How an individual answers these questions becomes a defining principle for their self-identity. How one answers the questions of meaning, which are ultimately subjective, defines the very character and morals that constitute an individual’s identity. In essence, how an individual defines the relationship between themselves and transcendence has practical implications on their existential framework.

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<sup>78</sup> Anti-Climacus, *Sickness unto Death*, 14.

We can take G.K. Chesterton's image of the boy discovering ancient cave drawings as an example of how subjective interests often influence the objectivity of an individual. If the boy was trained by an anthropologist, then his impressions of the cave drawings would be influenced by a socio-cultural investigative framework. The first thing that might come to the boy's mind is that the group of hunters surrounding a mammoth indicates an infrastructure of cooperation and communication. Each hunter would need to communicate in some form with another in order to coordinate an attack, and the very group cooperation indicates that each hunter is included in some community of sorts. Now imagine that the boy was tutored by an artist. The paintings would have a different appeal to the young man. They would represent different expressions that reflect a style or genre of painting. Ultimately, each individual's personal interests, whether it is the study of art or the pursuit of anthropological knowledge, influence their overall perceptions of daily experiences.<sup>79</sup>

To use a more vivid and challenging example let us take Anti-Climacus's psychological concept of despair. According to Anti-Climacus, the relational aspect of every individual's being is the cause for the compulsion to define that which rests behind the experiences of life. With every particular experience there is an attempt to define it by some overarching truth or metaphysical concept for the purpose of including it into an existential framework. This concept would not need to have to be specifically referenced to any experience directly for it to be an overarching truth that could be indirectly related to all experiences.

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<sup>79</sup> Chesterton, G. K., *The Everlasting Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), Google eBook, 26-28.

Say an individual embraces their own finitude, which is as much as saying they emphasize commonality amongst all humans. They lose their individuality and become “a number instead of a self, just one more man, just one more repetition of this everlasting one and the same.”<sup>80</sup> The individual loses their own identity in the crowd, getting lost more and more by embracing their finiteness. This person becomes “more and more shrewd about the ways of the world—such a person forgets himself, forgets his name...[and] finds it...far easier and safer to be like the others, to become a copy, a number, a mass man.”<sup>81</sup>

This is especially evident in every portion of history. There is and will always be a human desire to conform so they may remain a part of the group. The opposite, however, is to constitute the self’s identity on infinitude which emphasizes individuality and, religiously speaking, a spirituality that distinguishes every individual from the other. But despair can still infect the infinitely defined individual by means of over isolation and rejection of the material substances that sustain an individual’s physical condition, among other things.

Ultimately, human subjectivity dictates that there must be a balance between finitude and infinitude. An individual approaches every experience or situation looking for that single notion which may bring balance and serenity to their life. That single idea, that which would bring balance to the individual’s life, would effectively unify all their experiences. Change, however, and the process of our experiences is constantly in flux which makes balance difficult to accomplish. Accordingly Anti-Climacus believes that

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<sup>80</sup> Anti-Climacus, *Sickness unto Death*, 33.

<sup>81</sup> Anti-Climacus, *Sickness unto Death*, 33-34.

“...anyone who really knows mankind might say that there is not one single living human being who does not despair a little, who does not secretly harbor an untrust, an inner strife, a disharmony, an anxiety about an *unknown something or a something he does not even dare to try to know*, an anxiety about some possibility in existence or an anxiety about himself...”<sup>82</sup>

Anti-Climacus acknowledges that the process of our existence (i.e. the change in our experiences) makes it very difficult to understand or know for certain what that “unknown something” is, and thus despair is understood to be an inherent feature of human existence. This human condition of despair is caused by the psychological ramifications and the uncertainty of the self’s investigation into the realm of transcendence. In fact, human despair is the direct result of the natural compulsion to discover that which constitutes the human’s experiences of the world. As Anti-Climacus says, the “unknown something” brings about “despair...untrust, an inner strife, a disharmony, [and] anxiety”<sup>83</sup>. Hence, the relational self, whose transcendent ground of existence is theoretically beyond comprehension for the human faculty of understanding, is itself the cause of human despair. The question that always lingers, therefore, is what grounds the human existence and its existential reality.

This takes us back to the discussion on the mind-body problem. For, any attempt to define the human’s being by an objective principle of reason inevitably leads to despair. Our objective condition brings the subject into relation with a world consistently changing and fluctuating. Anytime the individual uses objective reason for the purpose of self-reflection we would become an object to ourselves and the subject simultaneously. This subject-object relation, as it develops in self-reflection, continues *ad infinitum*. The ground of the self’s existence would at every moment appear simultaneously as the object

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<sup>82</sup> Anti-Climacus, *Sickness unto Death*, 22.Ibid, 22.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

of reflection and the subject. Hume's concern that the self is fleeting would then take hold again, and we could never eliminate the mind-body question.

The notion of *ad infinitum*, which arises from reflection on the self-awareness, demonstrates the multiplicity of relations that can emerge from a self-identity. This "misrelation,"<sup>84</sup> as Anti-Climacus calls it, is the basis of humanity's despair that, as a being in constant relation to itself, the world, and the other worldly, and as a being trying to comprehend what these relations consist of and mean, the individual becomes a victim of "misrelation." Through "misrelation" the individual defines their self on the experiences of the world, and as Hume accurately stated, "there is no impression constant and invariable" that comes from human experience which can sustain the self's identity.

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To maintain the steady and stable concept of self an individual cannot constitute their identity, let alone their being, on a principle of understanding that would portray the self as constantly changing. Anti-Climacus says, "the misrelation of despair is... a misrelation in a relation that relates itself to itself and has been established by another."<sup>86</sup> Or, in other words, the "misrelation" of the self establishes itself through itself even though the self is actually established by another. But to establish the self on itself would lead the mind into an infinite regression. The mind would see itself as an object and yet be the subject, and can therefore never trace down the principle idea or power that constituted itself. The mind would be forever caught in an infinite relation to itself.

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<sup>84</sup> Anti-Climacus, *Sickness unto Death*, 14.

<sup>85</sup> Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 251.

<sup>86</sup> Anti-Climacus, *Sickness unto Death*, 14.

Hence, the individual turns to an-other to justify the belief that the self is steady and enduring. The individual striving to discover that which constitutes their existence must recognize that a power other than theirs established their being. To accept this existence allows for the negation of despair and necessarily brings the individual one step closer to understanding their true human nature.

The anxiety of human existence, however, was felt long before Anti-Climacus was alive. Kant believes that the tendency to misappropriate objective reason for the purpose of metaphysical speculation comes out of our self's sense of dissatisfaction. An individual's curiosity "cannot be fully satisfied with any empirical use of the rules of understanding."<sup>87</sup> This dissatisfaction forces the understanding "out of its sphere."<sup>88</sup> In an effort to satisfy reason the power of the self through curiosity seeks to discover what it is that transcends our knowledge. In the process, however, every individual at one time or another misappropriates the principles of reason.

A historian interested in the development of Western Philosophy might recall several individual's during Kant's lifetime (and prior to it) that represent the temptation to over speculate about the realm of transcendence. Some of the immediate individuals that come to mind are perhaps Rene Descartes and Spinoza. Descartes claimed that the self, the "I think" (*cogito*) that is contained within the body, was "entirely and absolutely distinct from my body, and can exist without it."<sup>89</sup> The Cartesian self treats the body as if it were baggage or a prison to the true being of the human subject, the mind. Thus, when

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<sup>87</sup> Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, 69.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Descartes, Rene. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes: Discourse on the Method*, 127.



Descartes must discuss the mind in its place within the body that is, the mind-body assemblage, he must turn to God as the creator of the human entity.<sup>90</sup> This makes humans ontologically dependent on God, and assumes that transcendence has in its domain a powerful being.

In his book *Ethics*, Spinoza attributes the mind-body assemblage to God as well. Spinoza believed that the mind and body were “constituted”<sup>91</sup> by the “essence of God”<sup>92</sup> For the mind and body follow from the God insofar as the mind is rooted in God’s essence and manifests as extension (i.e. body).<sup>93</sup> This formulation of the mind-body assemblage emerges from a number of different definitions regarding the nature of essence, substance, extension, etc. It suffices to say, however, that Spinoza in his own and unique way decides that the human being is founded by God.

Kant will admit that the self’s existence would be empty without the transcendent investigations like those of Descartes and Spinoza. This emptiness does not only convey a sense of purposelessness and meaninglessness, and Kant is not so much worried about an existence devoid of personal meaning. The concern rests in the knowledge that our self, without any subjectivity, would be an empty shell or a machine simply going through the motions of survival. But since the self embodies a transcendental thread<sup>94</sup> that unifies the mind’s subjectivity and objectivity our existence is meaningful because we are aware of it. The inquiries that seek meaning in the realm of transcendence,

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<sup>90</sup> Descartes, “Discourse on Method,” 127-129.

<sup>91</sup> Spinoza, “Ethics,” In *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, by Edwin Curley, 408-617 (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985) 457.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 446.

<sup>93</sup> Spinoza, “Ethics,” 457.

<sup>94</sup> Solomon, Robert C, *Introducing Philosophy: A Text with Integrated Readings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 344.

however, can be problematic to say the least, because subjective searches for meaning and purpose are always riddled with poor speculative reason.

The realm of transcendence may be open for speculation, but does that mean that its truth is utterly subjective and only relevant for the individual conducting the investigation. Can each individual just speculate about the realm of transcendence without any guidelines or parameters? Furthermore, without any parameters of guidelines, are these investigations possible at all? Hence, Kant and Anti-Climacus must grapple with the poor speculative habits that many individuals adopt when trying to grasp the realm of transcendence.

For, most individuals would use the kind of pure reason that is abstracted from the realm of experience for investigations into transcendence. They would apply the same methods of investigation in the realm of transcendence as they would for the objective, experiential realm of our physical existence. The objective condition of our existence is of course the most readily accessible realm of knowledge and would appear to be a good place to begin an investigation.

To ground the self and its experiences on some metaphysical claim abstracted from experience, according to Kant, would be a misappropriation of pure reason. This is a major turning point in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which can be found in the “Transcendental Dialectic.” Here, Kant demonstrates that the limits of objective reason do not extend beyond the realm of sensible experience. Kant’s argument is very poignant, for it makes a simple and clear distinction between the transcendental principles discovered through experience and the transcendent principles that lie in pure speculative

reasoning. Michael Rohlf calls this “Kant’s distinction between the ‘transcendental use’ of a concept or principle, and ‘transcendent’ principles.”<sup>95</sup>

In the “Dialectic” Kant demonstrates that the majority of problems that arise from metaphysical speculation begin by applying transcendental principles and concepts (those that arise from experiences) to transcendence. There is no reason to believe that the transcendental principles like time and space or cause and effect would ever be applicable to a realm that exceeds human experience. If this were the case then every individual’s portrayal of the reality of transcendence would be as numerous and vast as is their experiences. Such grand scale multiplicity would amount to meaninglessness.

The criticism of subjective pure reason, therefore, restricts empirically derived principles of the understanding to dealing with the construction of systems of knowledge that are based on sensory data and experience, respectively. For Anti-Climacus, the misrelation of one’s self reflects a similar problem. The very concept behind his pseudonymous works like *Either/Or*, *Fear and Trembling*, *Philosophical Fragments*, and the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* are all expressions of the different places, existentially speaking, an individual can be during their life. And in the *Sickness unto Death*, the constant change of an existential framework or constant recreating (i.e. misrelation) of self-identities reflect the failed attempts to comprehend the nature of the self and the metaphysical grounds of their being, all of which amount to human despair.

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<sup>95</sup> Rohlf, Michael. "The Ideas of Pure Reason." In *The Cambridge Companion to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, by Paul Guyer, 190-209 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010),191.

For Kant, the misappropriate use of pure reason (i.e. using transcendental principles to probe into transcendence) allows someone to jump from objective awareness, as it is developed through experience, to the grounds of the self's existence. While Kant may affirm that a human individual is only aware of their existence due to their experiences, it is clear that awareness of existence, and especially principles derived from experience, cannot determine the grounds of existence or the essence of a thing in itself. Since an individual must investigate an isolated realm of reality to discover the essence of an object, they must also appeal to an isolated form of reason. This form of reason is subjectivity, which for Kant uses "synthetic" principles of reason that are made aware to an individual through experience but isolated from experience and internal to the individual. These synthetic principles are the content of the power of judgment.

One must realize, however, that the open realm of transcendence can be portrayed in any manner that an individual desires that is, the human subject can reject or accept any results from transcendent investigations. There are no guidelines, so to speak, and no actual data that can be studied which directly informs the human subject about transcendence. Thus, the pure and synthetic use of reason must have a practical purpose since its application to transcendence cannot be checked. Hence, for Kant and Anti-Climacus the subjective use of reason should be critiqued by one's own experiences. Insofar as the ethical and existential implications of an individual's subjective beliefs are ill founded or create despair for the individual, the rational and subjective beliefs of that person should be checked by pure reasons practical application. This process is most evident in Kant and Anti-Climacus's systems of morality.

What seems clear to both authors is that the use of objective reason in the investigations of transcendence is a poor practice and method of studying that reality which underlies our experiences. On the other hand, the subjective use of reason can focus on investigations of transcendence indefinitely, but it has no parameters or guidelines for constructing a clear idea of what this reality may entail. There is, however, a different use for subjectivity that is its practical application through morality. When the subjective use of pure reason focuses on practical matters of living it takes on the form of morality that is, subjectivity allows and compels the individual to assert their being in the world around them.

Hence, I argue that: Kant believes morality is an *a priori* law that compels humans to establish their being in the world around them through moral choices; whereas, Anti-Climacus believes that morality is an existential struggle against despair in an effort for human's to embrace their being in the midst of becoming.<sup>96</sup> To make this comparison I will use three points of analysis. The first point of comparison will be to examine both authors' approaches to morality. By approach, this comparative point will begin from the starting point for the moral investigations of Kant and Anti-Climacus.

In this sense, I believe that Kant approaches morality from an intellectual maxim that is established in the *a priori* principles of the moral law. The moral law and the maxim's that come from it reflect the internal compulsion or feeling that the every

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<sup>96</sup> I do not cite the phrase 'being in the midst of becoming' since it is a widely used phrase by any individual who studies ontology or existentialism. The use of the phrase can be traced back as far as *The Divine Names* by Pseudo-Dionysius (pg. 98) to as recently as the famous works of Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger. Suffice it to say that the phrase is not one that originated from my work, but is used loosely enough that I feel no reason to cite any single source.

individual ought to and can make morally good choices. Insofar as this feeling of the moral law is founded in subjectivity it is universally applicable to every human as a part of their subjective condition. Hence, Kant's moral law is a universal law, which, the universality of the law, is in turn represented in moral maxims. Anti-Climacus approaches morality from the perspective of becoming which seeks to embrace the human's true being by overcoming the difficulties of human despair. This feeling of despair is universal such that it is inherent to every individual who, as a self, is a victim of misrelating one's self.

The second and third points of comparison will focus on the practical and rational beliefs in freedom and God that come from these approaches to morality. Kant believes human freedom is practically expressed in finite decisions represented as moral choices, which overtime disposes the individual to act in a certain way.<sup>97</sup> In other words, humans illustrate their true nature and freedom in particular acts which can be judged as either good or evil. The more they act in accordance with the highest good the more they are disposed towards its end.<sup>98</sup>

Anti-Climacus, on the other hand, believes that humans discover their freedom by embracing their being in the process of becoming. According to Anti-Climacus, every individual must realize that they have the will and power to break through frameworks of existential reality and reinterpret their identity. The hope, of course, is that despair will be negated.<sup>99</sup> The final point of comparison deals with the role played by that transcendent

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<sup>97</sup> Kant, Immanuel, "Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason" in *Religion and Rational Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 95.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 116-117.

<sup>99</sup> Anti-Climacus, *Sickness unto Death*, 14.

idea, God. Kant believes that the moral internal sense that humans will be held accountable for their actions an individual can *rationaly believe*<sup>100</sup> in God even if they cannot theoretically prove God's existence. Anti-Climacus believes that in order to negate despair, which arises from the struggles of a being in the midst of becoming, one must rest in the knowledge that their existence was established by another. Furthermore, the individual who accepts their self as it is "before God" discovers the solution for the self's "misrelation"<sup>101</sup> and despair.

One method for creating a moral system begins from the perspective of the agent. The challenge would be to define parameters or guidelines for the individual's actions. The other method begins by reflecting on the actions of an individual, and the goal would be to abstract from experience those tenets which guide the agent to make an ethical decision. In the moral systems of Kant and Anti-Climacus these two approaches define the perspectives they envision, but for our purposes it would be more appropriate to use the language of being (agent) and becoming (action).

For Kant, every individual has an intrinsic desire to do that which is morally good written into their being. The task of morality, therefore, is to discover what this internal moral law demands. On the other hand, Anti-Climacus believes that the compulsion to be morally good is the equivalent to the desire to overcome the human despair that arises from poorly guided ethical decisions. Ultimately, both want the moral individual to embrace their being. Yet Kant believes that morality is a matter of knowing what is right

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<sup>100</sup> Pacini, *Through Narcissus' Glass Darkly*, 83.

<sup>101</sup> Anti-Climacus, *Sickness unto Death*, 14.

and good; whereas, Anti-Climacus believes that morality is a matter of doing what is right and good.

Kant's foundation for approaching morality begins with the internal conviction to "become a better human being."<sup>102</sup> Accordingly, Kant's moral investigations look within the human subject to find concepts or principles that are morally and practically applicable to the objective experiences of life. The goal, in this moral approach, would be to discover an *a priori* principle or set of principles that are universally relevant to every individual and can, overtime, produce the disposition of moral goodness.

One might rightly ask why humans have the urge to apply *a priori* moral principles to daily experiences. According to Kant, the subjective and transcendent principles of morality represent reasons "propensity...to go beyond its use in experience, to venture outward—in a pure use and by means of mere ideas."<sup>103</sup> As previously stated, the curiosity (i.e. the pure use of objective reason) of the human subject is not "fully satisfied with any empirical use" of the understanding.<sup>104</sup>

Subjectivity, therefore, wants to find its role in the search for truth by means of metaphysical investigations. Yet the realm subjective pure reason is most applicable too, transcendence, does not guarantee that there will be anything revealed to reason more than anthropomorphic reflections of the self. Hence, Kant believes that the "ultimate purpose"<sup>105</sup> of pure reason is in its practical application. For, what is the ultimate need for any human being other than the ability to correctly guide their efforts in the practical

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<sup>102</sup> Kant, "Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason", 96.

<sup>103</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason: Unified Edition*, 730.

<sup>104</sup> Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, 69.

<sup>105</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason: Unified Edition*, 730.



matters of everyday life? The challenge, therefore, is to understand how the human self by its power of awareness and pure reason provides guidance for matters of morality and, further, matters of practicality?

This question can be sufficiently answered by understanding the character of the “moral laws.”<sup>106</sup> First, these laws are the only “pure practical laws”<sup>107</sup> that subjective reason can act upon. In this sense, the individual can be certain that the transcendent nature of the moral laws sets “aside entirely what might...be psychological, i.e. empirical”<sup>108</sup> variability. By isolating the moral laws from human experience, pure reason can aim the human self’s power towards establishing proper “conduct in reference to the highest purpose, the ultimate aim of nature.”<sup>109</sup> For, transcendent principles “remove [the] limits”<sup>110</sup> set forth by transcendental principles of experience.

Transcendent principles “command us to step beyond” experiences to make our end the highest good. And although we cannot know the highest good in itself, whatever it may be.<sup>111</sup> The individual can place the idea of the highest good on a pedestal and constantly refer to it when they encounter an ethical dilemma. Overtime Kant believes that the human subject would become disposed to enlist the highest good whenever they are confronted with an ethical dilemma, and, thus, they would begin to mirror more and more that goodness.

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<sup>106</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason: Unified Edition*, 732.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 733.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 732.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 349.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

In essence, Kant believes that the universal law of morality is based on a subjective maxim. As Kant says, every individual should “act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.”<sup>112</sup> This is a unique way to portray the tenet of self-preservation. As David S. Pacini says, “purely rational self-preservation promotes respect for conscience or the moral law as in itself a sufficient incentive for our wills.”<sup>113</sup> The very correlation between self-preservation and the moral maxim is proof enough that this sense to act morally resides within the individual’s being as if it were an instinctual urge to respect the moral law for the purpose of self-betterment and survival.

But for Kant, moral law cannot be determined through the process inherent to human objectivity even though it defines concrete ethical decisions. It must be rooted in *a priori* pure reason so it will not be perceived like a concept that arises from the process of becoming. The moral law is itself a stable and enduring ground for human action. Morality, as a form of pure reason, is an internal conviction to act in accordance to the moral laws that are rooted within the subjectivity of the human’s innermost being. And “in the arrangement of our reason [morality] provides for us wisely”<sup>114</sup> in such a way that the individual can properly comprehend what it means to act correctly according to moral law.

Like the curiosity of self-awareness, the moral conviction or “predisposition” that compels us “to be [a] better human being” is “incomprehensible...proclaiming as it does

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<sup>112</sup> Hare, *God and Morality*, 146.

<sup>113</sup> Pacini, *Through Narcissus’ Glass Darkly*, 78-79.

<sup>114</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason: Unified Edition*, 732.

a divine origin.”<sup>115</sup> Accordingly, Kant’s morality begins from within the individual’s very being. The moral conviction (i.e. universal maxims) rest within our being and as such they are rooted in subjective pure reason. Hence, Kant’s morality is an intellectual pursuit; it is a matter of knowing what is universally applicable to every individual.

While, on the other hand, Anti-Climacus’s approach to morality is from the perspective of becoming. From this perspective a moral system starts by abstracting from the actual world of experience. The moralist, in this case, would examine the ethical outcomes of an individual’s actions and define the moral concepts responsible for those actions. If the ethical outcome of an action has a negative result, then the moral principle behind it would need to be redefined to correct future problems.

The negative result that comes from a poor moral disposition is the cause for human despair. In this sense, the moral journey is more emotionally challenging than the idealistic and rational moral system of Kant. Like Kant, Anti-Climacus believed the human task should be to embrace their inner being, what Anti-Climacus called “spirit.”<sup>116</sup> To become spirit, to discover this moral being, requires a reevaluation of one’s existential framework, or in other words the task of discovering one’s moral being is a journey which requires an individual to redefine self-identity until it embraces its being or in Anti-Climacus’s case, until despair is negated. Essentially, everyone should understand that their existence (i.e. self) is conditioned by a being in the midst of becoming.

This statement, being in the midst of becoming, represents the struggle to see clearly one’s own being in light of the consistent misrelation of one’s self. One could say

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<sup>115</sup> Kant, “Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason”, 93.

<sup>116</sup> Anti-Climacus, *Sickness unto Death*, 13.

that Kant's diagnosis that the human self's struggle to define transcendence is as much as saying that one's being is in the midst of becoming. Insofar as a human subject desires to know what constituted their self, which, in its objective appearance and knowledge is constantly changing. And insofar as the human subject attempts to define themselves by metaphysical investigations that ultimately only reflect their own experiences in this world, they are a being in the midst of becoming. They exist simultaneously as a self that is (in Kant's words) "neither anchored in the world nor suspended from heaven." They must, according to Anti-Climacus's existential project, accept that this is the condition of their existence before the negation of despair is even possible.

This understanding of the self, as a being in the midst of becoming, is an essential concept for Anti-Climacus's project in the *Sickness unto Death*. There are philosophers who believe that the Anti-Climacusian "self is an achievement, something someone must become." Thus, they concede that "many people do not become anything,"<sup>117</sup> which implies that the concepts of anxiety and despair are not universally applicable. For, to despair at all one must first be a self regardless of whether or not they are not aware of their existence as a complex relational being.

To understand the self as if it were an achievement is a misinterpretation of the nature, not only, of despair but the existential conditions of the self also. The self is not something that an individual becomes overtime. Self is a condition of human existence, and as such the human subject can no more create it (i.e. become a self) any more than a human subject can reasonably deny that they are a self.

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<sup>117</sup> Evans, *Anti-Climacus On Faith and Self*, 267.

For example, “in volume 2 of *Either/Or* Judge Wilhelm advises the young aesthete to ‘choose despair’ (2:211),” and by doing so he would become a self through obtaining an ethical conscience. The assumption is that the individual must acquire a moral conscience that tells them that their actions have ethical ramifications. If the individual can judge their own actions, then they must be a true self. In this case, however, the boy is simply ignorant of his despair and does not lack it entirely.

In the *Sickness unto Death*, Anti-Climacus calls this form of despair a despair of consciousness. Either the aesthete is rejecting his self, which is to be ignorant of the ethical ramifications of his actions, or the boy is defiantly embracing his self, which is to be impartial towards the ethical ramifications of his actions.<sup>118</sup> In either form, despair is a universal sickness that every individual must endure regardless of their awareness or willingness to accept the reality of their self.

It is not, therefore, a clear understanding of the conditions of the human self to say that everyone is in a process of becoming a self. No, not at all, the self is merely a manifestation of the human existence as a being in the midst of becoming. One must simply acknowledge this reality and they will necessarily be aware that their actions have ethical consequences, and that they are in despair.

As a result of the process of becoming, despair can take several forms. Most of these forms develop out of ignorance regarding the condition of the human self or the unwillingness to accept this condition. For example, Anti-Climacus claims that one can

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<sup>118</sup> Anti-Climacus, *Sickness unto Death*, 42-44.

despair by the “lack” of necessity or possibility.<sup>119</sup> To believe that one or the other (possibility and necessity) did not exist would be to accept the other as grounds of existence. But both “possibility and necessity are equally essential to becoming”<sup>120</sup>.

If one were to override or “outrun” the other, then the individual would become a victim of despair.<sup>121</sup> For, despite their efforts to define their identity on either possibility or necessity they cannot help but sense they are missing one or the other. Every individual exists as a “negative unity” between concepts like possibility and necessity, thus, the first step towards negating despair is “in willing to be,” that is, willing to accept the conditions of the self’s existence as a union of both possibility and necessity.

The universality of despair and our efforts to overcome this condition parallels Kant’s universal moral conviction. Both Kant and Anti-Climacus believe that there is not only a feeling inherent to our being to be morally good; there must also be an unconditional surrender to our existence for the purpose of making morality universal. The differences between the two systems are discovered in their respective approaches to morality. Kant’s pursuit begins intellectually, while Anti-Climacus’s moral system abstracts from particular ethical dilemmas that occur in daily experience. These differences, however, should not be taken as grounds for contradiction. Neither moral system negates the truth of the other. Each system merely emphasizes a different side of the same coin.

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<sup>119</sup> Anti-Climacus, *Sickness unto Death*, 35.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid*.

For example, take Anti-Climacus's belief that despair must be conquered to live a properly moral life. Insofar as Kant's idealistic concept of morality assumes that an individual will spend a lifetime predisposing themselves to adhere the highest good, then prior to that accomplishment the individual will undoubtedly despair over the process of becoming a moral person. The only difference is that Anti-Climacus tends to portray the process with greater melancholy than does Kant.

In any case the individual must endure and finally accept that the process of becoming as a condition of their existence and a precursor to moral perfection. This segues nicely into the next comparative point on the practical need for freedom; for, to overcome despair one must will to be their selves. They must accept that the process of life is a product of their existence. To accept the process as a part of the condition of human existence is to embrace a practical (not theoretical) sense of freedom.<sup>122</sup>

For Anti-Climacus, the practical use of freedom is exemplified in the relationship between the ideas of possibility and necessity. To embrace the process of experiences one must include in their existential framework the use of both concepts, to do otherwise would lead to despair over one or the other principle. To use possibility as an example, imagine that a person confidently embraced possibility with such intensity that they had no need for necessity and "no necessity to which [they are] to return." The

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<sup>122</sup> One must distinguish between the practical belief in freedom and the theoretical arguments for freedom. The theoretical arguments for freedom are not logically justifiable. Yet there is a subjective sense that freedom exists. One can, therefore, maintain a practical belief in freedom as a means of understanding and comprehending moral convictions to act for the highest good.

implementation of possibility without necessity creates a self-identity based solely in “abstract possibility.”<sup>123</sup>

In other words, the individual embraces the infinitude of possibility with such intensity that they lose track of who they really are in actuality. The moment the human self denies its necessity is the “point at which the individual himself becomes a mirage.”<sup>124</sup> The balance between possibility and necessity, therefore, is essential for grounding the existential framework of one’s own ethical system. For to be lost in possibility is to never have the capacity to make a decision, while to be lost in necessity is to never have the strength to accept any possible alternative. Both forms of despair can have immensely dangerous ethical implications.

This is the basic form of every kind of despair that by the lack of unity in their self-identity the individual runs risk of asserting one part of their being at the risk of overriding other essential aspects of human existence. Furthermore, it is indicative of the “negative unity”<sup>125</sup> that Anti-Climacus mentioned from the very beginning of the *Sickness unto Death*. This unity appears to be a contradictory, and normally an individual would see the ideas of infinite and finite, temporal and eternal, psychological and physical as either negations or at least opposites of each other. If not contradictory, most individuals would at least concede that where finitude begins infinitude ends.

Hence, there is a gap in our understanding, but despite our “misrelation” and misunderstanding of both, finitude and infinitude exist as a unity in our being. If they did

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<sup>123</sup> Anti-Climacus, *Sickness unto Death*, 36.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 13.



not, then it would be impossible to recognize the difference between the two. This “negative unity”<sup>126</sup> evades the understanding like the Kantian “transcendental thread”<sup>127</sup> that ties together, unifies, and organizes all concepts and intuitions of the mind. In any case, despair represents an act of denying the true nature of the human self and thus denying the conditions of human existence. Whether it is despair that “wills to be [itself], severing the self from any relation to a power that has established it”<sup>128</sup> or the despair from the infinitudes lack of finitude. The basic problem is an unwillingness to properly embrace one’s being as that which rests in the midst of becoming. For, to embrace this would be a moral choice to accept that the grounds of the self rests in the power of another.<sup>129</sup> This would be the ultimate expression of freedom.

For Kant, the “practical (use of pure reason) is everything that is possible through freedom.”<sup>130</sup> The “free power of choice,” if it be exercised in matters of morality, which is in its empirical use, is “none but a regulative use.”<sup>131</sup> As Kant says,

“Practical freedom can be proved through experience. For the human power of choice is determined not merely by what stimulates, i.e., by what directly affects the senses. Rather, we have a power of overcoming, through presentations of what is beneficial or harmful even in a more remote way, the impressions made upon our sensible power of desire.”<sup>132</sup>

Freedom regulates the actions of an individual insofar as it emerges from pure subjective reason (the tool of the human self’s power of awareness), which determines

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<sup>126</sup> Anti-Climacus, *Sickness unto Death*, 13.

<sup>127</sup> Solomon, *Introducing Philosophy: A Text with Integrated Readings*, 344.

<sup>128</sup> Anti-Climacus, *Sickness unto Death*, 68.

<sup>129</sup> Anti-Climacus, *Sickness unto Death*, 13-14.

<sup>130</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason: Unified Edition*, 732.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 733-734.

what is “good and beneficial”<sup>133</sup> for the subject. In this sense, reason gives each individual the moral law, and these “laws tell us what ought to occur.”<sup>134</sup> The practical sense of freedom that arises from the subjective nature of a human being can therefore be the grounds of actions which are in accord with a moral maxim. And while Kant believes that freedom is expressed in the individual’s moral choices, Anti-Climacus believes that freedom’s ultimate expression is the willingness to accept one’s being in the midst of becoming.

There is, however, a question regarding the inclination to act morally. What gives the individual the desire to act in a way that reflects goodness, and where does the conviction and desire to overcome one’s despairing life emerge from? These are questions that one can answer only by appealing to pure reason and transcendence. It is here where the discussion turns to the final point of comparison, the role of God. For this discussion it would be prudent to revisit the idea of transcendence. Specifically, one must ask what relation transcendence has with morality.

It is clear from the use of pure reason objectively and subjectively that inquiries into the realm of transcendence are not only difficult but often times problematic. As Michael Rohlf says, the objective “use [of] a pure concept of the understanding independently of the sensible conditions of its applications (schemata) in order to think ‘things in general and in themselves’”<sup>135</sup> is to misappropriate pure reason. To use the

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<sup>133</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason: Unified Edition*, 734.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Rohlf, *The Cambridge Companion to Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, 191.

transcendental principles to discover the essence of an object of experience is “to fly beyond”<sup>136</sup> the limits of their practical use.

Take the concept of space as an example, it is a transcendental principle used in relation to sense data. And it is paired with this data in a synthesis that cannot be broken. Space can be isolated from experience as a principle but that will only allow the individual to recognize that space is a concept inherent to the mind. This isolation in the internal faculty of understanding, however, does not mean that transcendental principles can be appropriated for any use whatsoever.

Thus, if a theologian were to speak of God as a giant figure wearing gold plated armor who stood nine feet tall, then this description would involve the transcendental principle of space, among others, to define God. But since God is transcendent to experience the use of transcendental principles (i.e. analytic principles) to describe God is “a mere mistake made by the power of judgment.”<sup>137</sup> The concept of God, understood in this manner, is a misappropriation of pure reason.

Pure reason’s objective use depends solely on the objects from which knowledge can be abstracted. On the other hand, if pure reason is used subjectively to probe into transcendence, then the individual is faced with emptiness. For, the very idea of transcendence indicates that there is no object to work with or from which the human subject can abstract knowledge. Every individual, according to Kant, is therefore confronted with the question of whether or not metaphysical investigations are really

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<sup>136</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason: Unified Edition*, 349.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

possible.<sup>138</sup> If it is impossible to do proper investigations into the realm of transcendence, then would questions about meaning be relevant?

More importantly what does any of this have to do with morality? Morality, so far, has only been described as pure reasons expression in an objective way, like in the case with free choices. But the moral conviction inherent to the human subject is, according to Kant, the only principle that can truly reveal the human feeling that some power other than our own exists. Further, it is by means of morality that the human subject can speculate about God's existence without misappropriating and misusing pure reason. But how is this accomplished?

God, essentially, becomes a symbol for "the unification of all ends,"<sup>139</sup> and this of course would make the concept of God analogous to the "highest good in the world."<sup>140</sup> Prior to the conception of God as a concept at all, it is necessary to mention the inclination to do good and the freedom to act on this feeling. For, moral conscience and freedom pave the way for any concept of God. One must therefore acknowledge that morality in and of itself is simply pure subjective reason that precedes any concept of God.

As a synthetic principle that arises from the power of judgment, morality would require no objective content at all. According to Kant, "morality really has no need of an end for right conduct,"<sup>141</sup> and therefore a moral individual could stay in their house without ever leaving and be as moral, theoretically speaking, as any great philosopher,

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<sup>138</sup> Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, 15-17.

<sup>139</sup> Kant, "Religion within the Limits of Mere Reason", 59.

<sup>140</sup> Kant, "Religion within the Limits of Mere Reason", 59n.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid*, 58.

theologian, or ethicist. Yet pure subjective reason, as stated in the previous essay, can never be proven as necessary if the human subject does not, in some way either indirectly or directly, take on an object.

One must not forget, therefore, that there is the power that accompanies our existence, self-awareness. As a subjective power, self-awareness when it is coupled with pure reason becomes curious about the world, and in the same way the individual becomes duty bound to observe the moral law for the benefit of the world in which they live. In this sense, the individual is compelled to test their moral maxims against daily experiences until the highest good is achieved.

As Kant says, “‘All synthetic principles *a priori* are nothing more than principles of possible experience’ and can never be referred to things in themselves, but only to appearances as objects of experience.”<sup>142</sup> Like any other form of knowledge, moral maxims must be proven correct in accordance with the results of experience. Reason asks “‘What is then the result of this right conduct of ours?’”<sup>143</sup> To answer such a question one must act towards an end and discover the outcome. Freedom, therefore, becomes a practical element to the moral framework that arises from the combinative forces of awareness and pure reason in the same way that curiosity is the manifestation of objective investigations.

Likewise the concept of God is a practical development to appease pure reasons quest for the highest end. The combination of duty and experience, and, further, the “‘happiness proportioned to [duties] observance,” which arises from appeasing reason’s

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<sup>142</sup> Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, 52.

<sup>143</sup> Kant, “Religion within the Limits of Mere Reason”, 58.

question of ends, create “the idea of a highest good in the world.” When an individual considers the highest good, then the possibility of a “higher, moral, most holy, and omnipotent being who alone can unite the two elements” of duty and happiness into goodness becomes a tangible idea.<sup>144</sup>

One might ask why this unifying principle, i.e., God, was not the starting point of morality if God is indeed the unity of moral ends. Kant answers such a question by reminding the reader that God’s practical creation is a result or “idea that rises out of morality and is not its foundation.”<sup>145</sup> God is an expression of the synthetic unity of our moral conscience not its footing. Morality, therefore, develops into the “rational belief”<sup>146</sup> in God that does not seek out an objective entity or being as such, but speculates by means of moral consciousness that such a higher being could possibly exist. The moral project of Kant, therefore, is important for his entire philosophical project. The moral project alone allows the individual to examine the *possibility* of God’s existence.

A correct formulation of a transcendent God is, therefore, revealed in the practical approach of pure reason through morality. Perhaps, Anti-Climacus’s language of the “other” would be better suited to maintain the integrity of God’s mystery. Who, according to Anti-Climacus, is something transcendent to experience but accessible through belief as the highest good. The “other” in the *Sickness unto Death* is, in part 1, representative of a theoretical notion of some transcendent “power that established” the self.

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<sup>144</sup> Kant, “Religion within the Limits of Mere Reason”, 58.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Pacini, *Through Narcissus’ Glass Darkly*, 83.

At the very beginning of the *Sickness unto Death*, Anti-Climacus claims that “the human self is such a derived, established relation...and in relating itself to itself relates itself to another.”<sup>147</sup> Shortly after Anti-Climacus lays down the “strict” formulations of despair and the theoretical process of how an individual can suffer “misrelation of despair,” he claims that this despair can only be negated by the self’s willingness to rest “transparently in the power that established it.”<sup>148</sup> One might immediately conclude that this other is God, the being or entity of omnipotence and omnipresence, etc., that has some ontological ties to the self’s existence.

This would make an individual ontologically dependent on God’s power, but this would be a premature assessment of Anti-Climacus’s analysis. C. Stephen Evans makes such a claim building off of a quotation found in the first part of Anti-Climacus’s assessment of despair. As Anti-Climacus says, “Where, then, does the despair come from?”<sup>149</sup> This question is analogous to asking where does my ontological being come from since despair is inherent to the relational self. Thus Anti-Climacus continues by saying, “From the relation in which the synthesis relates itself to itself, inasmuch as God, who constituted man a relation, releases it from his hand, as it were—that is, inasmuch as the relation relates itself to itself.”<sup>150</sup>

Evans suggests (from this statement) that “ontologically, the self is not released; it finds itself as if it were released... There is no ontological freedom from God, but there is ethical freedom.” This may be an arguable claim once Anti-Climacus begins talking

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<sup>147</sup> Anti-Climacus, *Sickness unto Death*, 13-14.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

specifically about Christian theology in Part II of the *Sickness unto Death*, but it is premature to make such conclusions from the beginning of this work. The “other” in the relationship of the self only becomes evident to the individual after having sifted through the misrelation that caused despair to take over. In the first mention of the “other” it came as a predicate to the self’s relation to itself.

“The human self is such a derived, established relation, a relation that relates itself to itself and in relating itself to itself relates itself to another.”<sup>151</sup>

Insofar as this merely reflects the human’s self as a being in relation to not only the world of experience, but also to the world of transcendence (i.e. the other) then there is not yet a reason to believe that Anti-Climacus is making a theoretical claim connecting human ontology to God. There is only a relation like if a young boy were standing in front of a curtain staring at it and wondering what rests behind it. There is no reason for the boy, as of yet, to assume that the grounds of his existence will be laying on the other side of the curtain just waiting for him. And yet Anti-Climacus later makes the claim that,

“God constituted man as a relation, but when this relation relates itself to itself, God releases it from his hand, as it were. In this way the human being is a self, and the misrelation is possible.”<sup>152</sup>

How does the reader reconcile these two remarks? Does Anti-Climacus make a theoretical and ontological leap from the human being to God? No, not at all, let us continue the comparison with Kant and see if there is any clarity to be had regarding this situation. It is clear that Kant’s moral progression to a concept of God is purely practical since his concept of morality, as such, allows for the possibility that God exists. As Pacini says, “Kant maintained that there was no theoretical link between God and the self other

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<sup>151</sup> Anti-Climacus, *Sickness unto Death*, 13.

<sup>152</sup> Anti-Climacus, *Sickness unto Death*, Supplement, 144.



than what we invent for heuristic purposes of understanding.”<sup>153</sup> If one takes into account the prior comparative points made, it is clear that Anti-Climacus must move from the “misrelation of despair” before suggesting that this God is the other.<sup>154</sup>

Thus, I think, it would be more appropriate to maintain the separation of the human’s self and God, at least theoretically speaking. In this sense, when Anti-Climacus makes use of the language that the self exists “before God” in the second part of this work it would be understood as a practical move that rests at the heart of Christianity. One could go so far as saying that God becomes, for Anti-Climacus, a unifying principle to a moral conscience that, the self “in willing to be itself...rests transparently in the power that established it.” For, to will to be one’s self is to embrace one’s being in the midst of becoming, and to accept the inescapable nature of human despair. In a Christian sense, according to Anti-Climacus, despair is “sin before God,” and in psychological and philosophical terms sin is despair by misrelation of one’s self before the other of transcendence.

Hence, Kant and Anti-Climacus both depend on their moral frameworks for bridging the theoretical ideas of self with theology. While Kant begins his moral project from an internal sense that people should become better individuals overtime, which includes the practical and rational beliefs in freedom and God, Anti-Climacus begins his moral project by examining the origins and nature of despair, which includes the ultimate acceptance and practical need of human freedom in order to stand before the otherness of God and be at peace. The overall goal of Kant and Anti-Climacus, morally speaking,

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<sup>153</sup> Pacini, *Through Narcissus’ Glass Darkly*, 87.

<sup>154</sup> Anti-Climacus, *Sickness unto Death*, 14.

seems to be, on the one hand, the fulfillment of human serenity achieved through moral perfection, and, on the other hand, the beginning of a rational system of beliefs that begins with freedom and God.

I will not push the subject any further; for, once the discussion leaves the realm of psychology and philosophy, drifting more and more into theology, the comparison between Kant and Anti-Climacus begins to take a different shape. Yet their theories of human nature have very strong similarities as has been discovered in the three essays of this project. From the conditions of the self's existence to the power, diagnosis, and moral character of the self, it is clear that both Kant and Anti-Climacus take very similar stances on human nature. Furthermore, one could continue from these theories on human nature and develop well founded system of belief, and specifically a Christian theological system of beliefs. But such investigations will have to be left to another project. The main goal of this project has been completed, and has demonstrated the unique relationship that Kant and Anti-Climacus share through their theories of human nature.

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