

The background of the cover is a deep blue with a pattern of numerous thin, lighter blue lines radiating from a bright point on the left side, creating a starburst or sunburst effect.

ADAM BUBEN

Meaning and Mortality
in Kierkegaard and
Heidegger

Origins of the Existential
Philosophy of Death

MEANING AND MORTALITY IN KIERKEGAARD
AND HEIDEGGER

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Adam Buben



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When I tell people (even philosophers) about my philosophical interests, they often wonder what would lead someone to spend so much time thinking about something “so depressing.” They seem to assume that my endeavors must be the scholarly exorcism of demons born from some past personal trauma. But I have no especially heartrending tale to recount about the origins of this project; I honestly can’t even recall when the topic of death became so important to me. What I do have is an overwhelming sense of joy and appreciation when I consider the long list of people who have helped shape my ideas, especially over the last decade or so. It would be impossible in a short paragraph to acknowledge all of the family members, friends, and colleagues who have engaged me in fruitful conversations and offered other sorts of moral support and personal assistance along the way, so I will mention only those individuals who have had the most direct impact upon the emergence of this book. Chief among them are my mentors Charles Guignon and Andrew Burgess, and my close collaborators Megan Altman and Patrick Stokes. Other significant debts are owed to (in no particular order): Niels Jørgen Cappelørn, Jon Stewart, Gordon Marino, Sinead Knox, Iain Thomson, Roger Ariew, Thomas Williams, James Sellmann, Gerhard Schreiber, Gerhard Thonhauser, Douglas Farrer, Steve Burgess, Geoff Pfeifer, Shoni Rancher, Walter Wietzke, Carl Hughes, Andrew Henscheid, Jeff Hinzmann, the contributors to *Kierkegaard and Death*, my proofreading team of Rachel Baas and Sabina Menotti, and the students from my death class in the fall of 2010.

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Abbreviations

Kierkegaard's Works

- CA *The Concept of Anxiety*. Translated by Reidar Thomte in collaboration with Albert B. Anderson. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980.
- CD *Christian Discourses* and *The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress*. Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997.
- CI *The Concept of Irony*. Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989.
- CUP *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to "Philosophical Fragments."* 2 volumes. Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992.
- CUPL *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Translated by Walter Lowrie. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1941.
- EO *Either/Or*. 2 volumes. Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987.
- EPW *Early Polemical Writings*. Translated by Julia Watkin. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990.
- EUD *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*. Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990.
- FSE/JFY *For Self-Examination* and *Judge for Yourself!* Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990.
- FT/R *Fear and Trembling* and *Repetition*. Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- GW *Gesammelte Werke*. 12 volumes. Edited by Christoph Schrempf. Jena: Diederichs, 1909–1922.
- JP *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*. 7 volumes. Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, assisted by Gregor Malantschuk. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967–1978.

- PC* *Practice in Christianity*. Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991.
- PF* *Philosophical Fragments* and *Johannes Climacus*. Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985.
- PV* *The Point of View*. Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998.
- SKS* *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*. 28 volumes (plus corresponding commentary volumes). Edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn et al. Copenhagen: Gads, 1997–2013. (It has become common practice to include reference to the new Danish fourth edition of Kierkegaard's works because the complete English edition only provides a concordance with older Danish editions.)
- SLW* *Stages on Life's Way*. Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988.
- SUD* *The Sickness unto Death*. Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980.
- TDIO* *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*. Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- TM/NA* *The Moment and Late Writings* (Newspaper Articles). Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998.
- UDVS* *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*. Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- VT* "Vom Tode." *Brenner-Jahrbuch* (1915): 15–55. (Austrian Academy Corpus und Brenner-Archiv: Brenner Online. Online version: *Der Brenner*. Innsbruck: Ludwig Ficker, 1910–1954. AAC Digital Edition No. 2. <http://www.aac.ac.at/brenner>.)
- WA* *Without Authority*. Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997.
- WL* *Works of Love*. Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995.

Heidegger's Works

- BT* *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper and Row, 1962. (References will be to the numbers provided in the margins of this English translation, which correspond to the page numbers of standard German editions of *Sein und Zeit*.)

- “BDT” “Building, Dwelling, Thinking.” In *Basic Writings*. 2nd ed., edited by David Farrell Krell, 343–63. New York: HarperCollins, 1993.
- BP *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. Translated by Albert Hofstadter. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982.
- FC *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*. Translated by William McNeill and Nicholas Walker. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- FS *Frühe Schriften*. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1972.
- HCT *History of the Concept of Time*. Translated by Theodore Kisiel. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.
- “KJ” “Comments on Karl Jaspers’s *Psychology of Worldviews*.” In *Pathmarks*, translated by John van Buren and edited by William McNeill, 1–38. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- “LL” “Letter to Karl Löwith on His Philosophical Identity.” In *Becoming Heidegger*, edited by Theodore Kisiel and Thomas Sheehan, 97–102. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2007.
- MF *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*. Translated by Michael Heim. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.
- OBT *Off the Beaten Track*. Translated by Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- OHF *Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity*. Translated by John van Buren. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.
- PI *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle*. Translated by Richard Rojcewicz. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001.
- PiT *The Piety of Thinking*. Translated by James G. Hart and John C. Maraldo. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976.
- “PT” “Phenomenology and Theology.” In *Pathmarks*, translated by James G. Hart and John C. Maraldo and edited by William McNeill, 39–62. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- “SI” “The Spiegel Interview.” In *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism: Questions and Answers*, edited by Gunther Neske and Emil Kettering, 41–78. New York: Paragon House, 1990.
- “WPF” “What Are Poets For?” In *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofstadter, 87–139. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.

MEANING AND MORTALITY IN KIERKEGAARD
AND HEIDEGGER

Introduction

Death is one of those few topics that attract the attention of just about every significant thinker in the history of Western philosophy, and this attention has resulted in diverse and complex views on death and what comes after. On the postmortem fate of the soul, for example, while some argue in favor of different senses of metempsychosis, others assert its utter annihilation or deny that there ever was any such thing. In conjunction with these larger metaphysical issues, the philosophy of death has also come to deal with various related practical, ethical, and linguistic problems associated with death, dying, and the dead. In recent years, numerous attempts have been made to identify and catalog the responses to all of these problems. Despite their often implied, and sometimes openly stated, interest in being comprehensive, these attempts always seem to ignore, or address only superficially, some important perspective or another.¹ This situation might just be unavoidable given the vast array of material that has accumulated up to the present; or it might be due to a lack of facility with (and maybe a conscious dismissal of) certain styles of philosophy. With such concerns in mind, I would like to approach the issue of death in the history of philosophy with an eye more toward general characterization than straightforward chronological or topical organization. My goal here is to provide a compelling and innovative framework for understanding the ways in which philosophy has discussed death. I believe that there are two traditional strains that take part in this discussion, the Platonic and the Epicurean, and a third, more recent and less established voice.

Both the Platonic and the Epicurean strains originally seek to diminish the fear of death by appealing to the idea that death is simply the separation of the soul from the body. According to the former, as first elaborated in Plato's *Phaedo*, death should not be feared since the soul will have a prolonged existence free from the bodily prison after death. With several dramatic modifications under the influence of early figures in both strains, this is the option that is taken up by much of the mainstream Christian tradition. Although it can be difficult to pin this tradition down given its various manifestations and sects, it will be necessary to describe the fairly consistent significance of death at a few key junctures

during the long period of time when the history of Western philosophy was inextricably intertwined with that of Christianity.

According to the Epicurean strain, as first developed in Epicurus's letters, death should not be feared since the tiny particles that make up the soul evacuate the body and are dispersed at the moment of death, leaving behind no subject to experience any evil that might be associated with death. Although informed by millennia of further scientific discovery that has diminished the need to rely upon the explanatory power of souls, this is the strain picked up on by an increasingly non-religious, technologically advanced humankind. It is thus also the strain that is of most interest to philosophy once it begins to reassert its independence from Christianity during the period from the early moderns to contemporary Anglo-American philosophers.² Perhaps the essential difference between these two strains is that while the one seeks to deal with the fear of death by transforming it into something new—for example, hope for the future—the other seeks to eliminate this fear by making it seem ridiculous.

After providing a thorough account of this ancient dichotomy, it will be possible to describe the development of an alternative means of handling death. This is the alternative championed by the likes of Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), the supposed father of existentialism, and Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), whose work on death tends to overshadow Kierkegaard's despite the undeniable influence exerted on him by the nineteenth-century Dane. Although both of these thinkers arise from the Christian tradition,³ I will reveal how they take to heart and respond to the insights of the more Epicurean-minded, thereby prescribing a peculiar way of living with death that is in some sense a compromise between the Platonic and the Epicurean strains. And as a result of this compromise, I will find plenty of opportunity to raise concerns about the death views of both the Christian tradition and the more and more secular philosophy of modernity (including contemporary analytic approaches).

In the course of dealing with Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and their peculiar appropriation of the philosophy of death, several other issues that have received insufficient or unsound treatment in the surrounding literature will have to be addressed. For example, within the realm of Kierkegaard studies there has been little attempt to synthesize Kierkegaard's discussion of the "earnest thought of death" in a relatively early discourse with his ever-present notions of dying to immediacy, dying to the world, and dying to the self. Even in the case of Julia Watkin's work, which certainly suggests a connection between Kierkegaard's many discussions of death, there is no clear attempt at the specific sort of thoroughgoing integration that I am after. In the case of Heidegger, his fa-

mous chapter on death in *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*) remains one of the most obscure and frustrating aspects of his thought, despite a great deal of scholarly effort spent trying to grasp its meaning. I believe that a major reason for the difficulty in understanding this chapter is that Heidegger is not always perfectly clear about whose thought he is borrowing from. Thus, I intend to bring clarity to some of the most opaque passages with a thorough reading of the chapter through Kierkegaardian lenses. Although there is some discussion of Heidegger's dependence on Kierkegaardian ideas about death in the work of Hubert Dreyfus, Charles Guignon, Michael Theunissen, and John van Buren, there is surely more to be done—especially when there is such a paucity of literature that ties together Kierkegaard's "earnest" thinking about death and his notion of dying to the world when considering his impact on Heidegger.

Despite my interest in associating Kierkegaard and Heidegger by portraying them both as engaged in a project that one might call the "existential philosophy of death," I will push my investigation one step further in order to expose a fundamental difference between their respective versions of the project.⁴ In the relevant chapter of *Being and Time* Heidegger seems to rely specifically on the phenomenology of death that Kierkegaard provides in writings such as "At a Graveside" ("Ved en Grav") (Theunissen 2006, 327–29). What is interesting to notice, however, is that these writings, particularly when seen in proper relation to some of Kierkegaard's more explicitly religious works (e.g., *Works of Love* and *For Self-Examination*), might only be completely compelling to the aspiring Christian. If this is so, then one might start to wonder if there is a tension in Heidegger's appropriation of Kierkegaard's ideas about death, an appropriation which methodologically excludes matters of theology and attempts to make these ideas compelling to anyone aspiring to something like meaningful selfhood. In the course of describing this possible tension, it is my ultimate goal to determine whether Heidegger takes the existential philosophy of death too far when he attempts to incorporate it into his early ontological project.

Inclusion and Organization

In order to circumvent certain concerns that might distract from my general account of death in the history of philosophy, I would like to offer a brief preemptive statement that further clarifies my methodology. While aspects of this methodology will be reiterated throughout the book, there are two issues in particular that should probably be laid

out in explicit detail up front. The first concerns the selection of thinkers and texts that will find a prominent place in my account. As I have already pointed out, there is no shortage of figures in the history of philosophy who find it worthwhile to discuss the topic of death, and it would surely be impossible to say something about each of them here (it might not even be an easy matter to list each of them if the proverbial net was cast widely enough). I have therefore been forced to employ a series of criteria in order to help narrow my scope.

In many cases, the selection requires little deliberation. Plato, for example, is (1) an important figure in the mainstream canon of Western philosophy, (2) well known for his views on death, (3) the author of key works on this topic that are extant and widely read, and (4) hugely influential on the death views of those who come after him. In other cases that might not be so clear-cut, it is probably worth making an exception to these basic criteria. The New Testament writings, for example, might meet the latter three criteria, but one could argue that they are hardly philosophical in nature. Sidestepping this thorny issue, it is clear that these religious writings cannot be left out of the story because they are such an important part of the background views on death of some of my central thinkers, including my primary subjects Kierkegaard and Heidegger. On the other hand, it might be necessary to rule out certain authors or texts whose views, one could argue, meet the aforementioned criteria, but are adequately expressed by other thinkers I deem more important for the sake of my narrative. Consider the views on death of numerous Christian or early modern thinkers that are similar enough to those of figures who play more significant roles in the development of Kierkegaard's or Heidegger's ideas. Such thinkers can be excluded for the sake of maintaining a project of manageable size, but the points I make about the figures I *do* consider can be applied, after acknowledging any relevant differences, to those I exclude.

The second issue of methodology deals with my conceptual organization of treatments of death in the history of philosophy. The two traditional strains, and the existential compromise between them, that I describe are largely based on positions with respect to the following: (a) postmortem continuation of particular subjective experience, (b) the importance of death in daily life, and (c) the fear of death. For the most part, the thinkers who accept (a), accept (b) as well; and those who reject (a), reject (b) as well. The former group I call "the Platonic strain" and the latter, "the Epicurean," and they both seem to reject (c) in one way or another (usually arguing as to why or how it should be overcome). These correlations are far from fixed, however, and I do not mean to suggest that there are no exceptions; but after a thorough encounter with the

philosophy of death landscape, my general dichotomous understanding seems to be the rule. This observation finds further confirmation in the fact that some of the exceptional cases—for example, certain contemporary analytic thinkers who reject (a) and (b), but accept (c)—are clearly working within one of the two major strains, even as they diverge from it somewhat. While there simply is not enough space to address in great detail some of the more rare and peculiar cases (e.g., Leibniz might accept [a] while rejecting [b] and [c]), my project is mostly concerned with the sort of intentional exception to the rule represented by Kierkegaard and Heidegger. These two “existential” thinkers reject or at least bracket (a) for the sake of argument, and accept (b) and even (c) in some sense.

Although I obviously find merit in my view of the landscape, I doubt that mine is the only viable perspective when it comes to questions about who matters in the history of philosophy’s dealings with death, how this history ought to be characterized, or to which side of this history each thinker in it belongs. In very complicated cases, such as that of the Stoics, it may be difficult to determine, for instance, which strain best represents their views on death. Faced with a certain amount of ambiguity, I find it helpful to recall a statement of methodology that I am particularly fond of: “My method in this book is to trace the historical development. . . . Given that this is intended to be a relatively short book, the story must be rather coarse and schematic, making bald assertions about historical outlooks with no appreciation of the complexities of the historical record. I hope that the story is roughly on target even if it is not always accurate in its details” (Guignon 2004, xiii). My historical account must of necessity also be somewhat schematic, relying on generalities and connections that are certainly open to question; and I try to acknowledge when this account is not exactly beyond reproach. However, even if there are some minor disputes as to a few of the specifics, I provide an illuminating new framework that both uncovers a problematic lacuna going all of the way back to the origins of Western philosophy’s wrestling with the topic of death, and also shows how Kierkegaard and Heidegger represent a valuable attempt to fill that void.

Two Strains, One Point of Departure

Before pressing on with separate considerations of the two traditional strains, I would like to launch my respective journeys into each from a common starting point. The story begins, as many tales from the history of philosophy do, with Socrates (ca. 470–399 B.C.E.). Although *Phaedo* is

a foundational text in my account of the Platonic strain, it is another of Plato's dialogues that really serves as the origin for both strains. Written accounts of death in both Western and Eastern philosophical traditions surely predate the work of Plato (ca. 428–348 B.C.E.), but his *Apology* is where one can find the West's first extant and detailed philosophical disjunction between the basic postmortem possibilities.⁵ In this depiction of the trial of Socrates, Plato's famous character explains to the assembled Athenians why he is not afraid to die.⁶ To begin with, such fear would be inconsistent with Socratic "wisdom," which asserts that one ought not to behave as though one knows what one does not know. Since no one knows whether or not death is a good thing or a bad thing, there is hardly knowledge enough to determine whether or not one ought to fear death. Socrates states, "No one knows whether death may not be the greatest of all blessings for a man, yet men fear it as if they knew that it is the greatest of evils. And surely it is the most blameworthy ignorance to believe that one knows what one does not know" (Plato, *Apology* 29b). Despite his shameless open admission of ignorance about the matter, this is not Socrates's final word on the appropriateness of fearing death.

Without knowing its actual nature, by the end of the dialogue Socrates is perfectly willing to speculate about what death could possibly mean for the existing individual. He narrows these possibilities down to two very general postmortem situations, both good, he thinks: "Either the dead are nothing and have no perception of anything, or it is, as we are told, a change and a relocating for the soul from here to another place" (*Apology* 40c). The former situation Socrates compares to a pleasant dreamless sleep, and the latter he envisions as a prolonged, and very lifelike, existence in which he will have conversational access to the deceased heroes of old (41a). Either way, given the perceived pleasantness of both states of affairs, Socrates sees no reason to fear death if his account is accurate. Of course, one might point out the many problems with this account, such as the possibility that a prolonged existence might be utterly different than he expects (especially if one gives up metaphysical beliefs that make room for souls), and maybe even quite unpleasant. If one momentarily ignores these sorts of details, however, and simply considers the distinction Socrates draws in itself, one will notice that he is at least right in that these two possible outcomes of death seem to be exhaustive. After all, what other outcomes could there be besides nonexistence and continued existence?

Ultimately, it seems that Plato sets aside the possibility of nonexistence in order to consider the other alternative in detail. It is of course very difficult to identify decisively Plato's own final views on this matter, but given the regularity with which the notion of the continued existence

of the soul comes up in Plato's dialogues, it is at least fair to attribute to him a great interest in this particular alternative. On the other hand, it is Epicurus (341–270 B.C.E.) who, within decades of Plato's passing, becomes the champion of the notion of death as the end of subjective or personal existence. The following chapters are dedicated to exploring how various thinkers of significance to the history of philosophy have appropriated these alternatives and what such appropriation means for their views on a life well lived.

The Platonic Strain

Plato

After “unsuccessfully” defending himself against the charges brought by his accusers, Plato’s Socrates elaborates on the notion of death as a transition into another form of existence in the *Phaedo*.¹ Although Socrates continues to discuss the possibility of death as the way to nonexistence in this retelling of the final prison dialogue, he seems far less open to it than he is in the *Apology*. This difference in attitude toward the possibility of annihilation may have something to do with Plato’s inclusion of Pythagorean interlocutors, given Pythagorean belief in the transmigration of souls.² Leaning toward the idea of continued existence, the *Phaedo* is largely focused around the famous claim that “the one aim of those who practice philosophy in the proper manner is to practice for dying and death” (64a). This claim is as perplexing to the participants in the conversation as it might be to modern readers. After all, what could it mean to connect philosophy and death so intimately?

This connection, it turns out, is deeply rooted in what has come to be known as “Platonic metaphysics.” According to this view of the nature of things, as described in the *Phaedo*, a human is made up of both body and soul, and prior to birth the soul exists apart from the body in a pure state, bordering on the divine, in which it has access to a more perfect knowledge of reality than is possible while embodied in the world (75b–77a). Thus, if Socrates can establish that the soul will return to such a state after death, when it is again separated from the body, then it will be reasonable to view death as a great gain, rather than as a great loss (which is the common sentiment Socrates also rebuts in the *Apology*).³ In a departure, then, from his noncommittal attitude in the *Apology* and in opposition to future Epicurean doctrines, Socrates offers several arguments in the *Phaedo* in support of a specific sort of postmortem existence of the soul. For example, he adopts a cyclical view of life and death in which “living” souls can only come from “dead” souls,⁴ and he supplements this notion by explaining why only what is bodily can ever be properly destroyed (77c–80d). Although his arguments do not seem entirely compelling to either the modern reader or, in many cases, his interlocutors (and Socrates himself may come to no firm conclusion), what is important to notice for the sake

of the present account is the desirability of release from the corruptible body in the interest of attaining lasting truth and knowledge (64c–70d).

This desirability not only explains why philosophers, as lovers of knowledge or wisdom, should “fear death least of all men” (*Phaedo* 67e), but it also explains the troubling notion of philosophy as practice for death. Socrates points out that it is their very love of wisdom that causes philosophers to cultivate the qualities of the soul at the expense of the worldly interests of their bodies. It is a similar sort of casting off of bodily interests in exchange for a higher existence of more perfect knowledge that takes place when one’s life ends, if Socrates’s arguments are to be believed. There is a sense then, albeit a limited and impermanent one, in which the practice of philosophy attempts to separate the soul from the body and imitate the experience of being dead (80d–81c). For this reason, Socrates claims that philosophizing is a sort of dying and “true philosophers are nearly dead” (64b). To characterize the Platonic strain of the philosophy of death thus far: the highest form of life approximates, as closely as possible, being dead, which is really a prolonged and perfected form of existence.

Early Christian Appropriation

A few hundred years after the establishment of the numerous schools of philosophy in Greece, the Apostle Paul undertook several journeys in the first century C.E. around the Greco-Roman world of the Mediterranean in order to preach the message of Jesus Christ. Although he founded churches in several cities of significance to the history of philosophy, including one in relatively close proximity to Athens (at Corinth), the New Testament reports that his encounters with philosophers were occasionally somewhat hostile. In fact, the book of Acts (which may or may not be a reliable source of information about Paul’s activities) describes Paul’s time in Athens, where he was not able to found a church, and suggests that his less than stellar results in Plato’s hometown were due in part to disagreements with “some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers” (Acts 17:18 [NRSV]). Nonetheless, it would seem that the lessons of Greek thought (which might include, perhaps somewhat indirectly, Platonic lessons) were not lost on the well-educated Paul.⁵

On the specific issue of death, Paul seems to have found a great ally—probably unknowingly—in the philosophy of Plato.⁶ Just as Socrates sees a way of approximating death through philosophical pursuits, Paul sees faith in Christ as producing a living death in the believer. The

dying of the pre-Christian self and the subsequent rebirth as a follower of Christ, which this death makes possible, is a recurring theme throughout his New Testament letters. But one need not rely entirely on Paul in order to get the impression that Christianity and life as we ordinarily know it are not destined for peaceful coexistence. According to the gospels, Jesus himself often warns his disciples that a life of worldly concerns is not conducive to the proper care of the soul (e.g., Matt. 16:24–26; Luke 14:26). Because a worldly life is inhospitable to a Christian soul, Paul points out that such a life must end before Christianity can take root (e.g., 2 Cor. 4:10–12, 5:14–19; Gal. 2:20). But how exactly is one to understand death as the precondition for Christian life? Fortunately for the aspiring Christian, Christ's own life provides a model for finding life in death.

Just as Christ is said to have died on the cross to overcome the sin of the world, but later rose from the dead, one who would be a follower of Christ must also die to the sin of the world in order to live free from its tyranny (1 Pet. 2:24). There are two senses in which this analogy might hold true for the Christian. First, there is a sense in which one must physically die in order to be reborn in a heavenly afterlife, free from the sinful world. Second, there is a sense in which one must figuratively die to the sinful desires and preoccupations that come from being in the world, in order to become ready for Christ-like living. Romans 6:6–8 states, "We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed. . . . If we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him." While this passage might support both senses, each of which is quite similar to particular issues presented in the *Phaedo* (setting aside what are some clear differences concerning the nature of the afterlife), it is the latter, figurative, sense of dying to the world that will play an important role in Kierkegaard and Heidegger's existential refutation of the Epicurean position. But these two are hardly the first to adopt and develop the figurative sense of Christian dying to the world, and it is certainly not the case that they derive their respective understandings of this dying solely from biblical sources. In order to see how dying to the world passes down to them, it will be necessary to trace a line through a few of the high points of Christian thought after Paul.

From Neoplatonism to Medieval Christianity

Even though it is easy enough to point out striking similarities between New Testament writings and those of Plato, there is less need for specula-

tion when it comes to connecting Platonism with the Christian teachings of Augustine (354–430).⁷ In his *Confessions*, Augustine (7.13–27) details the circumstances of his conversion to Christianity, including the influence of Neoplatonism on his thought during the period leading up to this conversion.⁸ Like the original Platonists, this more recent incarnation holds that the philosopher is to be prepared and long for a time when the more perfect soul will be unleashed from its corrupt bodily and worldly shackles. Plotinus (205–270) (*Enneads* 1.6.6), perhaps the greatest of the Neoplatonists in the century prior to Augustine, recounts the ancient virtues of the philosopher and states, “Courage is but being fearless of the death which is but the parting of the Soul from the body, an event which no one can dread whose delight is to be his unmingled self. And Magnanimity is but disregard for the lure of things here.” Echoing both this very Platonic sentiment of disenchantment with the bodily world and Jesus’s own words in Luke 14, Augustine (*De libero arbitrio* 2.2) tells his interlocutor, in *On Free Choice of the Will*, that as Christians, “we must wholeheartedly desire and love [Godly] things and place no value on what is earthly and human.”⁹ Pushing this eschewal of worldliness even further, Augustine’s most significant appropriation of Platonic thought as it relates to Christian dying to the world can be found in his doctrine concerning original sin.

Plotinus (*Enneads* 1.6.5–6) speaks in great detail of the situation of a soul, which is naturally pure and good, once it becomes “sunk in manifold death” as the result of a “fall” into the life of worldly lusts and material pleasures. Given its corrupt and tainted, or as Plotinus puts it, “ugly,” state, a soul in this condition is no longer capable of understanding the beautiful reality of things. It is only by turning away, in a movement reminiscent of Plato’s (*Republic* 514a–521b) famous image of the cave, from such a degraded life of corporeal passion toward a more divine existence in the realm of the intellect, that such a soul can be purified and restored to its prior perfect state (Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.6.7–9). This Neoplatonic account of the fall and rise of the soul runs parallel in several significant ways to Augustine’s understanding of original sin. Due to the fall from the natural state of perfection in the Genesis story, the descendants of Adam and Eve, that is, all of humankind, are doomed to take on a new nature and live the life of the sinful, lustful flesh. Rather than experiencing everlasting goodness and wisdom, humans must face ignorance, hardship, and death—both physical and spiritual (Augustine, *De libero arbitrio* 3.18–20).¹⁰ Fortunately, just as Plotinus identifies a way out of such a corrupted state, Augustine also claims that redemption comes by way of giving up, or paradoxically dying to, the spiritually dead way of life to which humans have become accustomed. But is Augustine’s understanding of this shedding of worldliness exactly what Plotinus has in mind?

Augustine is surely on board with the Neoplatonic concerns about material pleasures and corporeal passions, and he is also in agreement about turning toward something higher and divine in order to avoid such worldly snares. However, it is at the point in Augustine's account where he discusses what is involved in this turning that one can find the major Christian innovation in the Platonic strain of the philosophy of death. While Plotinus believes that the road to redemption is an intellectual one taken by particular souls, Augustine (*De libero arbitrio* 3.19) claims that the human capacity for such a self-motivated intellectual transformation has been irreparably damaged by the fall—humans are “born in the blindness of ignorance.” In other words, there can be no pulling oneself up by one's own bootstraps when one's legs are shattered (compare Carr 2001, 184–85). Given this desperate situation, Christianity in general, and Augustine specifically, must posit another capacity if redemption is to be possible.¹¹ They believe that God in his mercy “showed them the path of faith in the blindness of forgetfulness” (Augustine, *De libero arbitrio* 3.20). For the Christian, reliance on reason, or intellect, is just one more aspect of the corrupt, damaged, human condition that one must in some sense die to in order to regain the perfect human nature that God originally created. Paul himself actually points out that, to the allegedly “reasonable” world of corrupt humanity, Christianity can only appear offensive or foolish, and so a new way of seeing is necessary (1 Cor. 1:23). Humbling oneself, admitting the insufficiency of one's intellectual capacities, and faithfully appealing to God's grace for help are the only recourses for finding life in death (Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 13.1–5, 10–12).

The paradoxical predicament of the Christian described up to this point can be summarized as follows: humans have left a situation of life without death and entered into one in which they must live with the constant reality of death. In order to overcome this present situation, a human must give up, or “die to,” this dead way of life; but this is no easy task and a divine act of redemption becomes necessary. Through this act, humans are able to pass from a corrupt state of living death—biologically alive for the time being and actively engaged in affairs of the world, but spiritually decaying and headed to perdition—to a purified state of living death. Although biological life persists in this latter state as well, one is able to thrive spiritually, unobstructed by the concerns of ordinary human life, while looking forward to eternal blessedness.

The period of Christian thought after Augustine, the medieval period, is a long and complicated one that I cannot begin to do justice to here, given that my ultimate goals must soon lead the discussion quite a bit farther abroad historically. Nonetheless, it will be worthwhile to high-

light two aspects or trends from this period. One prominent movement that was particularly popular during the early Middle Ages is monasticism (its popularity seems to have waned somewhat during the later Middle Ages with the rise of mendicant orders). This movement seems worth mentioning briefly given that it is a mechanism intended to facilitate dying to worldliness. In the monastery, one is closed off from the everyday world in order to cultivate one's spiritual relationship with the divine. Although this apparently powerful expression of dying to the world has its share of notable advocates, some of the key Christian thinkers included in my present account, including Kierkegaard, reject it. Besides the fact that these thinkers can find no biblical precedent for precisely this sort of behavior, they seem to agree that, in spite of its intentions, monasticism does not really lead to proper dying to the world. Martin Luther (1483–1546) (Luther 2000, 234–35), for instance, who was no stranger to monastic living, argues that the monastery is a relatively tranquil place that shuts out worldly suffering so that one might indulge in the more pleasant aspects of being alive.

A significant trend from the later medieval period that will be worth introducing now is Scholasticism. This trend is perhaps best characterized by the writings of natural theologians like Anselm (1033–1109) and Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). The latter's work—probably Scholasticism's most paradigmatic example—integrates Greek thought in the form of the newly “rediscovered” texts of Aristotle during the Crusades, and seems to carve out a more substantial place for reason, or human capabilities in general, than Augustine would have condoned (for the record, it is not as though Augustine rejects every use of reason to supplement faith).¹² Besides the famous Scholastic arguments for God's existence, based on pure reason in the case of Anselm's ontological argument and reason aided by experience of the world in other cases, Aquinas actually goes so far as to distinguish, explicitly, between separate domains for reason and faith within Christian doctrine. Although Aquinas (*Summa Theologica* I, Q. 2, Art. 2, ad. 1) does speak of the primacy of faith in some sense for the sake of being a Christian, he claims that faith is only necessary for appropriating certain articles of church doctrine (e.g., the Trinity), while reason is sufficient for grasping other articles, such as the existence of God. Given this compartmentalizing of reason, I do not mean to suggest that Aquinas, or Scholasticism in general, breaks entirely with the earlier Augustinian sense of Christian dying to the world or its more anti-rational aspects. The Scholastic position does, however, offer a convenient adversary to those who would restore these traditional aspects to their place of prominence in such dying.

An Augustinian Reformation

There are at least two thinkers from the first post-medieval centuries that must be discussed because they stand out as champions of the Augustinian tradition against the widespread Scholasticism of the day. These thinkers believe that the church, with its excessive reliance on the sort of Aristotelianism then in vogue, had forgotten some of the basic lessons of Pauline dying to the world, as well as those of Augustine's turn away from the more rationalistic and self-reliant aspects of Greek thought. The first of these traditionalists is none other than the famous reformer Martin Luther, himself a monk of the Augustinian order. The so-called Lutheran Reformation is arguably in many ways not a reformation, but a "pre-formation," or a return to Christianity as it had previously been. Reacting as much to the rationalism of prominent church doctrine-crafters like Aquinas, with the famous proclamation that reason is a whore,¹³ as to the "lazy" Christianity then practiced in what is now Germany (exemplified by the church's custom of selling indulgences), Luther (1957a; 1957c) sees value in a return to the New Testament focus on death, particularly the death of Jesus.

The issue of Luther's views on death is a complicated one given the gradual yet extreme changes in his views in general throughout his lifetime. For the sake of relating his more thoroughly "Lutheran" thought to the work of Kierkegaard, it is probably best to focus on those works that come after what is traditionally taken to be the beginning of the Reformation in 1517. Mirroring to some extent my earlier discussion of the two senses of dying to the world in the New Testament, it will also be helpful to distinguish between two types of Luther's writings on death: those that have to do with Christians passing out of the world physically, and those that have to do with sacrificing worldliness for Christ (in Luther's own context, the latter may actually include the physical passing away of martyrdom). Although there is surely too much material to address here, particularly on the issue of the more figurative sense of dying to the world, I have selected a few short texts to focus on, which should allow for an adequate characterization of Luther's views as they will impact Kierkegaard, and later, Heidegger.¹⁴

The first of these texts is a relatively early document (1519) entitled "A Sermon on Preparing to Die." Written just two years after Luther's publication of the "Ninety-Five Theses," which changed the course of Western history, this short sermon includes twenty articles of practical advice and spiritual comfort. Although the writing of this document was originally requested by a particular individual struggling with the thought of death, within a few years it was widely published and read

(Bertram 1969, 97–98). Despite its popularity, it should be noted that there are particular aspects of this sermon that Luther would later reject. For example, he repeatedly appeals to the value of particular sacraments such as “extreme unction” (part of the last rites), which he will eventually jettison due to a lack of biblical precedent (Luther 1969, 100, 108).¹⁵ It is not clear, however, that the presence of these particular remnants of his Catholicism pose any problems for his overall account of the proper way for a Christian to approach death.

At the beginning of his sermon Luther (1969, 101), treating death as the human condition, advises that “we should familiarize ourselves with death during our lifetime, inviting death into our presence when it is still at a distance and not on the move.” In fact, he includes death, along with sin and hell, as issues that must be kept in mind constantly during life, but which must remain unthought as life nears its conclusion (Luther 1969, 102). As the sermon progresses, however, it becomes clear that what Luther is advocating is no mere meditation on human finitude, personal or otherwise. Rather, he advocates focusing on Christ’s death to the exclusion of the consideration of any other perspective on death. He states, “You must not view or ponder death as such, not in yourself or in your nature. . . . You must concern yourself solely with the death of Christ. . . . If you look at death in any other way, it will kill you with great anxiety and anguish” (Luther 1969, 104). Just as Christ is said to have substituted his death for that of humankind, Luther substitutes a detailed consideration of Christ’s death for a consideration of both one’s own death and the fact of human mortality in general. His purpose in making this substitution is clearly to offer comfort to the dying, and mitigate the anxiety that one feels when thinking about death. Among numerous statements he makes to this effect, Luther (1969, 114) wonders, “What more should God do to persuade you to accept death willingly and not to dread but to overcome it? In Christ he offers you the image of life, of grace, and of salvation so that you may not be horrified by the images of sin, death, and hell.” By the end of this sermon, Luther’s overall message seems to be that one should really not spend one’s time thinking about death at all, but rather about one’s eternal life in Christ.

But there is another aspect of focusing on the death of Christ and the eternal life this death brings with it that Luther’s early sermon does not really address—the suffering, persecution, and martyrdom that come along with the imitation of Christ. In texts like “A Letter of Consolation to All Who Suffer Persecution” (1522), which was originally intended for a sympathetic nobleman, and the outlined sermon later titled “That a Christian Should Bear His Cross with Patience” (1530), Luther picks up on these issues with constant scriptural reference (Bertram 1968, 59–60;

Flesner 1968, 181–82). While one might find comfort in the face of death by thinking about a heavenly eternal life, it seems that a life in Christ is likely to be less than comfortable in the temporal world (Luther 1968b, 183). In fact, Luther seems to believe that the sign of true Christianity is the very presence of persecution and suffering. He asserts, “Wherever Christ is, Judas, Pilate, Herod, Caiaphas, and Annas will inevitably be also, so also his cross. If not, he is not the true Christ” (Luther 1968a, 63).¹⁶ In other words, one will only know if one is doing it right when one is betrayed, arrested, mocked, tortured, condemned, or even killed. Applying these criteria to his own situation, in which even martyrdom seems to be a real possibility, Luther (1968a, 63) begins almost to revel in death as he states: “They threaten us with death. If they were as smart as they are stupid, they would threaten us with life. It is a shame and disgrace to try to threaten and terrify Christ and his Christians with death for, after all, they are lords and victors over death. It is just like trying to frighten a man by bridling and saddling his horse and bidding him to ride on it.” For Luther then, it seems that Christians (as good proponents of the Platonic strain) are really at home in death. Not only are they ready to sacrifice worldly goods, including their own lives, they also believe that this sacrifice prepares them for the everlasting existence to come. It is as though they are already in some sense dead and yet in another sense incapable of dying.

Like Luther a century before (and Kierkegaard two centuries later), the Jansenist-leaning Blaise Pascal (1623–1662) takes issue with a religious status quo that seems to have forgotten Augustine’s lessons about the importance and worldly repercussions of a faithful relationship with God. Given the Augustinianism that Jansenists and Lutherans have in common, it is certainly not surprising that the Jansenists were accused of having Protestant sympathies. In fact, the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Jansenist movement was condemned by the Jesuits—the great propagators of Scholastic doctrines at this time—and Pascal’s views connecting death and reason place him squarely in the middle of this conflict. Immersed in the skeptical atmosphere of thinkers like Michel de Montaigne, Pierre Charron, and René Descartes, Pascal comes to wonder about the legitimacy and limits of reason in the service of Christian belief.¹⁷ Specifically, he feels that the Jesuit use of reason to “combine God and the world” leads to a situation in which the true nature of Christianity is lost (Pascal 2005, 311). It is at least partially with these issues in mind that Pascal’s *Pensées* turns to the thought of death in order to focus attention clearly on the state of humanity in the world and the essence of Christianity.

For Pascal, physical death is significant as the deadline by which an

individual must make a decision concerning belief in the immortality of the soul, or else risk certain consequences. In a slightly updated version of Socrates's disjunction in the *Apology*, he states: "Eternity exists, and death, which must begin it and which threatens them every hour, must in a short time inevitably put them under the horrible necessity of being annihilated or unhappy eternally" (Pascal 2005, 221). Given the obvious importance of making what Pascal (2005, 217) would see as the "right" decision about the eternal, there are a few things about the deadline that ought to be kept in mind. The first of these can be seen in the passage quoted above—death can come at any moment without warning. But this indeterminate aspect of death is bound up with a much less ambiguous feature. Regarding life in the world, Pascal (51) claims, "It is certain we will not exist in it for long and uncertain if we will exist in it for one hour." Furthermore, death is something that an individual faces alone (50); a person must not think that anyone else can help them once the deadline has been reached. This is one part of existence that is necessarily private and solitary, and one would do well to treat it as such. While Pascal, who is perhaps less interested in comforting the dying than Luther (and more interested in using death to open people's eyes to what is at stake in life), has other things to say about death, these few points should be sufficient for helping to explain his take on dying to the world.

When one focuses on death, and what comes after it, in the way Pascal describes, one experiences a sense of urgency and individual responsibility in life that one might not experience otherwise. There is a limited and possibly small amount of time to get one's affairs in order, but the most pressing affairs are not the temporary and transient problems of everyday life in the world. Pascal's sense of urgency and responsibility demands that one alter one's life in various ways in order to keep from becoming bogged down in matters that do not pertain to one's decision about the eternal. Consider his claim: "Let us . . . judge those who live without thinking of the ultimate end of life, who let themselves be guided by their inclinations and their pleasures without reflection and without concern, as if they could annihilate eternity by turning their thought away from it, and think only of making themselves happy for the moment" (221). This passage suggests that a genuine appreciation for one's precarious situation might lead to the avoidance of worldly ideas and passions. Indeed, our daily worries about office productivity, familial strife, and making time for the gym do seem to pale in comparison to end of life issues. Aided by thoughts of death, Pascal (47) seeks release from the ways of the world, which is precisely what several New Testament authors are after when they speak of dying to the sinful world of pride and bodily desires (e.g., Matt. 4:18–22, 19:24; 1 Cor. 6:12–7:9).

But beyond Pascal's view of death and the uneasiness and change it induces when taken seriously, the full implications of his understanding of dying to the world remain to be seen. Dying to the world is ultimately a disregarding, or hatred, of the worldly self, which includes one's selfishness, self-confidence, self-reliance, and so on; and this dying is necessary in order for an individual to be open to receiving a new sense of self through Christ's gracious and merciful redemptive act, as Augustine suggests (Pascal 2005, 81). Pascal (107) asserts that "true conversion consists in self-annihilation before that universal Being whom we have so often irritated. . . . There is an insurmountable opposition between God and us, and . . . without a mediator there can be no communion with him." There are many different ways in which one can understand how "having" a self might prevent having a relationship with God, but perhaps the most important impediment, according to Pascal, is the self-confidence and self-reliance that are manifested in the use of reason.

For the sake of existing in the world, it seems that there is nothing more valuable to a human being than reason. More often than not, it serves people well in dealing with the world, and it has therefore received an apparently well-deserved vote of confidence. But as Pascal explains (once again, in a way reminiscent of Augustine), God is opposed to worldliness, worldly reason included. The opposition between God and reason is quite apparent when one considers the numerous mysteries of Christian doctrine, whether it is the virgin birth, the divinity and resurrection of a man named Jesus, or Pascal's personal favorite: original sin. The purpose of recognizing such opposition is, according to Pascal, to acknowledge that reason can only go so far (not quite as far as the Jesuits and Scholastics claim, however), and that dying to the world includes, in some sense, dying to reason. The idea that reason might somehow become an obstacle to Christianity, and must therefore be cut off or excluded, surely resonates with Christ's own words in the gospels about cutting off limbs and gouging out organs that cause one to sin (Matt. 5:29–30, 18:8–9; Mark 9:43–47).

Pascal (2005, 37) says that we cannot know ourselves in God "through the proud exertions of our reason, but through its simple submission." By suspending or dying to reason at significant moments, one liberates another faculty, which humans can use to gain knowledge, or something like it. The heart—in this context, an instrument of faith—is a non-rational capacity by which principles, in this case Christian principles, can be felt. Just after introducing his famous wager, Pascal (215–16) claims, "It is the heart that experiences God, and not reason. Here, then, is faith: God felt by the heart, not by reason. The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know." I take this peculiar statement about

unreasonable reasons to mean a couple of things: first, that something might seem ridiculous to an outsider, but make perfect sense to those “in the know,” and second, that some course of action or belief might seem like a very bad idea (perhaps because a desirable outcome is unlikely—see the wager) and yet it is still possible to explain why someone might proceed along this course. With this statement Pascal does suggest a kind of dying to reason; but he could also be interpreted as sneaking some degree of reason back into Christianity in order to aid faith after having excluded it temporarily in order to form faith.

Despite the fact that the heart is capable of things that reason is not, Pascal does not believe that the heart ought to be left to its own devices. There is clearly a suspicion of reason in Pascal that separates him from his Scholastic predecessors (and Jesuit contemporaries), but it might be said that Pascal is closer to the Scholastics than Luther. Reason has a place in the service of Christianity according to Pascal and thus reason and faith must work together within the aspiring Christian. He states, “If we submit everything to reason, our religion will have nothing mysterious and supernatural. If we offend the principles of reason, our religion will be absurd and ridiculous” (53). Pascal (90, 212) does acknowledge that Christianity is, in a sense, foolish, but this foolishness is obviously not entirely incompatible with reason. It is because Christianity must, in some sense, be compatible with reason (or at least be able to offer “reasons” in its defense from the perspective of faith) that Pascal emphasizes the importance of at least some minimal amount of verifiable evidence in the form of miracles. He rather straightforwardly contends, “We would not have sinned in not believing in Jesus Christ, lacking miracles” (54).¹⁸ Of course, one could debate the rationality of belief in miracles, but given all that Pascal has to say, it is clear that his notion of dying to reason does not lead him into unabashed irrationalism.

The more anti-rationalist line of Christian thought, and the general focus on death and dying—both physical and metaphorical—that seems to lead thinkers like Augustine, Luther, and Pascal to it, will have an obvious impact on both Kierkegaard and Heidegger. Although there have surely been developments and variations on death-related issues within different Christian sects up to the present day (and I certainly do not mean to belittle or ignore what are no doubt some very fascinating views), I take it that the Platonic strain, insofar as it survives in certain forms of contemporary Christian thought, remains, for my broad purposes, more or less as I have described it. Furthermore, given that the philosophical tradition since the seventeenth century has for the most

part either radically reinterpreted Christianity (as in Hegel and Schopenhauer) or moved away from religious doctrines entirely, I feel that it is appropriate to end my brief account of the Platonic strain here. In fact, it is at the very point historically where my discussion of this strain slows down that the Epicurean strain, with its intensifying focus on scientific, this-worldly matters, and its corresponding doubts about an after-life, really takes off.

The Epicurean Strain

The Epicureans

If what distinguishes the Platonic strain of the philosophy of death is an appeal to an afterlife and an attempt to demonstrate that preparation for death is the best way to spend the less than perfect present worldly life, then what signifies membership in the Epicurean strain is a denial of any meaningful postmortem extension of particular subjective experience and an attempt to render death irrelevant in life. In his *Letter to Menoeceus* Epicurus (125) combats one of humankind's greatest fears by pointing out that death, "the most frightening of bad things, is nothing to us; since when we exist, death is not yet present, and when death is present, then we do not exist." This paradoxically enticing claim about death has been the subject of a great deal of philosophical discourse, both in the ancient world and in the present day. Before pressing on to consider its influence, however, it will be necessary to point out its sources.

As already suggested, Epicurus takes up the alternative view, which Plato briefly considers in the *Apology* but elsewhere seems to find less attractive: death begins nonexistence. In fact, Epicurus (*Letter to Menoeceus* 124–26) goes about his consideration of death in much the same way that the character Socrates does in his famous defense—that is, by pointing out the mistakes made in common discourse on the subject (compare *Apology* 29b). In addition to any Platonic connections Epicurus might have, he also seems to address (knowingly or not) the views of another prominent thinker from his era. In driving home the famous claim quoted above, Epicurus tries to rule out, definitively, the possibility of posthumous harm that Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.) (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1100a10–1101b9) downplays but will not ultimately deny.¹ In order to see how Epicurus does what Aristotle is unwilling or unable to do, one must explain two important aspects of Epicurean thought that underlie his beliefs about death. Because only a few short writings from Epicurus have survived, it will perhaps be helpful to supplement what Diogenes Laertius has preserved with *The Way Things Are* (*De rerum natura*), a poem written by the first-century B.C.E. Roman Epicurean, Titus Lucretius Carus.

The first aspect of Epicurean doctrine that must be taken up is its religious understanding. Like many of his fellow Greeks, Epicurus does

not deny the existence of the gods; however, he does encourage focusing on the proper idea of the gods. Such a conception precludes the attribution to the gods of various human qualities and shortcomings, as one sees in the works of Homer (Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus* 123–24). According to Epicureanism, not only are the gods very much unlike human beings, they also seem to be quite uninterested in human beings. Rather, the gods seem to be absolutely content in just being themselves. Lucretius (*De rerum natura* 3.18–24) states,

The gods majestic, and their calm abodes
Winds do not shake, nor clouds befoul, nor snow
Violate with the knives of sleet and cold;
But there the sky is purest blue, the air
Is almost laughter in that radiance,
And nature satisfies their every need,
And nothing, nothing, mars their calm of mind.

Since the gods are blissfully wrapped up in their own carefree perfection, Epicurus (*Letter to Menoeceus* 124) belittles the idea that they are somehow involved in the judgment of human behavior and the handing out of penalties for wrongdoing. If the gods are not interested in punishing humans, it is but a short step to the denial of the sort of hell that Homer describes (compare Epicurus, *Letter to Herodotus* 81). In fact, Lucretius (*De rerum natura* 3.976–1023) makes a point of revisiting Greek literature and discrediting several famous tales of suffering in Hades, concluding his list by claiming that if it were possible to have the experience of hell, it would be in life. All the more reason, according to the Epicurean, not to fear death.

The second relevant aspect of Epicurean doctrine is its atomistic metaphysics.² The idea at the heart of Epicurus's famous statement about why it is irrational to fear death is that in death there is no longer a subject able to suffer harm. This idea relies on the Epicurean belief that everything is made up of tiny particles of various shapes and sizes that come together occasionally, hold together temporarily, and eventually disperse again (Epicurus, *Letter to Herodotus* 40–44; Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 3.31–35). At the moment of death, the particularly tiny particles that make up the human mind or spirit and animate the body imperceptibly evacuate the corpse left behind. In his *Letter to Herodotus*, Epicurus (63–65) explains that “the soul is a body (made up of) fine parts distributed throughout the entire aggregate . . . [that is responsible for] its feelings, its ease of motion, its thought processes . . . [and its] sense-perception. . . . Furthermore, when the entire aggregate is destroyed,

the soul is scattered and no longer has the same powers" (compare Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 3.184–230). Since death is simply the dispersal of one's atoms, both those of the mind and eventually those of the body, there is no question of an enduring subject that can be harmed by death or anything that happens afterwards; and clearly there is nothing to fear in death. Not only does the Epicurean do away with fear of suffering in hell after death, the Epicurean even does away with the idea that there is anyone left at all to experience fear or other unpleasantness after death. Thus, Epicurus seems to have answered Aristotle's bizarre question about the possibility of posthumous harms.

What remains to be considered is Epicurus's further claim that death, as the dispersal of one's atoms, should not bother the living since it has not happened yet. He even believes that his understanding of death should comfort the living "by removing the longing for immortality" (*Letter to Menoeceus* 124). While his explanation as to why there is no personal existence and therefore nothing to fear *after death* might seem rather compelling, it is much less obvious why one's own impending death should not trouble one still capable of being troubled. Of course, one can understand the interest in this latter idea given Epicurus's overall goal of promoting the good life (*eudaimonia*) of tranquility (*ataraxia*) and pleasure (*hedonia*), but even if one shares his hope for this sort of life, it still is not altogether clear why one's death to come should not be considered deeply problematic. Epicurus (*Letter to Menoeceus* 125) argues that since one's own death is not a problem once it happens, it should not be viewed as a problem before it happens. Furthermore, Lucretius (*De rerum natura* 3.830–72, 968–74) calls attention to most humans' asymmetrical lack of concern about their prenatal nonexistence and argues that if this nonexistence does not bother anyone, then neither should postmortem nonexistence.³ But do these arguments not betray an impoverished understanding of death's interaction with life? Fortunately, the Epicurean treatment of death is an issue that will come up repeatedly in the history of philosophy, for example, in the work of early modern proponents of this pagan doctrine, in the writings of detractors like Kierkegaard and Heidegger, and even in the more recent musings of contemporary Anglo-American philosophers.⁴

The Stoics

Of the various schools of thought that deal heavily with death, the Stoics are one of the most troublesome to categorize. The earliest Stoics

are practically contemporary with Epicurus, but many of the key Stoic writers—for example, Lucius Annaeus Seneca (ca. 4 B.C.E.–65 C.E.) and Epictetus (ca. 50–ca. 130)—come well after Epicurus and Lucretius; and some even seem influenced by Epicurean doctrine.⁵ Stoicism also has a complicated relationship with Christianity. The close proximity between them is perhaps the main reason why it is noticeably more difficult to classify the Stoics in terms of the dichotomy of death views that I am describing. Stoicism, of course, had a tremendous influence on Christianity during the latter's formative years in the very Stoic Roman empire, prior to Christianity's rise to prominence around the time of Augustine.⁶ In fact, Josiah B. Gould (1970, 13) claims that it is in “the third century A.D., when Stoicism itself begins to lose ground and to be absorbed piecemeal into Neoplatonic and Christian thought.” Consider, for example, the rather Stoic idea of *memento mori* (and the related perseverance in the face of physical suffering and martyrdom) that has been an important aspect of Christian thought (and artwork) throughout Christian history.⁷ Nonetheless, the Stoics also have a great deal in common with the Epicureans on the two issues that matter for the sake of my account. They are, for the most part, without a clear notion of an individualistic afterlife and they often seek to diminish the significance of the deaths of individuals.

Like the Epicureans, the Stoics seem opposed to what traditional fear-mongering religions have to say about death and what comes after. For example, Epictetus (*Enchiridion* 5) states, “Death is nothing terrible, else it would have appeared so to Socrates. But the terror consists in our notion of death, that it is terrible.”⁸ Death is a perfectly natural, non-harmful part of existing that must not be fought against if tranquility is to be attained. But in order to understand death in this way and become tranquil, one must have a proper understanding of the divine's place in a largely determined natural world. The Stoics, in contrast to the Epicureans, believe that God—the very universe itself—is actively involved in human affairs. Perhaps the primary way that God is involved in human affairs is through the divine spark that animates and allows perception in each human being. Just as God is the divine fire that takes in, permeates, and animates the entire universe, human souls do the same on a much smaller, bodily, scale (Gould 1970, 127, 155–56). Despite this relationship to the divine, however, the Stoics do agree with the Epicureans that the “gift” of soul is more like a rental that must be “given back” (compare Epictetus, *Enchiridion* 11). Death is simply the reintegration of an individual spark into the divine fire that makes up the universe. Thus, while there may be some kind of continued existence in this reintegration, such existence does not seem to be the personal, individualistic afterlife that Plato and the Christians seem interested in; and if one's death is the

end of a particular subjective experience, there is surely nothing to be feared in death.⁹

Even though there is some parallel with the Epicureans on the irrationality of fearing death given certain metaphysical realities, it might at first glance appear that the Stoics are more in line with the Christians when it comes to the relevance of death in life. Surely, some of the Stoic views on this issue had an impact on the Christians, as I have already suggested. After all, they both often recommend a focus on thoughts of death with the goal of an improved life. For example, Epictetus (*Enchiridion* 21) states, "Let death and exile, and all other things which appear terrible, be daily before your eyes, but death chiefly; and you will never entertain an abject thought, nor too eagerly covet anything." This passage and others like it in Stoic writings could just as easily have been written by Pascal, or as will become clear, Kierkegaard.¹⁰ Such similarity in the use of thoughts of death is certainly enough to give one pause before denying the Stoics a place in the Platonic strain of the philosophy of death.

However, if this strategic employment of thoughts of death is enough to put the Stoics in line with the Christians, then maybe the Epicureans are not as far removed from the Christian approach as they most certainly appear to be. After all, both Epicurus and Lucretius dedicate large portions of their work to ponderings about death in the hope that such meditations will lead to an improved quality of life. An obvious difference is that while Christians turning to thoughts of death for the sake of life-improvement generally have an eye toward how their postmortem situation will be affected, Epicureans and Stoics (for the most part) are hardly concerned with such things in their peculiar use of thoughts of death. Furthermore, despite the occasional similarity in expression, exemplified by Epictetus's claim above, Epicureans and Stoics, unlike Christians, often "counsel that we should desensitize ourselves to death by thinking of it constantly" (J. Murphy 1993, 44n3). That is, while the goal of pondering death for the Christian is usually to prepare to be meaningfully changed by it, in many instances the goal of doing so for Epicureans and Stoics is to attain an attitude in which death means little (and in some cases, "nothing") to them.

In fact, the Stoics pursue this indifference to the point at which suicide becomes a perfectly viable option in a life that has outlived its usefulness (Strem 1981, 153). While their views on suicide may not be perfectly in line with those of the Epicureans either, Stoic views on this topic are surely helpful in distinguishing the Stoics from the Christians. Positions relative to the issue of suicide might even be a third, perhaps less essential, difference between the two key strains in the philosophy of death. Although Epicurus (*Letter to Menoeceus* 126–27) rejects the no-

tion that there might be an appropriate stage of life for suicide, he is not opposed to it on principle. On the other hand, Christians are known for their prohibition of suicide, and this prohibition seems like another possible connection to Platonic thought given Socrates's views on suicide in the *Phaedo* (61e–62d).

A further feature of Stoic thought that distinguishes them from the Christians on the topic of death is the notion that there is nothing particularly evil about the world (Epictetus, *Enchiridion* 26–27). While the Stoics surely treat worldly life with a detached “take it or leave it” attitude, there is not so much Christian-style opposition to the world in Stoicism. Without such world-animosity, it hardly makes sense to include the Stoic treatment of death in my account of Platonic and Christian dying to the world, even if there is some overlap between them. With this final distinction, it seems clear enough that, so far as death is concerned, Epicureans and Stoics are joined in their opposition to the Platonic strain of the philosophy of death. This connection of Epicureans and Stoics will find further support in the appropriation of their ancient teachings by various modern thinkers.

Early Modern Appropriation

After a long period of intellectual domination by the medieval Christian tradition, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw a renewed interest in the pagan thought of the post-Aristotelian Hellenistic schools of philosophy. While such ancient thought was extremely influential in the general metaphysical and epistemological works of an increasingly deistic, and even atheistic, philosophical community, its influence is especially obvious in the case of the philosophy of death (compare Wilson 2008, esp. 1–4, 37–38, 108–41). Like the Epicureans and the Stoics before them, thinkers such as Montaigne (1533–1592), Benedict de (Baruch) Spinoza (1632–1677), and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) seek to diminish the significance that people attach to their own deaths. For example, Montaigne (1958a, 458) disapprovingly claims that “we set too much importance on ourselves. It seems that the universe somehow suffers by our annihilation.” In the course of questioning the meaning of individuals facing death, some of these modern thinkers also display vaguely Hellenistic metaphysical views that lead to the denial of, or at least indifference toward, the possibility of postmortem continuance of particular subjectivities. Although Montaigne (1958b, 64, 66–67), again

a helpful exemplary figure, does not go out of his way to say much about the possibility of an afterlife, his frequent discussion of death as annihilation or the “end of the road” suggests either that he does not believe in an afterlife, or that such beliefs have no serious impact on his consideration of death. Finally, it is worth pointing out that some of our representatives of early modernity even exhibit an appreciation for the views on suicide of these ancient Greek schools.

While his essays are easily identifiable influences on Pascal’s discussions of the certainty of death, the uncertainty of its when, the importance of constant thinking about it, and the sense of urgency and suspicion of worldliness that such thoughts produce, Montaigne (1958b, 57–61) clearly belongs to the Epicurean strain of the philosophy of death. In essays such as “That to Philosophize Is to Learn to Die” and “Of Judging of the Death of Others,” he makes frequent reference to Epicurean and Stoic thought, particularly that of Lucretius and Seneca. He even paraphrases Epicurus’s famous mantra and Lucretius’s symmetry argument (1958b, 64–66). As Jeffrie G. Murphy says above about these ancient thinkers, it seems that Montaigne’s (57, 60) purpose in recommending a constant meditation on death is to produce a “disdain for death,” “to strip it of its greatest advantage against us, . . . rid it of its strangeness,” and free us from fear. He claims, “It is impossible that we should fail to feel the sting of such notions at first. But by handling them and going over them, in the long run we tame them beyond question” (61). In true Epicurean fashion, Montaigne (68) also criticizes the cultural and religious practices surrounding death for producing such great fear in people. Montaigne’s discussion of death is aimed at mastering life, not by making death a significant deadline, moment of transition, or way of life as the Platonic strain asserts, but by reducing death’s impact on life.¹¹ The difference here is between “living as though you are dead” and “living as though death doesn’t matter.”

Besides preaching this sort of Epicurean/Stoic desensitization on the issue of death, Montaigne (1958b, 61) also cultivates an attitude of detachment from worldly existence that resembles very closely what I have attributed to the Stoics, but not the Christians. Montaigne (64–65), like the members of both of these groups, is ready to give up his life, but while he acknowledges Christian “contempt for life,” he adheres to the Stoic idea that “life is neither good nor evil in itself.” And just as this indifference toward life in general leads the Stoics to recommend taking one’s own, but only when the situation truly calls for it, Montaigne (57, 67) does not rule out suicide as a viable option in extreme cases. In fact, his “Of Judging of the Death of Others” is dedicated to consider-

ing the difficulty of committing suicide, and he even provides several accounts of those who have done it well and those who have not (Montaigne 1958a, 460–62).

Although Spinoza has far less to say about suicide in particular and death in general than Montaigne, his lack of interest in the topic is motivated by the very same Epicurean and Stoic attitudes. That is, given that there is life to be lived in the here and now, concerns about a time when this will not be the case are unproductive at best, and so, an indifference to death must be cultivated. In explaining the divergence from Montaigne's more conspicuous appropriation of Epicurean and Stoic thought, Murphy (1993, 44n3) states, "Spinoza, on the other hand, suggests that we should try to avoid thinking of death entirely, to forget about death in the pursuit of the values of life." At the heart of Spinoza's disregarding of death is his very Stoic understanding of God, which is really just the strictly determined universe itself. He believes that if there is any freedom (or tranquility, in the case of the Stoics) to be found in such a universe it consists of aligning one's understanding with the way things will happen anyway (Spinoza 1955, 54–70, 244–54).¹² Because death is part of God's will—that is, the natural processes of the universe—excessive struggle with or fear of death simply demonstrates a misrelation to, or misunderstanding of, life. In order to ensure a proper relation to God/nature/life Spinoza (1955, 232) thus ignores death: "A free man is one who lives under the guidance of reason, who is not led by fear . . . but who directly desires that which is good, . . . in other words . . . who strives to act, to live, and to preserve his being on the basis of seeking his own true advantage; wherefore such an one thinks of nothing less than of death, but his wisdom is a meditation of life."

But apart from the life-disrupting nature of thinking about it, there is another, more basic, reason why Spinoza believes that one should not bother with concerns about death. Like the Stoics with their divine spark (and the Epicureans with their indestructible atoms), Spinoza believes that death does not destroy what a person really is. It is not inaccurate to say that the mind is eternal—in the sense that particular minds (like all apparent particularity) are really just modes of the one eternal universal substance—and he seems to find some consolation in knowing that one's existence cannot end. However, as is also the case with many of the key Stoic thinkers, Spinoza (1955, 259–67) does not believe that such continued existence resembles the particular subjectivity we become so attached to;¹³ and for him, of course, such attachment already betrays a misunderstanding of the nature of things.

Perhaps borrowing certain ideas from Spinoza, while vehemently rejecting others, Leibniz seems to take aspects of Hellenistic thought

in some peculiar directions in his portrayal of death and postmortem existence. Even though Leibniz (1965, 148) denies Spinozist monism¹⁴ in favor of an almost Epicurean infinite plurality of “atoms of nature” called “monads,” they both describe the durability of the ultimate reality from which humans come and to which they will return. I must be careful not to suggest that monads are to be understood as precisely the same sorts of elementary material particles that Epicurus describes (see Leibniz 1989b, 142); but one need not become too enmeshed in Leibnizian metaphysics in order to grasp that, so far as death is concerned, monads are just like Epicurean atoms—indivisible and indestructible. Everything that we take to exist consists of monads and all apparent change and destruction is really nothing more than an alteration in the “perceptions” and relations of monads (Leibniz 1965, 148–59). That is, while nothing is ever really destroyed, everything is in a constant state of shifting viewpoints and relationships, including human beings.¹⁵ The “soul,” like all of reality, is just another monad, albeit one that has temporarily taken a place of prominence (Leibniz 1965, 150–51, 159). At death, this monad, no different than the others, continues to exist, but not necessarily as we understood it beforehand. Leibniz (1965, 160–61; compare 1989b, 140–41) states, “never . . . is there metempsychosis nor transmigration of souls,” but neither is there “perfect death” or “entire destruction.” Even though Leibniz’s conclusions in the *Monadology* are primarily metaphysical in nature, the implications of this understanding of death for practical life are clear enough: do not let death disturb you since it does not really happen anyway.

However, despite an apparent harmony with some of the Epicurean and Stoic sympathies that Spinoza displays, Leibniz seemingly refuses to relinquish belief in postmortem continuation of subjective experience. This makes him an interesting case that does not fit neatly into either the Platonic strain or the Epicurean. He may never offer a completely satisfying account of what such continued existence would be like, but Leibniz (e.g., 1989a, 243; 1989b, 141) does suggest the possibility of the reduction, at death, of a human to an imperceptible state of hibernation from which it can be resuscitated in order to be held accountable for its previous behavior. While Spinoza seems uninterested in propping up any traditional theology, Leibniz still sounds like he might consider himself to be in the Christian tradition regardless of his rather unorthodox views on the soul and the afterlife.

Speaking of those who seem to affirm Christianity (or at least some deistic version of it) while espousing potentially heretical views on death-related issues, consider David Hume and his posthumously published essays. Writing entirely in the eighteenth century, and thus a bit more

recently than the preceding philosophers, he ought to be mentioned here briefly before moving on for several reasons. Hume is both a valuable bridge between the early modern views on death of thinkers such as Spinoza and the nineteenth-century explosion of attitudes on the topic, and also an indication that English-speaking philosophy was heading in the same direction as philosophy on the Continent. But perhaps the primary reasons he is worth calling attention to are his explicitly Stoic arguments on behalf of suicide and against the immortality of the personal soul, and his reliance on something like the Lucretian symmetry argument (Hume 1987, 580, 583, 591–92, 598). However, given the extreme similarity of Hume's views on these matters to those of the thinkers I have already discussed, perhaps this brief statement will be sufficient for now.

The Nineteenth-Century Germans

Some of the German-speaking authors considered here exert at least as much influence on Kierkegaard and Heidegger as any philosophers of death described thus far, which makes sense given their historical, regional, and linguistic proximity to my primary subjects. Beginning with Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), one can see some of the ideas that will underlie the existential philosophy of death. Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), who does not hide his contempt for Hegel, but seems to appreciate Spinozist and Leibnizian views, is perhaps a better indicator of the future of the Epicurean strain of the philosophy of death. And by the end of the century, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), who was in his youth an adherent of Schopenhauer's pessimism,¹⁶ actually takes a direct shot at the Platonic strain, especially as seen in the form of Christian dying to the world.¹⁷

There are several issues that one could focus on in providing an account of Hegel on death, but perhaps the most pertinent for what is to come is his discussion of "lordship and bondage" or the "master/slave dialectic." Although this particular section of *Phenomenology of Spirit* is complicated by its political implications, including its significance for later adherents as well as critics like Karl Marx (1818–1883), I will emphasize what it seems to suggest about humanity facing death.¹⁸ Even this specific issue, however, is a contentious one as there is disagreement about how much weight one ought to put on Hegel's claims about facing death, especially in the relevant section.¹⁹ But debate about the centrality of death to Hegel's overall project is of little consequence for my present account of his place in the history of the philosophy of death,

given his apparent influence on both Kierkegaard and Heidegger on this topic. What is of some concern at this point is determining how well Hegel fits into the Platonic/Epicurean dichotomy that I am trying to expound. While some thinkers—such as Alexandre Kojève, who mentions Spinoza and Leibniz as key precursors to Hegel²⁰—believe that Hegel's views on death lead him to deny both God's existence and the possibility of postmortem continuation of subjective experience,²¹ others suggest that Hegel is right in line with the Christian tradition.²²

Robert C. Solomon (1983, 614) points to three key issues in *Phenomenology* that must be considered if one is to grasp Hegel's views on Christianity: the "unhappy consciousness," the "beautiful soul," and "revealed religion."²³ Solomon (1983, 620) associates the unhappy consciousness with the self-denial and asceticism of early Christianity. In order to understand this association it is necessary to see that in *Phenomenology*'s explanation of the development of consciousness up to this point, it has come to hold that there are two separate aspects of itself—the temporal/contingent/bodily and the eternal/necessary/soulful (Solomon 1983, 616–17). It is the paradoxical unity of these opposites found in Christianity, which will eventually lead this form of consciousness to despair. After all, it just does not make much sense to claim that the temporal/contingent/bodily aspect, with which one tends to identify, is related to the eternal/necessary/soulful. How could there be anything divine and permanent in a corporeal and mortal human? Consciousness is left with the unhappy realization that there is no satisfactory way to answer this question. To relieve the pain of this apparent incompatibility and connect with the eternal/necessary/soulful, consciousness, with the help of a mediator, is forced to make a series of temporal/contingent/bodily sacrifices. Hegel (1977, 137) states, "Through these moments of surrender, first of its right to decide for itself, then of its property and enjoyment, and finally through the positive moment of practising what it does not understand . . . it has . . . truly divested itself of its 'I.'" In this self-denial, Christianity as unhappy consciousness seems to find a kind of slavish peace, but for Hegel (1977, 137–38) such peace is hardly the highest form of human existence. In fact, Christianity as unhappy consciousness is not even the highest form of Christianity.

The beautiful soul, apparently standing in for Jesus of Nazareth (perhaps one of Solomon's [1983, 622–24] more controversial readings), seems to be another manifestation of the unhappy consciousness (compare Hegel 1977, 399–400), but this time less focused on metaphysical difficulties than on moral ones. The beautiful soul abstains from moral judgment and instead substitutes forgiveness. The claim at the heart of this substitution is that human morality is an uncertain and tenuous en-

terprise. Humans are constantly faced with difficult “damned if you do, damned if you don’t” kinds of choices; and there is also the issue of cultural relativism to cloud matters. Given difficulties like these, the beautiful soul affirms human fallibility and weakness, refusing to make moral judgments (Solomon 1983, 623–24). While Hegel (1977, 407–8) seems to see some reconciliatory value in Christian forgiveness, he is critical of the understanding of Christianity as imitation of Jesus. Within the very humility and unassertiveness that is the goal of the beautiful soul, epitomized by Jesus’s allowing himself to be put to death, Hegel (1977, 577) sees precisely the sort of self-denial that he has a problem with in Christianity as the unhappy consciousness (compare Solomon 1983, 624–25). He complains, “This ‘beautiful soul’ . . . is disordered to the point of madness. . . . It does in fact surrender the *being-for-self* to which it so stubbornly clings; but what it brings forth is only the non-spiritual unity of (mere) being” (Hegel 1977, 407). The beautiful soul surrenders itself, leaving behind an empty shell (literally so in the case of the martyr) that is, once again, hardly the highest development of humankind (Solomon 1983, 625).

Unsatisfied, Hegel goes on to consider a third understanding of Christianity in his discussion of revealed religion, which abandons the importance of Jesus Christ (and the imitation of his self-denial by the early Christians) in favor of something like the community of the Holy Spirit (Solomon 1983, 626). Hegel (1977, 463) states, “This self-revealing Spirit is *in and for itself*, is not elicited by, as it were, unravelling the rich life of Spirit in the community and tracing it back to its original strands, to the ideas, say, of the primitive imperfect community, or even to the utterances of the actual man himself.” According to commonly held Christian theological views (Lutheranism is prominent in Hegel’s context), it is through the Holy Spirit that one is finally able to find unity with the divine; after the death of Jesus Christ has cleansed humanity, it is possible for God, as this Spirit, to take up residence within human beings (compare Hegel 1977, 460; Solomon 1983, 626). Hegel obscures this theological teaching in order to emphasize the realization of the presence of divinity in humanity, rather than the story of the divinity of a particular man (Solomon 1983, 629). This realization marks, for Hegel, the highest form of Christianity, if not the highest form of human being. He asserts, “The *death* of the divine Man, *as death*, is *abstract* negativity, the immediate result of the movement which ends only in *natural* universality. Death loses this natural meaning in spiritual self-consciousness. . . . Death becomes transfigured from its immediate meaning, viz. the non-being of this *particular* individual, into the *universality* of the Spirit who dwells in His community, dies in it every day, and is daily resurrected” (Hegel

1977, 475). What Hegel seems to be getting at is that Christ's death/self-denial signifies both that Christ is to be cast off, and that the community of humans can find its divinity in itself in the here and now and not in some future heaven (Solomon 1983, 629).

These conclusions about the divine, self-denial, death, and post-mortem existence suggest that Hegel's interpretation of Christianity is so radical that it has more in common with the Epicurean strain in the philosophy of death. Nonetheless, it is significant that Hegel emphasizes the importance of, in some sense or at some stage of development, passing through death in order to live properly or become a proper self;²⁴ and it is in his discussion of lordship and bondage, just before his account of the unhappy consciousness, that this struggle for self-understanding most closely connects with death. We depend on "the other" to know ourselves—"I" am only in the sense that there is a "not-me," and so part of what makes up my existence as "me" is "external" to me. However, it seems that it is only through further distinguishing oneself from the other that a more genuine self-awareness or self-possession can really take place. In passages loaded with political implications, Hegel (1977, 112–14) states, "they *recognize* themselves as *mutually recognizing* one another," but "each seeks the death of the other. . . . Thus the relation of the two self-conscious individuals is such that they prove themselves and each other through a life-and-death struggle. . . . They must raise their certainty of being *for themselves* to truth. . . . It is only through staking one's life that freedom is won."²⁵ By risking one's life trying to bring about the other's death, one hopes to gain independence from the other. But insofar as the other cannot actually be killed so long as I continue to be (I am always in at least some minimal way dependent on some other), the result of this struggle is merely the situation of winner and loser, master and slave. Interestingly though, as in the case of Christian concerns about worldly flourishing, winning is a kind of losing and losing a kind of winning.

While the master *seems* to have achieved the desired goal of secure and independent understanding of itself, given the subjugation of the claims of the other on this self, the opposite has actually occurred. In winning, the master loses awareness of an integral aspect of itself—the self-defining threat of the other—and falls into a lifeless and shallow relationship to the world, which becomes a collection of mere objects of amusement. To the master, even the slave is simply an object for service and production (Hegel 1977, 114–17). If there is any value to be found in this situation, according to Hegel, it is not located in the master, but in the slave. Not only does the latter have a more authentic relationship to the objects of the world, because in making and working with these

objects one invests oneself in them and encounters them as pieces of oneself rather than as objects of mere amusement (Hegel 1977, 118), but also, the slave continues to encounter the master as other. This encounter manifests itself as fear of death, a profound sense of anxiety that the master has little, if any, access to. Hegel (1977, 117) explains,

Its whole being has been seized with dread; for it has experienced the fear of death, the absolute Lord. In that experience it has been quite unmanned, has trembled in every fibre of its being, and everything solid and stable has been shaken to its foundations. But this pure universal movement . . . is the simple, essential nature of self-consciousness. . . . This moment of pure being-for-self is also *explicit* for the bondsman, for in the lord it exists for him as his *object* Through his service he rids himself of his attachment to natural existence in every single detail.

By maintaining the fear in the face of death that the master has tried to eliminate in subjugating the other, Hegel seems to suggest that the slave actually achieves the self-awareness that the master sought in vain. What is more, it turns out that such an understanding is not found in bold assertion of one's self and interests, but rather in a kind of relinquishing of these "selfish" ways of existing in the world. Although this early account of self-sacrifice does not seem to be Hegel's end goal, something like it seems to be of particular importance to Schopenhauer.

In *The World as Will and Representation* (1844, expanded second edition), Schopenhauer dedicates an entire chapter to considering diverse philosophical and religious views on death, ranging from the treatments by Plato and Epicurus to the approaches of Hinduism and Buddhism. For example, Schopenhauer (1958, 467–68, 474–77) suggests that Eastern ideas about reincarnation rely on something like the Lucretian insight that we ought to be as concerned about what came before as what comes after—if we can "demonstrate" an afterlife to ourselves, then why not a pre-life as well?²⁶ Schopenhauer believes that philosophy and religion owe their existence primarily to the need for rationalizing comfort in the face of death. Rationality both exposes our mortality, and offers this comforting compensation as well. Following Indian and Epicurean lines of argument, Schopenhauer seeks to diminish the significance of death's certainty in human life given that subjective experience is extinguished in death. He is less disposed toward traditional Platonic or Christian attempts to comfort with the thought that death is an important moment of transition to further, and better, subjective experience, if a life has been lived properly. In fact, Schopenhauer sees these attempts as less

rational, and more like examples of misguided wishful thinking without much evidence to support them. When the plausibility of such strategies is seriously doubted, as it is in nineteenth-century Europe under the subversive influence of socialists and Hegelians, he claims that their former proponents (European Christians) are left despairing;²⁷ but those who took reason's true consolation from the beginning are undisturbed (Schopenhauer 1958, 463–65).

After this initial description of the strategic options for dealing with death, Schopenhauer (1958, 464) embarks on an account of the “empirical viewpoint,” which discloses widespread anxiety in the face of the supposed greatest of harms. This anxiety, Schopenhauer claims, is due to the fact that all existence is “will,” and “will-to-live” when manifested in animal form. Fear of death is the innate and not exactly rational companion to our basic (and not exactly rational) will-to-live. Schopenhauer suggests several arguments, drawing from the ancients, both Western and Eastern, as to why one might attempt to overcome one's immediate attachment to life and give up the fear of death. These arguments tend to focus on the idea that death is not harmful, even if it is annihilation; and, loosely following Socrates in the *Apology*, it may well be that death is in some sense beneficial, especially if it turns out that death does not mean total annihilation (Schopenhauer 1958, 465, 468–69). Even though a particular subjective experience seems to end in death, there is no reason to hold that the life force (will-to-live) formerly exhibited by a deceased individual or its material manifestation will ever cease “in and with the whole of nature” (473).²⁸ If no existence really ceases, from nature's perspective the death of particular individuals means nothing. Those who are able to abstract from the narrow personal perspective to this general one (in a way reminiscent of Plato's discovery of the universal forms underlying a world of particulars)²⁹ can view death and even life as indifferently as nature does, as a constant cycle of renewal (472–77).³⁰

With this understanding, one grasps that the species has relative permanence (and considered broadly enough, absolute permanence), and so more truth or reality than the very temporary particular (1958, 478–84).³¹ It is in the species that one can glimpse reality “free from that delusion of the individual” (485). Despite these claims, Schopenhauer does not mean to suggest that the temporary subjective perspective is entirely insignificant when compared with the more permanent objective nature of things. This subject/object division, when properly considered, is nothing more than two ways—“macrocosm and microcosm”—of speaking about the same underlying reality (485–88). In fact, Schopenhauer points out that it is only through the subjective perspective (representation) that the objective (will) is known at all. Given its participa-

tion in this ultimate reality, where the subjective and objective are mere aspects (496–97), even subjectivity is in some sense imperishable.

Schopenhauer acknowledges that the sort of subjective imperishability that he speaks of does not involve the prolongation of individual experience that many long for after death. He chastises this latter notion for its attachment to derivative and merely instrumental rationality, or consciousness. Consciousness is simply the “product of a brain-function that has arisen for the purpose of mere self-maintenance” (1958, 491), so that the individual survives long enough to serve the primordial will-to-live. Since consciousness is a mere by-product or tool of larger forces, why then get caught up obsessing over this “secondary phenomenon” (499)? This selfish obsession leads to a devaluing of both the eternity of existence that comes before our individualizing births and the numerous individualities that might spring up through our lives and deaths. And what good would a prolonged individual consciousness do anyone anyway? After all, Schopenhauer (492) argues, our lives are miserable and to extend them indefinitely would lead to boredom, at best, even in a “better world.”³²

With the help of Immanuel Kant’s (see 1998, A30–49/B46–66) account of the ideality of time, Schopenhauer goes on to offer further support for his argument against the desire for prolonged individual consciousness. If time is simply part of the form that all human knowledge and experience takes, and all notions of birth and death rely on this temporal form of our knowledge, then death is solely a matter for the phenomenal realm of experience, but not a matter for the noumenal reality beyond our temporal experience. Because noumena are outside the realm of knowledge and experience, there seems to arise something like an antinomy of death—as far as we can know, we die, and yet so far as what we cannot know is atemporal, death cannot happen.³³ Fortunately for Schopenhauer, the noumenal realm is not quite as mysterious as it is for Kant, and thus he can avoid such an antinomy. Since the noumenon is will and consciousness (the knowing capacity) is the mere phenomenal representation of this ultimate reality, death can be the phenomenal cessation of consciousness without impacting the will. The problem with philosophy up to this point, Schopenhauer says, is that it has failed to recognize the supremacy of will over the intellect or consciousness. Rather it made the intellect supreme in comparison with the body, not realizing that the intellect is nothing more than the by-product of bodily (i.e., brain) function, and both are simple manifestations of will. Schopenhauer (1958, 493–500) believes that once we realize our true nature as will, unaffected by death, our phenomenal attachment to prolonged individuality (an intellectual by-product of the will) should fade.

In a helpful summary of his chapter thus far, Schopenhauer states that will, or more specifically, will-to-live, represents itself phenomenally in consciousness as fear of death—a mechanism for self-preservation. Because will in itself does not know anything, it remains blind to the fact that it cannot be extinguished. Conscious knowledge (and the world that it knows), on the other hand, as a phenomenal representation of will, can be snuffed out, but is capable of realizing that death cannot affect its true being.³⁴ Will-to-live/fear of death becomes problematic when it leads us to make the easy, but not insurmountable, error of failing to separate what we really are “from the intellect that has fallen to [our] lot through the course of nature” (1958, 500). For Schopenhauer (see 609), it is possible both to be will at the deepest level, and also to recognize that will must in some sense be reproached or denied if it becomes excessively attached to individual existence.

In what remains of Schopenhauer’s chapter on death he provides an extended discussion of reincarnation—not of particular souls but of will itself (palingenesis, not metempsychosis). He cites a great deal of historical evidence about the pervasive belief in some form or another of reincarnation; even Jews, Muslims, and Christians have been known to express certain notions of at least a primitive metempsychosis (1958, 502–7; see also 603–8). In the case of Christianity, the notion of original sin represents reincarnation’s primal insight about the continued passing on of existence. Following these Eastern readings of Western religious traditions, Schopenhauer (507–8) concludes the chapter with an apparent equation of Nirvana and his sense of the denial of the individual will-to-live. As in Buddhism, the goal here is to stop fighting for one’s own personal existence, and come to terms with the eternal and impersonal cycle of natural forces.

Schopenhauer actually argues in a later chapter that the primal insight of most religions, including Christianity, is the annihilation of the individual. In his words:

For not only the religions of the East, but also true Christianity has throughout this fundamental ascetic character that my philosophy explains as denial of the will-to-live, although Protestantism, especially in its present-day form, tries to keep this dark. Yet even the open enemies of Christianity who have appeared in most recent times have attributed to it the teaching of renunciation, self-denial, perfect chastity, and generally mortification of the will . . . and they have thoroughly demonstrated that such doctrines are essentially peculiar to original and genuine Christianity . . . as it was developed in the writings of the Church Fathers from the kernel of the New Testament. (Schopenhauer 1958, 615–16)

But while, according to this passage, he picks up on the key notion of dying to the self and the world that is found in the Platonic strain of the philosophy of death,³⁵ Schopenhauer (605; compare 507) stops there, seeing renunciation and death as the ultimate goal—"it would be better for us not to exist." Not only does he lack interest in prolonged subjective experience, but also, as with the other thinkers in the Epicurean strain, it seems that his primary purpose in dealing with these issues at all is to find tranquility in regarding the subject's annihilation in death as inconsequential, or even preferable (609). My account of the Platonic strain says, "give up this way of life for a better one"; Schopenhauer simply says, "give up this life."

In Nietzsche's later works, he abandons the pessimism about life that Schopenhauer expresses, and with it the appraisal of Christianity as a noble (albeit somewhat confused and inelegant) attempt to get over attachment to life. In fact, it is Nietzsche's apparent hope for the only life that we have, which leads him to a ferocious criticism of Christianity. *The Anti-Christ* states,

If one shifts the centre of gravity of life *out* of life into the "Beyond"—into *nothingness*—one has deprived life as such of its centre of gravity. The great lie of personal immortality destroys all rationality, all naturalness of instinct—all that is salutary, all that is life-furthering. . . . So to live that there is no longer any *meaning* in living: *that* now becomes the "meaning" of life. . . . Christianity has waged a war to the death against every feeling of reverence and distance between man and man . . . against everything noble, joyful, high-spirited on earth, against our happiness on earth. (Nietzsche 1990, 167–68)

Of course, Nietzsche is in line with Schopenhauer on the issue of personal immortality, but the reason for Nietzsche's vehement opposition to it is quite different. While Schopenhauer rejects the "personal" aspect of such thinking, but appreciates the hatred of life behind it, it is this very hatred that Nietzsche objects to.

Nietzsche's problems with the aversion to life go back to the very beginning of my account of the Platonic strain of the philosophy of death. In agreement with aspects of Schopenhauer's historical treatment, *Twilight of the Idols* asserts that "in every age the wisest have passed the identical judgment on life: *it is worthless* Even Socrates had had enough of it" (Nietzsche 1990, 39). But Nietzsche claims that Socrates's apparent longing for death in the *Phaedo* is really among the first moments in Western culture's long history of decadence and weariness. Socrates,

who is not blessed with many physical gifts, takes revenge on all that is natural and strong in human existence, even to the point of explaining that the body, the world it inhabits, and life itself are but insignificant, and possibly evil, imitations of a glorious reality in which all of his own personal shortcomings will be rendered irrelevant (Nietzsche 1990, 39–42). The problem with this sort of idea is that “*the value of life cannot be estimated*. Not by a living man, because he is a party to the dispute, indeed its object, and not the judge of it; not by a dead one, for another reason” (Nietzsche 1990, 40). Even if Socrates’s attack on life is interpreted more charitably, Nietzsche’s twist on the famous Epicurean mantra still applies.³⁶

Moreover, it applies to other “death over life” strategies, especially the Christian. It may well be the case that there is a “better” world beyond death, but given that there is little reason or evidence suggesting that this is so, it seems like a mixture of bitterness and foolishness to long for such a world at the expense of the one we have. This treatment of life is akin to gouging out an eye because you are displeased with its lack of X-ray vision, despite the fact that you have no good reason to think that your eye should be capable of such things or that your actions will improve the situation. Nietzsche (1990, 49) complains,

The “real world” has been constructed out of the contradiction to the actual world. . . . To talk about “another” world than this is quite pointless, provided that an instinct for slandering, disparaging and accusing life is not strong within us: in the latter case we *revenge* ourselves on life by means of the phantasmagoria of “another,” a “better” life. . . . To divide the world into a “real” and an “apparent” world, whether in the manner of Christianity or in the manner of Kant (which is, after all, that of a *cunning* Christian—) is only a suggestion of *décadence*—a symptom of *declining* life.

Instead of such a declining existence that flees to death out of “sour grapes” and cowardice, Nietzsche—finding a place in the Epicurean strain of the philosophy of death—suggests an embracing of life, regardless of what it brings, and shows a corresponding disinterest in death.³⁷ Building on the lessons of his early book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, he declares, “The tragic artist is *not* a pessimist—it is precisely he who *affirms* all that is questionable and terrible in existence, he is *Dionysian*” (Nietzsche 1990, 49). In terms of Platonic imagery, one might see Nietzsche (1990, 42–43) as rejecting the allegory of the cave—there may be value at the bottom that is missed by always trying to get out.

Death in Twentieth- (and Twenty-First-) Century Analytic Philosophy

Moving beyond critiques and subversively unorthodox reinterpretations of Christianity, the mostly (but not in every case) nonreligious philosophers in the “analytic” tradition often do not even feel the need to mention spiritual matters when speaking about death. Rather, they seek a less metaphorical, more precise and scientific, understanding of the language we use in discussing death. For example, death is often said to be the greatest harm, so the question becomes “is this a mistaken view (as Epicurus argues), or if not, what are the ways that we can understand the harmfulness of something that we will likely never experience?” It will not be possible to provide a complete overview of the diverse work on death in this largely English-speaking tradition, but it should be possible at least to point out some key trends.³⁸ Although it is probably accurate to say that this tradition builds on the thought of early modern philosophers like Hobbes and Hume, it is certainly true that analytic philosophy really begins to find itself in the work of thinkers like Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) and the logical positivist A. J. Ayer (1910–1989).³⁹ The former is another native German speaker (like Nietzsche, influenced early on by Schopenhauer) who briefly argues that “death is not an event in life: we do not live to experience death. If we take eternity to mean not infinite temporal duration but timelessness, then eternal life belongs to those who live in the present” (Wittgenstein 1961, 6.4311).⁴⁰ There is an almost Nietzschean emphasis on the value of this life to be found in this passage, but there is an even more familiar voice present as well. To get to the true roots of the analytic response to death, one must go all the way back to the Epicurean position.

It may seem unsurprising that analytic thinkers are attracted to Epicurean ideas, given that modern science also rules out durable souls and maintains that death is just the beginning of the permanent dispersal of particles that used to be “mine.” However, by surveying the analytic landscape, one quickly discovers that the Epicurean take on death does not enjoy a great deal of positive reception. Patrick Stokes (2006, 387–88) claims that this lack of approval is due to the common sentiment that “there is something profoundly counterintuitive” and “indigestible” about denying the significance of one’s own death. Nonetheless, it is important to notice that most analytic philosophers of death find this position worthy of attention, which is hardly the case for the rarely considered views on death of the Platonic/Christian tradition.⁴¹ It might even be fair to suggest that for these thinkers Epicurus establishes the foundation of the only reasonable way to look at death. That is, while

his conclusion may be problematic, arguing that death is the end of one's individuality—and at least raising the question as to why death should matter to the living given that, in a sense, death is not even part of living—is a good way to begin dealing with this topic. But I do not mean to suggest that contemporary analytic thinkers only approach Epicurean views on death with semi-respectful criticism. As it turns out, Epicurus is not without his defenders among analytic philosophers. It will therefore be helpful to provide a brief description of some of the ideas of both the detractors and the defenders.

The main reason why the Epicurean position on death is so unpalatable, according to thinkers such as Thomas Nagel and George Pitcher, is that, contrary to certain common feelings, it does not allow for the possibility that death or post-death events can harm an individual that has died since the individual is no longer around to experience such harm. Nagel (1993, 64) believes, however, that one need not experience something as harmful in order for actual harm to be done; perhaps “there are . . . evils that consist merely in the deprivation or absence of possible goods, and that do not depend on someone's *mind*ing that deprivation.” As an example of such evil or harm, he offers up the loss of a good reputation. Nagel (1993, 65) famously points out that a perfectly content individual might still be harmed when slandered even if this individual is unaware that such slander has taken place. If he is right about harms that one does not experience as such, then it seems possible that the dead, who do not experience at all, can still be harmed.

But before declaring the Epicurean problem solved, it must first be determined when a dead individual might be harmed. After all, it would seem a bit odd to say that a corpse lying in the ground is harmed by anything going on above ground. It may, of course, be true that a corpse could be “harmed” in the same sense that any physical object could be damaged, but this is certainly not the sort of harm to a person that is in question here (Nagel 1993, 67). In response to the problem of when the dead are harmed, Pitcher suggests that death has a bizarre sort of retroactive effect—in the sense of “making true or false” what was previously indeterminate (not in the dubious sense of backwards causation)—on the now concluded life of the individual. Given, for example, that a hypothetical person was engaged in various projects that were left incomplete by the event of death, and that the deceased had an interest in the well-being of loved ones who were dependent upon him or her, it seems possible to ascribe to the once living individual harm in the form of frustration of projects and interests like these (Pitcher 1993, 165–68). Although this hypothetical person did not know it while alive, it would be determined later that they had in fact been a failure of sorts all along.

With all due respect to both Aristotle and Epicurus, if Pitcher (1993, 163–64, 168) is correct, one's own death (and what happens afterwards) can seriously affect the happiness of one's own life.

Among those “analytics” who are not so quick to deny the Epicurean position, I highlight Jeffrie G. Murphy and Stephen E. Rosenbaum. Murphy attempts a resurrection of what he describes as the pagan view of death. This is the Epicurean and Stoic view that seeks to discredit the fear of death as irrational, passed down through Montaigne and Spinoza, in whom Murphy claims to find the more nuanced view that while irrational fear of death is a problem, not all fear of death is irrational. Setting Murphy aside for a more detailed discussion in a later chapter, I turn briefly to Rosenbaum, who offers a dedicated defense of Epicurus from the assault of thinkers such as Nagel. After taking some questionable liberties in his restatement of what Epicurus is really up to, Rosenbaum (1993b, 134) goes on to conclude that Nagel is guilty of, among other things, making the common mistake of failing to distinguish between dying, death, and the dead.⁴² Of course, because Epicurus does not make these distinctions either, it takes some argument on the part of Rosenbaum (1993b, 122–23) just to explain that Epicurus is primarily interested in discussing the status of the dead. While I believe that Rosenbaum does not give enough attention to the Epicurean rebuke (which I have already identified as being unjustified) of those who agree that being dead is the end, and yet still find their dying or impending lack of life disturbing,⁴³ his problem with Nagel is for the most part sufficiently and clearly dealt with.

Rosenbaum (1993b, 126–27) astutely points out that Nagel's slander analogy (on which his argument relies heavily) fails because even though it shows how one might be harmed without experiencing it, the idea of being harmed after death is different because one *cannot* experience it. Rosenbaum quite simply (and perhaps understandably) cannot wrap his mind around the notion of a harm that cannot be experienced. I am less impressed by Rosenbaum's response to Nagel's critique of the symmetry argument, because I tend to agree with Nagel (1993, 67) that there is some sort of life-oriented difference between prenatal and post-mortem nonexistence: prior to my birth there never had been a “me” to be disturbed about not existing, but by the time of my death, there had been a “me” to be disturbed. I realize that Rosenbaum (1993b, 128–29) sees no need to describe the situation in this way, but it does seem like a perfectly accurate asymmetrical description from a certain point of view. Although I cannot continue at this point to explore the debate over Epicurean ideas that rages on between thinkers in the mold of Rosenbaum and Pitcher, it should at least be clear by now how important these

ideas are as part of the ground on which the analytic battle over death takes place.

Having approached the present in my account of the Epicurean strain, I will now transition from the discussion of some key moments in the history of the philosophy of death to a consideration of the work of two thinkers who represent an important alternative to the bilateral history I have described thus far. Before moving on to Kierkegaard, however, I would like to offer a brief summary and reiterate a couple of caveats about the preceding chapters' portrayal of the Platonic and Epicurean strains in the philosophy of death. To be clear, both strains recommend a change in attitude toward death from the typical frightened outlook, but while one exchanges fear for potential misery in life and hope for something better later on, the other trades fear in for relative tranquility now and no hope for a future life.

Even though I will suggest in the coming chapters that Kierkegaard and Heidegger offer a sort of novel compromise between philosophy's two ancient approaches to death, I do not mean to discount the various ways that the Platonic and Epicurean strains already interact and influence each other throughout history. For example, it would be foolish to ignore the significant "ancestral" relationships I describe between Plato/Socrates and the Stoics, the Stoics and the early Christians, or Christianity and various nineteenth-century thinkers. My goal in offering this account of two fairly distinct strains on the topic of death is to describe as thoroughly as possible the two prominent philosophical attitudes that I see uniquely merged in the work on death by Kierkegaard and Heidegger. I should also mention once again that my account is by no means intended to be exhaustive. There is just too much written by philosophers on the topic of death, and more written every day, to offer the definitive historical account of death in philosophy. While I have surely omitted someone deserving of attention, or simply not paid enough attention to a thinker deserving of more, I believe these last two chapters provide a sufficient description of the foundation on which the existential philosophy of death stands.

Kierkegaard's Death Project

It is no secret that Kierkegaard's work is deeply entrenched in the Christian tradition, especially in its Protestant form, and that he is therefore indebted to thinkers such as Augustine and Luther on a wide array of topics. He is also quite clear that, when it comes to the issues of death and the afterlife, any account one might offer would be incomplete without some encounter with the pre-Christian pagan thinkers Socrates and Epicurus.¹ Of course, he does not say this explicitly, but I do not think that such a statement is out of line given the prominent roles that these thinkers play in Kierkegaard's discussion of death-related issues. Prior to exploring the particular roots of Kierkegaard's philosophy of death, however, it will be helpful to have some familiarity with the way he treats the topic. Thus, we must consider the significance of death throughout Kierkegaard's life and authorship.

The name "Kierkegaard" is practically synonymous with death. Before dying at a relatively young age himself, Søren endured the deaths of all but one of his immediate family members. In fact, his father believed that he was doomed to see all of his seven children die before they turned 34 (Christ supposedly died at age 33) because he had cursed God as a young man . . . and he almost did (only Søren and Peter surpassed this age) (*JP* 1: 511; 5: 140–41, 555 / *SKS* 27: 291–92). Given these facts, it is more than appropriate that the name "Kierkegaard" is identical with the word for "graveyard" in Danish. It should come as no surprise, then, that a thinker so well acquainted with mortality would have a great deal to say about death. Indeed, various issues pertaining to death come up constantly throughout Kierkegaard's writings. For example, in one of his earliest works, the pseudonymous *Either/Or* (1843), he introduces the reader to the *Symparanekromenoi*, the "Fellowship of the Dead" (*EO* 1: 137 / *SKS* 2: 137);² and in some of his last works, *For Self-Examination* (1851) and *Judge for Yourself!* (written in 1851), he lays out his notion of Christian dying to the world in detail.³ This chapter will provide a thorough description of some of the most important ways death comes up in Kierkegaard's authorship. This turns out to be a very complicated task, however. It is not that his claims about death are always hard to follow when taken in isolation, but rather, it is not immediately clear what relationship exists between these claims or if there is supposed to be any relationship

between them at all. I would like to offer an account that integrates Kierkegaard's major death ideas by following a train of thought that runs through several key texts in which death is most prominent.⁴

The Early Writings

Before considering the most significant texts in Kierkegaard's existential death project, there are several early writings that must be addressed, at least briefly, given the relevance of their contents for later death-related issues that will prove crucial to his authorship. For example, the earliest inklings of Kierkegaard's deathly train of thought appear in his first published book—a review of Hans Christian Andersen's *Only a Fiddler*—titled *From the Papers of One Still Living* (1838). Already the title indicates some familiarity with mortality, and it may well be in reference to the deaths of both his father (which concluded a fairly disastrous 1830s for the Kierkegaard clan) and his mentor Poul Martin Møller during the few months leading up to the book's publication.⁵ Here, in criticizing Andersen's inability to express a consistent "life-view" in his writing, Kierkegaard states, "The life-view proper commences first . . . at the hour of one's death" (*EPW* 77/*SKS* 1: 33). Rather than consisting of the simple sum of worldly experiences or ideas that one has had, a proper view on one's life is the sort of retroactive or "backward" understanding of oneself from the perspective of death that is able to show a consistency to the self despite the distracting variety of such experiences (*EPW* 76–78/*SKS* 1: 31–34). Kierkegaard is accusing Andersen of trying to grasp personalities while caught up in the bustle of life, which is difficult and maybe impossible to do, instead of adopting the settled perspective from which it might be possible to take in what a life is all about (see *EPW* xxx–xxxi). Although these ideas are not yet fully developed, particularly when it comes to explaining how one adopts such a perspective, even at this early stage Kierkegaard is clearly trying to work out "a dead and transfigured personality" as opposed to a "many-angled, worldly, palpable one" (*EPW* 82/*SKS* 1: 37).

In both his dissertation, *The Concept of Irony* (1841), and the six sets of "upbuilding" (*opbyggelige*, sometimes translated as "edifying") discourses that were published in conjunction with the various early pseudonymous works (1843–1844), Kierkegaard attempts to fill out this understanding of death's relevance in life. In the former, he does so through a detailed examination of death's "retrospective" view on life as described in some of Plato's dialogues (*CI* 64/*SKS* 1: 124); and in the latter, he does

so by focusing more on a properly Christian understanding of death. Although there is much in these texts that relates to Kierkegaard's philosophy of death—the criticism of Platonic / Socratic “dying to” that will be discussed in the next chapter is particularly important—perhaps the most thoroughly considered issue is the proper relationship to the afterlife.⁶ As Tamara Monet Marks points out, despite his obvious appreciation for the Socratic subjective appropriation of the afterlife in *Irony*, Kierkegaard is concerned about the absence of any existential angst in Socrates's attitude. While he is willing to live as though there will be an afterlife, taking all of the necessary precautions in this life to prepare himself (e.g., doing what the gods ask of him), Socrates is not especially disturbed by what he sees as the very “live” possibility that there will be no afterlife whatsoever. The Christian, however, is meant to be much more concerned about his or her postmortem situation, and Marks (2011, 275–79) claims that it is this passionately faithful hope for what comes next, rather than Socrates's somewhat disinterested attitude, that Kierkegaard ultimately sides with.⁷

While Kierkegaard works on this explanation of the proper Christian relationship to the afterlife under his own name, his pseudonyms take up death-related issues from other perspectives. For example, Watkin argues that the occasional quips about death in the first volume of *Either/Or* are an attempt to show how death seems to sap the meaning from life when viewed from an aesthetic perspective.⁸ In the second volume, Judge William responds by explaining how death can actually help to give meaning to life from an ethical point of view in which one learns how to “die to” one's selfishness for the sake of participation in something more permanent than the soon-to-be-dead worldly self (Watkin 1990, 66, 71–72). One might suggest that Johannes de silentio, the author of *Fear and Trembling* (1843), has a similar goal in mind when he says that “infinite resignation is the last stage before faith, so that anyone who has not made this movement does not have faith, for only in infinite resignation do I become conscious of my eternal validity” (*FT* 46 / *SKS* 4: 140). Using Abraham as the model for such faith, silentio explains that it is only in the willingness to give up (or “die to”) everything one holds most dear in life that one can become ready to trust in the possibility that God will provide (*FT* 20, 46–47 / *SKS* 4: 116–17, 140–42). Another way of putting this might be that one must sacrifice the worldly attachment to the notion that one gives one's own life meaning so that one can allow all such meaning to be bestowed by God. When one's meaning comes from the right relationship to God, then it no longer relies on the transient temporal self, but is rather grounded in the eternal.⁹

In Vigilius Haufniensis's *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844) one can see,

among many other things, an attempt to explain this intersection of eternity with temporality in “the fullness of time” of “the moment” (*Øjeblikket*) (CA 90/SKS 4: 393). This is the Christian notion of the kairological (the Greek *kairos* originally means something like “the appropriate time”), as opposed to chronological, sense of time, which suggests that an otherwise insignificant chronologically temporal moment or event might take on atemporal or eternal significance (see, e.g., 1 Cor. 15:51–55; Gal. 4:4). The prime example is the life of Christ. From an ordinary horizontal “timeline” understanding of time (say, along the x-axis of a Cartesian coordinate plane), the birth, actions, and death of a human are unremarkable, having only some finite (y-axis) vertical value; but given the eternal repercussions of Christ, as God, being born, acting, dying, and (most importantly) rising again, any particular point on the horizontal line has infinite vertical value. Similarly, human lives and actions can take on such significance through the proper participation in Christ’s life.

This explanation and its perhaps less than obvious connection with death, which should become more apparent in Kierkegaard’s subsequent works that really emphasize death, will prove to be enormously influential on Heidegger’s understanding of these matters. Thus, Haufniensis’s discussion of concepts like futurity, possibility, freedom, repetition, and anxiety will also be quite helpful in a later chapter. For now, there is just one other brief death issue here worth drawing attention to, again largely for its possible impact on Heidegger’s account. In a long footnote to his discussion of the moment, Haufniensis suggests that there might be degrees of death, and of the anxiety related to death. He states, “Death declares itself more terrible the more perfect the organism is. . . . The higher man is valued, the more terrifying is death. The beast does not really die, but when the spirit is posited as spirit, death shows itself as the terrifying. The anxiety of death therefore corresponds to the anxiety of birth” (CA 92/SKS 4: 395–96). Not only is he implying that physical passing away is somehow distinct from meaningful death, but he is also pointing out that unless humanity is understood in the proper way, human existence runs the risk of having no more meaning than that of animals, whose births and deaths seem relatively insignificant. This proper way of understanding human existence is a central topic in Kierkegaard’s later work.

The connection that I am tracing between Kierkegaard’s early works is no accident. It might be appropriate to say that Kierkegaard’s early pseudonyms are intentionally offering consistently intensifying perspectives on death and the eternal: the more developed the awareness of eternity, the more death matters. This is a theme that will con-

tinue to develop through *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to "Philosophical Fragments"* (1846), where death in its different senses becomes more and more significant as the complex Christian sense of the eternal is approached in "Religiousness B."¹⁰ While we must now begin to look at Kierkegaard's more substantial treatments of death, are there not still other dealings with the topic in Kierkegaard's early writings that bear interesting resemblance to his later discussions? For example, Johannes Climacus introduces the image of a dance with the thought of death in 1844's *Philosophical Fragments* (PF 8/SKS 4: 217), an image that comes up again as soon as "At a Graveside" (1845).¹¹ However, since I want to avoid becoming bogged down in exploring every passing appearance of death in Kierkegaard's authorship, I will proceed on the assumption that the preceding consideration of these few early texts is a sufficient indication of the full-blown philosophy of death that he is about to unleash.

The Middle Writings

Although clearly not far from his mind early on, between 1845 and 1847 death becomes a major theme in Kierkegaard's work. The first text to express Kierkegaard's death project in great detail is the final discourse from *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*—the aforementioned "At a Graveside."¹² Here Kierkegaard explains, "The thought of death gives the earnest person the right momentum in life and the right goal toward which he directs his momentum" (TDIO 83/SKS 5: 453). But how exactly does an "earnest" (*alvorlig*) person approach death and realize the proper momentum and goal? To begin with, the earnest individual must focus primarily on his or her own death. Rather than looking to the deaths of others or treating death as simply "the human condition," Kierkegaard believes that its most important lessons cannot be had unless "you are thinking it as your lot" (TDIO 73, 75/SKS 5: 444, 446). Failure to focus on one's own death can lead one into the "mood" (*Stemning*) of objectivity, in which one might well think about death often, but not in the way that can have any meaningful impact on one's own life according to Kierkegaard.¹³

Kierkegaard also states that "death is indefinable—the only certainty, and the only thing about which nothing is certain" (TDIO 91/SKS 5: 460).¹⁴ While one's death will certainly come, it is uncertain when it will happen or what, if anything, it might mean for the one who has died. Kierkegaard worries that failure to keep the certainty of death in mind might lead to the mood of excessive sorrow, either at bad news surround-

ing one's own situation, or at the loss of a loved one. This is the mood of an individual who, shocked at an unexpected development, becomes so distraught that they are unable to address their responsibilities adequately (*TDIO* 75/*SKS* 5: 446). By focusing on the certainty, one realizes that death is an ever-present companion; and by preparing for what is sure to come, no death is so unexpected that it can cause such obstructive distress. In the case of the failure to keep the uncertainty of death in mind, Kierkegaard claims, among other things, that one might fall into a mood of procrastination. This is the mood in which one believes for any number of reasons (youth, health, etc.) that one will continue to live for a long time (*TDIO* 79–80, 91/*SKS* 5: 449–51, 460). The danger is that such a person will put off thinking about death and the significance of existence. When one takes seriously the uncertainty that death could happen at any moment and in any way, one understands that thoughts of death and the meaning of one's life cannot be so easily set aside for another occasion. There may not be another chance.

Given the constant threat of death, however, it is easy to see how it might be difficult to invest in life; a person might even end up afraid to leave the house, looking constantly over their shoulder when they do. Kierkegaard, therefore, goes on to make several claims about the importance of having an appropriate fear of death, including the following: "Earnestness does not scowl but is reconciled with life and knows how to fear death" (*TDIO* 88/*SKS* 5: 457). Without such knowledge, it seems that there are two ways that someone could fear death inappropriately. The first is the insufficient fear of death, which Kierkegaard believes might lead an individual to fear life more than death (*TDIO* 81–82/*SKS* 5: 451–53). If death has no foreboding character, then one might be quick to choose it as an option in the face of difficulties in life (*TDIO* 86–88/*SKS* 5: 455–57). On the other hand, if one has an excessive fear of death, then one might be unwilling to risk one's life in the ways that are necessary for dealing with the responsibilities of existing (*TDIO* 83–84/*SKS* 5: 453–54). By walking some sort of a middle path between these two overreactions, one might be able to realize the life that Kierkegaard has in mind when he recommends focusing on the certain uncertainty. This middle path must be understood as an existing in the tension between fearing death and living life, and not as some kind of Aristotelian golden mean of fear.¹⁵ Proclaiming, "let death keep its power . . . but let life also keep the right to work while it is day" (*TDIO* 84/*SKS* 5: 454), Kierkegaard wants to maintain death's full frightening nature while simultaneously pressing forward toward death into life.

Because "death itself produces a scarcity of time for the dying" (*TDIO* 84/*SKS* 5: 453), Kierkegaard believes that the earnest individual—

the one who keeps in mind the keys to thinking about death described above and thereby grasps his or her own precarious position—will feel a profound sense of urgency. This urgency is the momentum, the “retro-active power in life” that invigorates it by seeping backwards into one’s existence from one’s impending death (*TDIO* 99/*SKS* 5: 466). With no time to waste, one learns not to spend it on “vain pursuits,” or “accidental” matters (*TDIO* 75, 96/*SKS* 5: 446, 464), which demand results in the external world. Results take time, and as Kierkegaard has pointed out, time cannot be guaranteed. Instead, he thinks that one should embrace one’s temporal uncertainty and make concerns that do not require a specific amount of time the priority. These non-time-dependent concerns are not about what one may or may not accomplish in the external world, but about how, inwardly, one does whatever one is doing (*TDIO* 96/*SKS* 5: 464).¹⁶ By emphasizing the issue of how one is going about whatever life activities one is engaged in, Kierkegaard’s earnest thought of death leads one to “die to” (as he will eventually describe it) the vain “what-concerns” that the world is so focused upon.

Kierkegaard surely has a great deal more to say about the earnest thought of death in “At a Graveside.” For example, he explains how the thought of death’s equality helps one “to renounce worldly comparison” with others (*TDIO* 91/*SKS* 5: 459). But Kierkegaard’s dealings with physical passing away and related issues are not exhausted by this short discourse. In several of his subsequent writings, he will revisit some of these same ideas and spend a great deal of time pondering the suffering, persecution, and martyrdom of early Christians, the remembrance of the deceased, and the figurative martyrdom of “dying to the world,” which will turn out to be the end goal and crown jewel of Kierkegaard’s writing on death.¹⁷

Concluding Unscientific Postscript to “Philosophical Fragments” is unique among the key “middle” texts in the train of Kierkegaard’s thought that I am tracing both in its breadth of scope and in the fact that it is written under a pseudonym. Its author, Johannes Climacus, following up on related work in his *Philosophical Fragments*, attempts to offer an account, from the perspective of an outsider, of “climbing” up the steps involved in becoming a Christian.¹⁸ He does this, however, with numerous detours along the way, including various discussions of topics that often initially seem only loosely related to the primary purpose of the book. Among these sorts of discussions is a short reflection on death and immortality in the context of the alleged difficulty of becoming subjective (*CUP* 1: 165–77, 201–2/*SKS* 7: 153–63, 184–85). The consideration of death makes several of the same points that are made in “At a Graveside” about issues such as the certainty and the uncertainty of death, but Climacus’s

primary interest seems to lie in a further refinement of that discourse's discussion of personally appropriating the thought of death (*CUP* 1: 166–67/*SKS* 7: 154–55). In a slight redirection, Climacus suggests that by determining how an individual relates to death, it is possible to detect how developed this individual is subjectively. Just like the graveside discourse though, he maintains that the certain uncertainty of death, thought subjectively (and constantly), will manifest itself in the lives of those who think it, not just in their words, but in their actions and attitudes as well (*CUP* 1: 169–70/*SKS* 7: 157–58).

In a similar vein, Climacus takes up the proper subjective approach to the “indefiniteness” of the afterlife (*CUP* 1: 176/*SKS* 7: 163). Despite the best efforts of Hegelians and Christian apologists to establish on objective grounds that there will be immortality of some kind or another, Climacus believes that these sorts of objective accounts miss the point. Although these issues will come up again when considering Kierkegaard's reaction to the thinkers who provide such arguments, perhaps a brief explanation here will be helpful. Marks (2011, 284–87) sees Climacus making a distinction between “revisionist” (e.g., Hegelian) arguments that dodge the issue of personal immortality by offering up some kind of less specific eternity or permanence, and “traditional” (i.e., apologetic) arguments that diminish the importance of an individual's struggle with faith in his or her own immortal afterlife by attempting to demonstrate the necessity of immortality in general given the nature of the universe.

Rather than trying to remove the indefiniteness surrounding one's own personal immortality by dissolving the concerns of particular individuals in arguments about the abstract eternity of humanity, Climacus argues that the relevant indefiniteness cannot be avoided in this way and instead ought to be conscientiously preserved. Because the questions that most people ask are about what *I*, in particular, should believe comes after *my* own death and about how *I* should live in light of this belief, a detached objective answer about the general permanence of things is no answer at all and the indefiniteness surrounding *my* own situation remains. Similarly, since a compelling objective proof based on the nature of the universe, if such a thing is even possible, would actually be detrimental to the personal relationship with immortality that is necessary (at least according to many Christian views), Climacus sees no reason to continue trying to speculate the indefiniteness away. The task then, à la Socrates, is to determine how to live given that this uncertainty cannot be disposed of once and for all (*CUP* 1: 201–2/*SKS* 7: 184–85). Like keeping one's own impending death in mind at every moment, focusing on the insecurity one feels with respect to personal immortality is to practice

subjectivity—to develop one’s self. This activity can occupy an individual for a lifetime, leaving no chance for speculation about abstract issues that are of no essential concern for a particular existing individual.¹⁹ But why is Climacus so interested in attaining the proper subjective perspective with the help of encounters with death and immortality, and what does this perspective have to do with the overall project of explaining what it is to become a Christian in *Postscript*?

Climacus points out early on that subjectivity must be cultivated because there is no objectively becoming a Christian (e.g., *CUP* 1: 16, 129–30 / *SKS* 7: 25, 121–22). Christianity and all that it entails must be willingly taken on by a passionately interested individual. Unfortunately, according to Kierkegaard and Climacus alike, mid-nineteenth-century Copenhageners have apparently come to believe that one’s Christianity is a hereditary privilege that can almost be demonstrated objectively by looking at a map. That is, they behave as though everyone is a Christian “of sorts as a matter of course” simply by virtue of being born (and baptized with no awareness) in the comfortable confines of Christendom (*CUP* 1: 586 / *SKS* 7: 533). It is due to the rise of this effortless, diluted version of Christianity that Kierkegaard recommends considering the difficult plight of early Christians.

In a journal entry from 1850, he states, “In the early days people were almost surprised to find that life had a few joyful days . . . because they understood that this life was ordained to suffering, also suffering for Christianity. Nowadays Christianity has come to mean gratifying oneself in a purely secular manner and clinging tightly to this life” (*JP* 4: 399 / *SKS* 24: 38–39). In order to free oneself from such an attachment to life and become dedicated to genuine Christianity, Climacus, in tune with this journal entry, suggests that one must learn to accept as the early followers did that a Christian life is necessarily one of suffering (*CUP* 1: 458 / *SKS* 7: 416). Such suffering in its most extreme form is the martyrdom that the early Christians faced, but it also takes the shape of the figurative martyrdom of “dying to immediacy” and to “oneself” (*CUP* 1: 460–63, 472, 597–98 / *SKS* 7: 418–21, 428, 542–43). Dying in this sense is really a series of sacrifices that an individual must make in order to remove obstacles on the road to becoming a Christian. These sacrifices, which will be described in greater detail in Kierkegaard’s later texts, may include giving up worldly goods, bodily security, and comfort, but they certainly include “the martyrdom of faith (to crucify one’s understanding)” (*CUP* 1: 559 / *SKS* 7: 508). This loss of understanding, which is contrary to all hope for the objective demonstration of either the truth of Christianity or one’s relationship to it, is necessary for subjectively appropriating what turns out to be the core belief of Climacus’s (and as we shall see,

Kierkegaard's) Christianity—the paradoxical mortality of the immortal God as demonstrated by death on the cross (*CUP* 1: 578/*SKS* 7: 525).²⁰

Following *Postscript*, Kierkegaard's unshielded Christianity begins to come to the fore as his work turns in a new direction.²¹ Although *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* (1847), one of the first texts in what is known as his "second authorship," does not deal extensively with death, there are a few passages worth mentioning as a way of transitioning to the more direct explicitly Christian works after 1846. Much of what is said about death in this text comes in the first discourse, commonly called "Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing." Here one can see both a hint of the way Kierkegaard will suggest using one's relationship to the dead to help cultivate an untainted self-understanding (*UDVS* 54–55/*SKS* 8: 164–65) in *Works of Love* (1847), and also a still further development of the lessons of urgency described in "At a Graveside." In fact, Kierkegaard's discussion of the ever-present "eleventh hour" in "Purity of Heart" uses much of the same rhetoric of that earlier discourse to point out that death permeates life from beginning to end and undermines ordinary temporal sensibilities of what is essential by discrediting the notion that we still have plenty of time left (*UDVS* 14–16/*SKS* 8: 129–31).²²

Unlike "At a Graveside" though, this discourse provides a little more description of precisely *what* we are to do in the dire situation of the eleventh hour—we are to take responsibility for our guilty pasts in regret and move freely into the future with repentance before God. This merging of one's temporal guilty self with what Kierkegaard describes as "repentance in the sense of freedom with the stamp of eternity" (*UDVS* 16/*SKS* 8: 131), can only happen in the urgent fullness of time of the eleventh hour. In other words, fearful and humble repentance in the face of impending doom (and it is always impending) can give eternal significance to one's otherwise unremarkable worldly existence by liberating one's actions from the shackles of purely temporal meaning (*UDVS* 15–16, 152–53/*SKS* 8: 130–31, 248–49). Like *Postscript's* crucifixion of the understanding, both "Purity of Heart" and "Part Three" of *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, "The Gospel of Sufferings," describe this liberation in terms of "dying to" temporal/worldly sagacity (*UDVS* 113–14, 257/*SKS* 8: 215–16, 355). As an example of being dead to worldly interpretation of otherwise worldly events, consider Kierkegaard's story of the martyr on his way to die who only sees and speaks to God in gratitude, despite being paraded before a malicious crowd (*UDVS* 336/*SKS* 8: 426–27).

One can find a similar connection of martyrdom and dying to worldliness in the "Christian deliberations" (*WL* 3/*SKS* 9: 11) of *Works of Love* where Kierkegaard muses,

Let us now think of a Christian witness. For the sake of this doctrine, he ventures into battle with the powers that be who have his life in their hands and who must see in him a troublemaker—this will probably cost him his life. At the same time his contemporaries, with whom he has no immediate dispute but who are onlookers, find it ludicrous to risk death for the sake of such fatuousness. Here there is life to lose and truly no honor and admiration to gain! Yet to be abandoned in this way, only in this way to be abandoned, is Christian self-denial! (WL 196–97 / SKS 9: 195–96)

Not only does this passage describe a genuine readiness for martyrdom, and express the sort of dying to worldly understanding and selfhood that has come up throughout the key texts of the middle period (a dying that will become absolutely crucial in Kierkegaard's later writings), but it also displays an explicit Christian sharpening of matters that pertain to death (now with perhaps more of an interest in becoming Christian than we see in *Postscript*, which only *explains* what is involved in becoming Christian). Since the bulk of the death discussion found in this text takes place in a short discourse titled “The Work of Love in Recollecting One Who Is Dead,” it will be most worthwhile to focus on the ways that death shows up there.

Like the other dealings with death from this period, there is a moment in which Kierkegaard once again revisits one of the themes from “At a Graveside”—earnestness in this case. In discussing the earnestness of death, however, Kierkegaard adds a further condition that he does not make especially clear in the graveside discourse (although I will eventually attempt to explain that it is present even there). He declares, “To the earnestness of death belongs that remarkable capacity for awakening, this resonance of a profound mockery that, detached from the thought of the eternal, is an empty, often brazen, jest, but together with the thought of the eternal is just what it should be” (WL 353 / SKS 9: 347). Based on the overall character of the book and other claims made on the very same page, it seems that Kierkegaard is using “the eternal” here, as elsewhere, in reference to the relationship with the Christian God. What he seems to mean then, is that thinking of death must be done for the purpose of improving one's relationship with God if it is to have any more value than not thinking of death at all. Thinking of death on its own is just another transient, temporal, worldly activity that can add no more meaning to an already transient, temporal, worldly life, but this is not so when the lasting significance of something eternal is involved. And for a Christian, involvement with God is only possible through a proper connection to Christ, especially to his death and resurrection

(compare *WL* 248/*SKS* 9: 248). Thus, the alleged earnestness of death is really only superficial unless it somehow reflects Christ's example. It would seem that Kierkegaard is now openly attempting to Christianize the contents of "At a Graveside."

In accord with his now openly Christian project of dealing with death, Kierkegaard's primary goal in the discourse on the deceased is the description of Christian love for the dead. Although there is much about this description that need not be thoroughly rehashed here, it must be noted that, in the end, the discourse is less concerned about actual practices, such as burial, visiting the cemetery, and speaking of loved ones long gone, than it is about using love for the dead to teach oneself how to love the living properly.²³ Kierkegaard states, "The work of love in recollecting one who is dead is thus a work of the most unselfish, the freest, the most faithful love. Therefore go out and practice it; recollect the one who is dead and just in this way learn to love the living unselfishly, freely, faithfully. In the relationship to one who is dead, you have the criterion by which you can test yourself" (*WL* 358/*SKS* 9: 351). Perhaps most important of all of the ways that death comes up in *Works of Love*, at least for the sake of understanding Kierkegaard's death project, is this idea that loving the dead helps individuals do away with their selfish worldly love for others. This sort of love, he explains, is the preferential love of certain individuals, such as friends and spouses, over the rest of humanity; it is contrary to Christian love, which is meant for every member of humankind, even one's enemies (*WL* 19/*SKS* 9: 27). Because the dead can be absolutely nothing for the living, as Kierkegaard reiterates throughout the discourse, there is nothing about the dead that one can prefer. Thus, loving the dead is practice for loving non-preferentially, or unselfishly, and it encourages people to "die to" their worldly attachments to others.

The Late Writings

If the writings of the middle period are characterized by a general emphasis on death and its significance for Christian dying to the world, then the writings from 1848 and beyond can be understood in terms of a further intensification of such dying. The first text from these later writings to manifest this intensification is *Christian Discourses*. Although the same issues about death's certainty and uncertainty that come up in earlier discourses are still present here, Kierkegaard now regularly speaks of the Christian use of thoughts of death (*CD* 27, 257/*SKS* 10: 39, 270). The purpose of these sorts of thoughts is, in line with his somewhat less

explicit previous descriptions, to help in overcoming the attachment to all things earthly, human, and temporal, and thereby open oneself up to Christ and the eternal life that comes with faith in him. Kierkegaard claims, "If there is no next day for you, then all earthly care is annihilated, . . . then either you are dying or you are one who by dying to temporality grasped the eternal, either one who is actually dying or one who is *really* living" (CD 72/SKS 10: 81). In this passage one can again see Kierkegaard's emphasis on the atemporal or kairological sense of the fullness of time of the present moment. Tomorrow has no significance for one who comes into the right relationship with the eternally present meaning of a godly life.²⁴

Another possible implication of this passage and others like it is that so long as one is bound to the perishable things of a rapidly decaying existence, one participates in death, but one is said to be truly alive by participating instead in something that can never die—the resurrected divinity (who, as a human, established the pattern for passing from death to life) (compare CD 208, 258/SKS 10: 216–17, 271). Furthermore, since the world is a place of death, in order not to die with it in one sense one must die to it in another: "A person must die to finitude (to its pleasures, its preoccupations, its projects, its diversions), must go through this death to life . . . and realize how empty is that with which busyness fills up life, how trivial is that which is the lust of the eye and the craving of the carnal heart" (CD 172/SKS 10: 183). One must sacrifice a certain way of life that is deemed insignificant and temporary so as not to rule out the meaningful and everlasting Christian way of life (CD 17, 184, 242–43/SKS 10: 29, 194–95, 248–49).²⁵ While Kierkegaard's most helpful explanations of his strange distinction between death as pathological and death as therapeutic seem to be found in the writings that follow *Christian Discourses*, the importance of death in the latter sense—dying to the world—shows up quite obviously throughout this work of 1848.

Even Kierkegaard's discussion of the afterlife in *Christian Discourses* seems to emphasize aspects of dying to the world. In "There Will Be the Resurrection of the Dead, of the Righteous—and of the Unrighteous," he expresses concern about the prevalence of demonstrations of the immortality of the soul in his day. As in *Postscript*, this issue is one that is essentially not meant to be fodder for abstract speculation. However, unlike the discussion in Climacus's text, which follows the Socratic argument from ignorance, this explicitly Christian treatment takes another approach and faithfully affirms that personal immortality is a given.²⁶ By ruling out human demonstrations of immortality as somehow missing the point of simply believing, Kierkegaard is already suggesting a dying to worldly "shrewdness" (*Snildhed*) that is necessary for relating to Christian

doctrines in the way that is appropriate to them (CD 213/SKS 10: 221). But beyond this anti-intellectual aspect of dying to the world, which will be described in greater detail in *For Self-Examination*, Kierkegaard identifies two other worldly bonds connected with immortality that must be broken.

The first concerns the notion that faith in immortality is something like longing for continuation of one's worldly existence. This notion displays both an unchristian attachment to the world that must be overcome and a misunderstanding of one's task with respect to one's immortality. In order to clear up any misunderstanding, Kierkegaard, following Paul, equates immortality with judgment and claims that the only issue related to immortality that a Christian need be concerned about is how he or she stands with respect to the fact that there will be a judgment of the dead (CD 205–9/SKS 10: 214–18). Having laid out the vital task of caring for one's standing, Kierkegaard turns to the other worldly bond that must be broken. This bond is the human "sureness" that convinces so-called Christians that a positive judgment is secure (CD 210/SKS 10: 218). While such security may have a place in worldly affairs, the task with respect to immortality is, like Climacus says, one that lasts a lifetime, and as such, it cannot be completed in life in the way that would be necessary for worldly security. Kierkegaard wonders, "Is there not bound to be unsureness in fear and trembling until the end? . . . My salvation is not yet decided" (CD 212/SKS 10: 220). Without such an ultimate resolution, Kierkegaard believes that a Christian must do away with the human tendency to become comfortable and satisfied with one's efforts.

For a more comprehensive list of problematic human tendencies one must turn to *The Sickness unto Death* (1849), one of Kierkegaard's most famous works. It might not be immediately clear how *Sickness* fits into the present account of Kierkegaard's overall death project. Based on the title alone though, it is clear that this text deals with death in some sense; and in fact, it deals with the other, problematic, sense of death that *Christian Discourses* suggests when emphasizing the need for dying to the world. This engagement with that other sense of death, in addition to its pseudonymity, serves to distinguish *Sickness* from Kierkegaard's other late dealings with the topic.

Sickness is not directly involved in the further explication of dying to the world, but is rather wholly absorbed in describing the state of individuals who seem in need of such dying. The sickness unto death is nothing more than a human's state of despair, which Anti-Climacus, the book's pseudonymous author, will later identify as sinfulness when interpreted Christianly.²⁷ He states, "In the whole book, as the title indeed declares, despair is interpreted as a sickness, not as a cure. . . . Thus, also

in Christian terminology death is indeed the expression for the state of deepest spiritual wretchedness, and yet the cure is simply to die, to die to [*at døe, at afdøe*] the world" (*SUD* 6/*SKS* 11: 118). Since, in the discussion of death that surrounds *Sickness*, Kierkegaard is mostly interested in what this passage calls "the cure," it might seem possible to leave Anti-Climacus's thorough discussion of the ailment of spiritual death (by worldly association) out of my account of Kierkegaard's explanation of dying to the world. However, it would be strange to focus on the discussion of a cure without some awareness of a disease, and so, it is clear that *Sickness* holds an important place in my overall account of Kierkegaard on death. Having said this, I might also point out that, without directly referring to despair or sin, this account already includes a description of the despair-like symptoms (e.g., what-concerns, objectivity, preferential love, selfishness) that dying to the world is up against (compare *SUD* 31, 45, 58–59, 112/*SKS* 11: 147, 160, 173–74, 223–24). Given that the dead way of life that one must die to has not been neglected thus far, and the fact that the association of death and despair in *Sickness* is a topic that has been well covered recently, it seems appropriate to return to the explanation of the more beneficial sense of living death.²⁸

The discussion of dying to the world in *For Self-Examination* is the culmination of the train of thought, or death project, that I have been tracing through Kierkegaard's works. It is in this text that Kierkegaard offers his most thorough account of this sort of figurative martyrdom by laying out the difficult task of serving Christ through imitation. Since Christ died on the cross for humankind, each and every individual who would be a follower of Christ must join him in death (compare Imbrosciano 1994, 105). But even if it is unlikely that one will find violent biological death on the Christian path, what matters most is that, if by the grace of God one is able to stay on it, one participates in some way in the sort of death Christ suffered and becomes as good as dead, at least so far as the ways and wisdom of the world are concerned.²⁹

Kierkegaard, echoing Luke 14:26, claims, "In a certain sense . . . love of God is hatred toward the world" (*FSE* 85/*SKS* 13: 105; compare *CD* 184, 242–43/*SKS* 10: 194–95, 248–49).³⁰ Hints of such hatred can be seen at least as far back as Kierkegaard's discussion of the earnest thought of death in "At a Graveside," but this earnestness about death, even if coupled with the thought of the eternal as *Works of Love* recommends, cannot bring about a properly Christian dying to the world. Kierkegaard explains, "The life-giving Spirit is the very one who slays you; the first thing the life-giving Spirit says is that you must enter into death, that you must die to . . . in order that you may not take Christianity in vain" (*FSE* 76–77/*SKS* 13: 98; compare *JFY* 98/*SKS* 16: 155). It is only because

of God's intervention that an individual can die to the world and avoid making his or her Christianity into the sort of trivial endeavor that "At a Graveside" understands as a worldly what-concern. That is, only through divine assistance can one entirely overcome the impulse to view the new life in Christ that comes after this dying in "immediate continuation" with the accomplishments of the previous worldly life; decisively breaking with the worldly self and its corresponding concerns about what it has or has not done to make itself Christian is necessary for accepting the new life based on faith in God's mercy alone (*FSE* 76–77, 81/*SKS* 13: 97–99, 102; compare *CD* 205/*SKS* 10: 214–15). Thus, dying to the world even includes abandoning the selfish notion that one has the ability to use thoughts of death to complete one's Christian training on one's own, despite the usefulness of such thoughts along the way.

In fact, as it turns out, Kierkegaard is opposed to any sort of aspiring Christian's dependence on him- or herself. Consider the following passage:

The apostles were indeed dead, dead to every merely earthly hope, to every human confidence in their own powers or in human assistance. Therefore, death first; you must first die to every merely earthly hope, to every merely human confidence; you must die to your selfishness, or to the world, because it is only through your selfishness that the world has power over you; if you are dead to your selfishness, you are also dead to the world. (*FSE* 77/*SKS* 13: 99)³¹

Here Kierkegaard begins a list of human capabilities, traits, and resources that signify a dangerous worldliness, and that consequently must be overcome. Among the abilities that Kierkegaard believes are, Christianly speaking, useless, and maybe even detrimental, is reason.³² He states, "The way is narrow—it is . . . impassable, blocked, impossible, insane [*afsigdig*]. . . . To walk this way is immediately, at the beginning, akin to dying. . . . Along this way sagacity [*Klogskab*] and common sense [*Forstand*] never walk—that would indeed be madness [*Galskab*]" (*FSE* 61–62/*SKS* 13: 84). But why is Christian life madness, and thus apparently against reason? Because it has as its core belief that Jesus Christ (a man) entered into the paradoxical situation of finding life in death (or, as God, the paradoxical situation of a mortal immortal). Similarly, in imitation, prospective Christians must die to the world in order to be born again (*FSE* 60–61/*SKS* 13: 83–84). In both cases, reason and experience, which argue unceasingly that death only comes after life (and that worldly goods are to be enjoyed, not denied), seem to be wrong.

For Kierkegaard then, "Faith is against understanding [*Forstand*];

faith is on the other side of death. . . . When you died or died to yourself, to the world, then you also died to all immediacy in yourself, also to your understanding" (*FSE* 82/*SKS* 13: 103). Despite the strong language Kierkegaard uses in describing dying to reason, it is not exactly the case that reason or understanding itself is the enemy, but rather, it is the need to find worldly support by offering reasonable explanations for the things one thinks, says, or does that Kierkegaard criticizes (*FSE* 68/*SKS* 13: 90).³³ To sum up, as suggested in the preceding discussions of *Postscript*, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, and *Christian Discourses* (among others), dying to the security blanket that is the understanding is a necessary prerequisite for appropriating, through faith, the backwards situation of being a Christian.³⁴ However, since killing off reason is no easy task, humans are in need of a divine nudge.

Kierkegaard gives the Christian situation another interesting spin in the final text that I will mention in connection with his death project. After three years of publishing silence, Kierkegaard unleashes his ultimate attack on the diluted version of Christianity preached by the Danish church through a series of pamphlets titled "The Moment" (1855).³⁵ This title is likely a reference to the New Testament kairological fullness of time, mentioned throughout Kierkegaard's work, in which an ordinary temporal being might come to take on atemporal or eternal significance by relating properly to God. Among numerous radical claims in these pamphlets, Kierkegaard describes the paradoxical situation of Christianity by pointing out that this God who has infinite love for humans is also their greatest nemesis. In order to take part in God's love, he demands suffering of us; he demands death to what we are—worldly beings (*TM* 177, 294/*SKS* 13: 227, 352). Here we see the sense of hatred from God that is demanded of humans in *For Self-Examination*.

"The Moment" also offers a short reflection on deathbed regret about what one has failed to do with the only life one gets. Kierkegaard depicts the almost hilarious triviality of lamenting some particular unfulfilled wish, for example, seeing Paris; surely, the fulfillment of such a wish could have no significant effect on the situation of the deathbed given that worldly experiences are all just a matter of killing time. He contrasts this earthly temporal situation with the possibility of looking back from the deathbed having used "the moment" of life well—"so it rightly relates itself to eternity" (*TM* 294/*SKS* 13: 352). Missing out on the fleeting pleasure that is Paris hardly compares to missing out on the everlasting meaning of a loving relationship with God (*TM* 293–95/*SKS* 13: 351–53). But the difficulty is that, practically speaking, loving God means suffering in (or dying to) the world, when we would rather just visit the Louvre. Nonetheless, humans must not be distracted by their natural inclinations

or recoil from this beneficial suffering. In order to reconcile our sinful worldly "past" with our forgiven eternal "future," we must use the "present" moment of existence to die to the worldly associations that make this future impossible.

The Proper Audience

Is dying to the world only for the aspiring Christian? It is necessary to answer this question given the explicitly Christian themes of the train of thought I have laid out, particularly in the case of Kierkegaard's later writings. There is a sense in which I believe that Kierkegaard's existential death project is inherently Christian. One cannot deny that in many of the texts discussed above, death's intertwinement with existence comes up in the context of how one can become Christian. Even in the case of "At a Graveside," which for the most part seems to treat death on its own terms, there is at least an implicit Christian understanding. Consider the claim that "the person who is without God in the world soon becomes bored with himself—and expresses this haughtily by being bored with all life, but the person who is in fellowship with God indeed lives with the one whose presence gives infinite significance to even the most insignificant" (*TDIO* 78/*SKS* 5: 448).³⁶ It seems that Kierkegaard might need a little religious gravitas in order to demonstrate that his approach to life through death is preferable to other possible attitudes toward death. After all, as George Connell (2006, 436) suggests, it is unclear why Kierkegaard believes that one should not simply ignore death in the tradition of Epicurus (*TDIO* 73/*SKS* 5: 444), unless he also believes that ignoring death in this way works against a Godly life.³⁷ If even one of Kierkegaard's least religious discussions of death cannot stand without God, then it may be that his death project is not meant for the nonbeliever. And by the time Kierkegaard gets to his more explicitly Christian works, there is no doubt he believes that without Christ "it is a matter of indifference whether I live or die" (*CD* 242/*SKS* 10: 248).

I do not mean to suggest, however, that it is impossible for someone without any Christian interests whatsoever to be moved by some of the lessons learned in following Kierkegaard's project. I only mean to point out that someone without Christian interests will find nothing in Kierkegaard's work to compel them to make such a project their own. If by chance a particular individual (e.g., Heidegger) or group of individuals with a different, but somehow comparable motivation is able to appreciate and make use of some feature of Kierkegaard's complex deal-

ings with death, this should hardly count as shocking or inappropriate.³⁸ But putting Kierkegaard's ideas about death to work in nonreligious or different religious contexts only goes so far. Once the train of thought arrives at the station of intense dying to the world in his late writings, I believe it becomes much more difficult to bracket the Christian elements of his discussion of death.³⁹ With the peculiar notion of grace in play, it is hard to see how anyone but the aspiring Christian would find this discussion useful.

One final related issue worth mentioning before moving on is the fact that the consideration of despair in *Sickness* is often treated as having certain non-Christian applications. It would seem that by the time Anti-Climacus equates despair with what Christians call "sin," this text becomes as inapplicable for anyone not aspiring to Christianity as *For Self-Examination's* hints of grace. But early on, Anti-Climacus claims that virtually everyone is in a state of despair (*SUD* 22–28 / *SKS* 11: 138–44), perhaps implying that virtually everyone, Christian or otherwise, might be in need of dying to the world. Am I simply mistaken in thinking that Kierkegaard's existential approach to death is essentially Christian? Despite the attraction of a more pluralistic reading, I do not believe that this is the case. Because Anti-Climacus, the super-Christian, represents a perspective so well entrenched in Christianity (*JP* 6: 119–20, 174–75, 177 / *SKS* 22: 128, 130, 135–36; 28: 441), it is more likely that *Sickness* is suggesting that everyone is judged under the criterion of sinfulness and in need of a cure (*SUD* 101 / *SKS* 11: 213). In other words, the mistake would lie in believing that Anti-Climacus displays a tolerance for a plurality of views when he discusses despair prior to introducing sin. For anyone who does not share Anti-Climacus's perspective or convictions, there seems to be no need either to agree with his diagnosis of humanity, or to accept his prescription.

Kierkegaard's Appropriation and Criticism of the Tradition

In the works discussed in the preceding chapter, Kierkegaard's formulation of the existential philosophy of death has both interesting nuances that seem to show up only occasionally, and also a consistent emphasis on dying to the world and all that such dying entails. The primary purpose of his discussing death at all is to suggest a way of life that is infused with the knowledge that life as we ordinarily understand it must, one way or another, be overcome. In grappling with the precarious nature of life and all of its projects and activities, he hopes that his reader will come to see the insignificance of everyday life in the world. By the world's own standards of accomplishment, a life that ends at an inopportune moment might leave its meaning incomplete or even ruined, since such meaning always seems to depend on what would have happened next. If life is to avoid this meaningless situation, then it must paradoxically stop looking for meaning in life, at least as it is commonly understood; and once liberated from the usual worldly attempts to find meaning, the moment of life can be understood as an opportunity to derive value from something less transient than everyday existence. For Kierkegaard, though, there is only one thing with the permanence necessary to provide something more than mere worldly meaning—God. Given that the only way God allows an individual to attribute eternal significance to an otherwise decaying and insignificant existence is through following his son in defying and conquering this decadence, the moment of life must be urgently spent coming to terms with Christ. As essentially worldly beings our worldly efforts to overcome our worldliness fail, and so, we must thoroughly give up on ourselves and depend entirely on Christ's merciful redemptive act.

This dying to the worldly self in urgent concern about how one stands in relationship to Christ is necessarily fraught with fear and anxiety since there are constant pitfalls so long as one lives. Besides the danger that one's life might simply end without relating properly to Christ, there is also the possibility that one might approach such a relationship but then fall away again due to worldly temptation or suffering. Since there is a certain anxiousness about one's very existence built right into a truly Christian understanding of life, Kierkegaard is opposed to attempts

to become secure in one's Christianity or to relieve the pressure and fear related to death. This opposition immediately puts him at odds with both the Platonic and the Epicurean strains in the history of the philosophy of death. The conflict with the Epicurean strain is quite clear as practically all of the thinkers that I have associated with this strain try to explain in one way or another why individuals' deaths are of little consequence. The Platonic strain on the other hand, particularly as seen in some of the Christian thinkers I consider, might seem to agree with Kierkegaard about the urgency in life that an appropriate fear of death can engender. Ultimately, however, I will argue that even those thinkers from the Christian tradition who most closely approach Kierkegaard on death-related issues are still trying to offer worldly comfort by mitigating the fear of death with hope for an afterlife. While there is little doubt that Kierkegaard personally hopes for an afterlife as well, he offers his audience no mitigation but only more nervousness in this life due to the uncertainty of the subjective task of relating to what may come next.

Despite the problems he has with these two strains, Kierkegaard's philosophy of death certainly borrows a great deal from thinkers on both sides. This is especially true in the case of the Platonic strain, from whose pillars he appropriates the very notion of dying to the world in the first place. In fact, his entire approach to death might be seen as a turning to New Testament Christianity, with constant reference to Socrates and the guidance of thinkers like Augustine, Luther, and Pascal, in order to combat the rise of Hegelianism (and German idealism in general) in the Danish church. However, while Kierkegaard obviously appreciates certain aspects of these "Platonic" thinkers' views on the use of death for life, he finds some of their aforementioned mitigation and ideas about the afterlife potentially detrimental or at least inapplicable given the state of Danish Christianity. From the Epicurean strain he obviously rejects the notion that the deaths of individuals are insignificant, but I would argue that its corresponding doubt regarding personal immortality is something that Kierkegaard takes very seriously indeed when encouraging his reader to focus on the faithful subjective task even in the face of objective opposition.¹ Again, it is not the case that Kierkegaard gives up belief in a personal afterlife; rather, he simply understands that nothing is to be gained spiritually by speculatively engaging with those who would argue against it. The purpose of this chapter is to show how Kierkegaard reacts to and learns from the insights of the Epicurean strain while acting as a corrective to the Platonic. To this end there will be two sections, one that considers what he borrows and rejects from the thinkers in the Platonic strain, and another that does the same with those in the Epicurean.

Kierkegaard on Socrates and Christianity

Kierkegaard's reception of Plato and Socrates is enormously complex and by no means static, even on the relatively narrow topic of death-related issues. As early as *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard discusses the *Apology* and the *Phaedo* in detail. Although he often distinguishes between the views of the historical Socrates and those of Plato in a way that I do not, when it comes to "dying to" Kierkegaard's dissertation seems to see the same basic problems with both of them. He suggests that the notion of philosophy as practice for death has a significant overlap with, and maybe even an influence upon, what will be understood in Christian terms as dying to the world (compare *JP* 4: 217/*SKS* 24: 462), but his final work as a student is not subtle in calling attention to some key differences between this Greek view and the Christian. Perhaps the most important difference concerns one of the major themes of Kierkegaard's later writings related to death—the insufficiency of reason. While Platonists (and Neoplatonists, for that matter) have what Kierkegaard identifies as the tendency of Pelagianism to make dying to into an individual intellectual accomplishment, he points out that the truly Christian view is that the "contamination of sin" renders human intellectual capacities ineffective in this process (*CI* 76/*SKS* 1: 135).²

Another significant difference between Platonic and Christian dying to, according to Kierkegaard, is that Plato's excessively vague presentation of the result or goal of such dying indicates a "weariness with life" that the Christian does not share (*CI* 77/*SKS* 1: 136).³ Whereas the Christian account has a specific longing for new life in mind when it recommends dying to the world, Kierkegaard takes the Platonic focus on being "nearly dead," and the relative lack of interest in new life, to mean that Platonism is simply trying to overcome individual existence (*CI* 77–78/*SKS* 1: 135–37). Plato does, after all, frequently condemn the imperfection and confusion of particularity. In *The Concept of Anxiety*, Haufnien-sis offers a further criticism of this apparent life-bashing when he takes issue with Platonic "dying away" for its inadequate notion of temporality, which is wrapped up in recollection of what came before and finds little significance in "the moment" of life. The more complete and robust Christian temporality, of course, sees the moment's significance in binding a guilty past to a forgiven eternal future in proper repetition; the moment is the opportunity for renewing one's eternal commitment (*CA* 89–90/*SKS* 4: 392–93).⁴

While Kierkegaard closely associates Plato and Socrates, at least early on, in discussing the problems of an intellectual dying to, his dis-

tion between their views (within the collection of writings attributed only to Plato) becomes more prominent—and problematic—when dealing with this issue of life-weariness. The judgment of Plato seems to stick throughout Kierkegaard's work, but he begins to let Socrates off the hook to some degree in *Irony* and will eventually designate him a champion of individual existence. Of course there are still the concerns about Socrates's rejection of fear related to death and the afterlife,⁵ but as Watkin (1990, 68–70) notices, Kierkegaard comes to see Socrates as a step away from the Platonic notion of dying to toward the Christian. By dividing Plato and Socrates in this way (even though Plato never makes a clear distinction himself), one diminishes Plato's role in portraying his character so powerfully, ignores important nuances in his body of work, and makes him into something of the proto-Epicurean. Watkin seems to understand him as when she lumps him in with afterlife-denying "immanentists."⁶ On this latter point, which appears to be in line with Kierkegaard's understanding, the separation of Socrates's claims about the nature of the afterlife he expects (even if he cannot be sure) from Plato's allegedly more negative views has the troubling result of making it seem that Plato has no conception of personal immortality whatsoever. As I have previously described the Platonic strain, treating Socrates as the literary figure he is, one can see Plato's preoccupation with the possibility of a personal pre- and post-life existence.⁷

Whether or not one gives Plato the credit he probably deserves and treats the views Kierkegaard attributes to Socrates as in some sense belonging to Plato, one can still come to an adequate understanding of what Kierkegaard ultimately retains and rejects from Plato's writings on death issues through a consideration of Kierkegaard's ever-shifting appreciation for Socrates. I have argued that the view on the afterlife of most interest in Plato's dialogues is a continued subjective experience, which he packages with a corresponding disparagement of worldly life, but Kierkegaard focuses on the character Socrates's use of irony to preserve uncertainty on the afterlife issue and generate a similar suspicion of worldly affairs. Although his dissertation is almost as critical of this ironic manifestation of the intellectual approach to dying to the world as it is of the version he flat out rejects in Plato, Kierkegaard's later works seem to go back and forth between such criticism and unchecked praise of Socrates's attitude toward death and the afterlife.

I offer a brief summary of the apparent oscillation. In *Irony* Kierkegaard sees both Plato and Socrates using rational speculation to overcome the fear of death. Plato seems to argue that since embodied life—and maybe individual existence of all kinds—is an ailment, its conclusion is a great blessing (see *Phaedo* 118a). While Socrates (especially as he ap-

pears in the *Apology*) never decides if death—including the annihilative sort—is better than life, he leaves open the comforting possibility that it is. Although the young Kierkegaard believes that Socrates's view is slightly superior in that it is perhaps not so quick to denigrate life, he feels that both views are defective and accuses Socrates of a kind of intellectual deception (*CI* 77–79, 84–85 / *SKS* 1: 135–38, 141–42). Even as late as “At a Graveside,” Kierkegaard seems to have a similar view of this “wise person” of “paganism” (*TDIO* 98 / *SKS* 5: 465). Climacus, on the other hand, romanticizes Socrates's attitude for its focus on *how* one should live in the face of uncertainty surrounding *what* comes next (an objective matter of far less concern); but in *Christian Discourses* Kierkegaard rejects Socratic concerned ignorance in favor of a life committed to the idea that there will be a resurrection and a judgment.

Both Marks and Watkin agree that eventually Kierkegaard has to give up on Socrates in order to focus on uniquely Christian tasks, and indeed this seems true when Kierkegaard claims that Socrates must become “a very unimportant person, a sheer nonentity, a nobody” (*CD* 241 / *SKS* 10: 248). However, Marks in particular seems to miss the fact that this is not Kierkegaard's final word on a possible role for Socrates in Christian practice. In fact, in both his late journals (e.g., *JP* 4: 221–23 / *SKS* 26: 67–71) and Anti-Climacus's *Sickness*, Socrates's value seems to rise rather than diminish as one might expect after reading *Christian Discourses*. For example, Anti-Climacus states, “Christianity teaches that everything essential depends solely upon faith; therefore it wants to be precisely a Socratic, God-fearing ignorance, which by means of ignorance guards faith against speculation” (*SUD* 99 / *SKS* 11: 211). Here Socratic irony and ignorance are not elements of the evasive intellectual game Kierkegaard describes in *Irony*, but are rather invaluable aspects of a pious form of being dead to the understanding. Just before prescribing “a little” Socrates, Anti-Climacus adds, “I consider it an outright ethical task, perhaps requiring not a little self-denial in these very speculative times, when all ‘the others’ are busy comprehending, to admit that one is neither able nor obliged to comprehend it” (*SUD* 99 / *SKS* 11: 211).⁸ Since Socrates is an ever-present force throughout Kierkegaard's writings, and often not one to be overcome, it might be accurate to claim that Plato's dialogues exert a greater influence on Kierkegaard's understanding of dying to the world than any other text outside of the New Testament. And yet, it is in turning to Christian writings that Kierkegaard is able to focus on some of those instances that I have highlighted along the way in which Platonic dying to the world comes up wanting.⁹

In fact, one can find Kierkegaard's concerns about transmigration of souls and the all too intellectual dying to the world, and perhaps also

some of his appreciation for Plato's (via Socrates, of course) taking death seriously in life, already well expressed in Augustine's discussion of Platonism. But before moving on to Kierkegaard's reception of the early church father, it is necessary to say a few things about his complicated relationship with scripture. He clearly sees himself as a kind of ambassador of New Testament Christianity, especially when dealing with dying to the world and the moment of vision (see, e.g., *JP* 1: 146, 230–31; 3: 267, 273, 278, 303–4 / *SKS* 21: 328; 22: 346; 23: 334; 24: 263–64; 27: 662–63),¹⁰ but his extreme emphasis on individuality, as opposed to the communal nature of the church so often depicted in the epistles, might be cause for thinking that his account is a bit of a departure.¹¹ For example, while Paul compares Christian individuals to parts of a unified body (1 Cor. 12:12–30), Kierkegaard states in a late journal that “the New Testament's Christianity is anti-social. . . . The formula for New Testament Christianity is in hatred of oneself to love God: but to hate self is really a part of killing and hating the urge, the itch, for sociality, which is something most precious to the natural man. To hate oneself in association with others is not hating oneself—for association expresses loving oneself” (*JP* 3: 301–2; compare *JP* 1: 230 / *SKS* 26: 269–70, 275; 27: 649; *SUD* 120–21 / *SKS* 11: 231–32). Furthermore, when it comes to objective articles of Christian belief and how they are used to comfort those afraid of dying, one might also wonder if Kierkegaard is straying somewhat. Compare, for example, the way Christ speaks of the afterlife to the penitent sinner on the cross, or the way Paul speaks of immortality's victory over death (1 Cor. 15:54–55), with Kierkegaard's claim (from a journal entry around the same time as the previous one) that “according to the New Testament Christianity is *restlessness*. . . . In Christendom's Christianity Christianity is introduced as a tranquilizer, . . . for in Christendom even eternity is used to tranquilize and to lend zest to the enjoyment of life” (*JP* 3: 302 / *SKS* 27: 656). What could explain such apparently glaring misrepresentations of scripture?

I think that these sorts of worries can easily be assuaged when considering the situation that Kierkegaard finds himself in. It is not that he actively disagrees with the methods of Jesus and Paul, but rather that he has a somewhat different battle to fight.¹² This point is well stated in a journal entry from 1849:

With respect to the few Christians at that time everything was in order, for they were true Christians or at least fairly so. Furthermore, the Christian Church itself was still such a small plant that it was a sect in the world, which does help in keeping alert. But from the moment Christianity conquered *in the worldly sense* and all became Christians in the ridiculous manner which nowadays is jealously guarded by secular-

ecclesiastic authorities—so that everyone is baptized as a child—from that moment on the prime polemical target must be the illusion that we are all Christians, and this polemical sighting must be sharper and sharper with each century that “established Christendom” stands, for with every century the illusion grows. (*JP* 3: 467/*SKS* 22: 89)

While the early church was concerned with spreading and preserving its particular objective message in a world that was not always eager to hear it, Kierkegaard is faced with a world that claims it accepts the message but does not want to hear that it does not properly relate to and live in accordance with it. Even though he understands that for the sake of the survival of the message the early Christians had need of a certain kind of community, Kierkegaard believes that modern “Christians” might fail to understand that, even for the early Christians, the properly Christian task is to relate as an individual before Christ,¹³ becoming Christian is more than merely joining a church (*JP* 1: 245/*SKS* 26: 398–99). Similarly, the early church was engaged in giving the new hope of eternity to a despairing world of death and misery, while Kierkegaard is faced with a lazy, self-satisfied, and overly comfortable world that needs to be reminded that existence has some real peril . . . even for the so-called Christian in Christendom. Simply put, in the early days of Christianity people needed to hear about what they were suffering and striving for, but in Kierkegaard’s day they need to hear that suffering and striving are the prerequisites.

How Christian dying to the world is lost or corrupted is a complicated problem for Kierkegaard, with roots as deep as Paul himself (see *JP* 2: 354, 368/*SKS* 24: 491; 26: 44). As one might expect based on his criticism of Christianity once it has “conquered in the worldly sense,” Kierkegaard’s view of the various medieval proponents of Christian doctrine is often uncomplimentary.¹⁴ Despite the fact that he is likely not well read in the works of its major contributors, he seems to see the entire medieval tradition as a gradual descent into the sort of comforting rationalistic theological speculation that he is so critical of in his own time. While Kierkegaard is supportive of both the life of Augustine and many of the claims he makes in distinguishing Christian orthodoxy from sectarian heresy (Puchniak 2008a, 13–14), and even finds a certain passionate dedication in Anselm (*JP* 1: 11–12/*SKS* 25: 239; 27: 570),¹⁵ Kierkegaard follows Luther in his opposition to the late medieval Scholastic trend (Bøgeskov 2008, 188–90).

There is no doubt that Kierkegaard is Augustinian to some degree in his understanding of the original corruption of humanity and its rational capacities.¹⁶ In the same vein, he also seems to recognize Augustine’s

notion that grace through faith is necessary if one is to be redeemed and come into a proper relationship with the divine as an improvement upon Platonic or Pelagian attempts to figure out such a relationship on one's own. One of Augustine's major contributions to Christianity is a development of Paul's suggestion of dying to reason and self-reliance, but whatever movement beyond a stubborn Platonic independence Augustine initially represents, Kierkegaard is concerned about the thoroughness of the dying to he ultimately recommends. Kierkegaard sees Augustine's willingness (at least in some limited fashion) to supplement faith with the sort of rational explanation of theological difficulties that Paul would not provide as evidence of a persistent underlying Platonism. In a very critical journal entry from 1854, Kierkegaard laments,

Augustine has nevertheless done incalculable harm. The whole system of doctrine through the centuries relies essentially upon him. . . . Augustine has reinstated the Platonic-Aristotelian definition, the whole Greek philosophical pagan definition of faith. . . . In the Greek view, faith is a concept which belongs in the sphere of the intellectual . . . and we get the progression: faith—knowledge. Christianly, faith is at home in the existential. . . . In this purely personal relationship between God as personality and the believer as *existing* personality lies the concept of faith. (*JP* 1: 71–72/*SKS* 25: 432–33)¹⁷

According to this passage, Augustine's method suggests that faith is belief without complete justification, the necessary starting point on the road to justified knowledge, while the properly Christian view sees faith purely as a relationship to be lived rather than understood. To make matters worse, what begins as a mere rationalistic tendency in Augustine sets a precedent, which leads to a most unfortunate (from Kierkegaard's perspective) consequence in the history of Christian thought. This consequence is the full-blown and wide-spread attempt to perfect faith through understanding exemplified in the work of figures such as Anselm and Aquinas.

Although Kierkegaard paid little attention to the writings of these Scholastics, and only occasionally says anything about them, there are two significant clues that can help piece together his views on the problematic use of reason that they represent. First, much like his appropriation of Augustinian ideas, it is probably fair to say that a mistrust of the natural theology professed by Scholasticism is part of the properly Lutheran doctrine in which Kierkegaard was educated (Bøgeskov 2008, 183–84). Second and more importantly is Kierkegaard's explicit criticism of similar ideas in other thinkers. Perhaps the most illuminating instance

of such criticism can be found in Climacus's discussion of the arguments for the existence of God offered by modern thinkers such as Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz (*PF* 39–43 / *SKS* 4: 244–48).¹⁸ Since Climacus immediately rejects these arguments in favor of the “leap,” it is doubtful that he would approve of them in their Scholastic formulation. The same can be said for the non-pseudonymous Kierkegaard. In fact, in the case of Anselm's devout gratitude for being allowed to develop the ontological argument, Kierkegaard points out in a late journal entry that “this prayer and this expression of thanksgiving are infinitely more proof of God's existence than—the proof” (*JP* 1: 11 / *SKS* 25: 239; compare Anselm, *Prosligion* 2–4). Once again, for Kierkegaard, faith is a matter of living out a relationship with the divine—a relationship that does not need support in the form of clever proofs, but requires instead more dying to reason than Scholasticism generally allows.

Turning now to Kierkegaard's greatest predecessor when it comes to dying to reason, Luther is yet another figure whose complicated relationship to Kierkegaard is marked both by high praise and sharp criticism. In Kierkegaard's later published works, he speaks mostly in support of Luther, while the reformer receives more of a mixed review in Kierkegaard's journals from the same period. There have been numerous excellent papers, particularly in the past decade, on the fascinating topic of Kierkegaard's appropriation of Luther, and so it should be easy to characterize Kierkegaard's understanding very briefly.¹⁹ According to this understanding, Luther is an invaluable corrective for both the excessive rationalization of medieval theology and the sense of merit found in practices such as monasticism and the sale of indulgences (e.g., *FSE* 16–18 / *SKS* 13: 45–47; *JFY* 132, 192–94 / *SKS* 16: 186, 238–41). Kierkegaard appreciates that in order to combat these problematic attitudes and trends, Luther reaches back to the denigration of human effort, rational or otherwise, and the corresponding emphasis on faith and grace that Augustine finds in Paul's letters. Unfortunately, Kierkegaard thinks, Luther goes so far in stressing divine grace's concession to human frailty that, in correcting a history of error inadvertently set off by Augustine's defense of orthodoxy, Luther accidentally inaugurates an (in many ways) inverse, but still highly problematic, history that leads right up to Kierkegaard's own time (see *JP* 2: 362; 3: 82, 84–85, 100–104 / *SKS* 23: 323, 368; 25: 201–2, 399–401, 476–77; 26: 80, 166–67, 368–69, 426; compare Kim and Rasmussen 2009, 197–99).

The problem that Kierkegaard points out is the world's tendency to take advantage of any concession one gives it. He states, “No wonder Luther very quickly got such great support! The secular mentality understood immediately that here was a break. . . . They understood

at once how with a little lying this could be used to great profit" (*JP* 3: 84/*SKS* 23: 368). Since Luther's most influential Reformation documents claim that no human effort is sufficient for salvation, many of the Reformation's supporters fail to realize that Luther's own life is a demonstration of the importance (dare I say "necessity") of making the effort to die to worldliness anyway, if only to show one's inability and dependence on a redeemer (*FSE* 16/*SKS* 13: 45; *JP* 3: 76, 94–95/*SKS* 22: 241; 27: 572–73). The almost immediate, occasionally violent, outcome of Luther's attempts at reform, which he himself watched with horror firsthand, was the exact opposite of his intended overcoming of worldliness. While he saw an opportunity to do away with certain "religious" practices demanded by a corrupt worldly authority, many people took the idea that their salvation could not be earned by their own effort to mean that they could do almost anything they wanted in the world and things might work out for their souls anyway.²⁰ Without emphasizing the rigor of the law (as in Calvin), or as Kierkegaard sees it, the importance of *trying* to imitate Christ in dying to the world, Luther opens the door to the situation of rampant secular hedonism calling itself Christianity that Kierkegaard complains about in nineteenth-century Denmark (e.g., *JP* 2: 362–64/*SKS* 25: 201–4). Although Luther certainly becomes aware of the dangers of misinterpreting his views, and makes an effort in his later writings to clear up any misunderstandings about the rigors of Christianity, Kierkegaard, particularly in the late journals, holds him accountable to some degree for his early excessive exuberance in the preaching of grace without works.²¹ The distinction between the two types of Luther's writings on death that I discussed in the first chapter offers an excellent illustration of the tension that Kierkegaard sees in Luther.

Even though Kierkegaard would surely be critical of Luther's specific suggestions about avoiding reflection on personal death and treating it as something off in the distant future, his fundamental problem with a text like Luther's sermon on preparing to die is its overall orientation toward comforting minds anxious about the end of life. By taking the edge off of death as he does with his substitution of thoughts of eternal life and grace for thoughts of sin, hell, and misery, Luther compassionately puts people at ease, but perhaps a little too at ease for their own eternal good. Kierkegaard believes that there are benefits to having a certain fear of death and an uncertain worry about what comes next, albeit fear and worry of an appropriate sort. He is definitely not asking that one become paralyzed by extreme terror, but simply suggesting that a respectful trepidation leads to a sense of urgency and an appreciation for divine assistance in maintaining one's urgently adopted course of action. To focus on grace to the exclusion of the difficulty is to give the

impression that there is not still work to be done—faith is not a gift once and for all, but a relationship to be maintained “in fear and trembling” (*JP* 3: 96/*SKS* 27: 568–69).

At no point does Kierkegaard explicitly claim that Luther personally fails to grasp the necessary difficulty of dying to the world and remaining dead to it, but perhaps he would be less critical if Luther had consistently written of suffering, persecution, and martyrdom as the reformer does in the later writings I discussed.²² In these texts one can find a description of the sort of imitation of Christ's dying to the world (in fact, the sign of true Christianity here is suffering in the world) that Kierkegaard sees in the spiritual anguish that the younger Luther experienced but did not adequately publicize. However, even though Luther seems to get around to a proper explanation of the relationship between works and faith, law and gospel, rigor and mercy, example and redeemer, or dying to and eternal life, there is no doubt in Kierkegaard's mind that the explanation comes too late to stop the caricature of Christianity spawned by Luther's early carelessness.²³

Although Pascal has a smaller impact on both Kierkegaard and the history of Christianity than Luther, there are certain similarities in how Kierkegaard views these two thinkers. He has many positive things to say about the life that Pascal lived and his Luther-like struggle against the Scholastic views of the Jesuits (e.g., *JP* 1: 222/*SKS* 25: 256), but he ultimately feels that Pascal retains a little too much of their interest in rational proof and thereby tries to diminish the difficulty of Christianity. It is the shared mitigation, whether intentional or not, of the hardship of dying to the world that really binds Luther and Pascal together as targets for Kierkegaardian criticism. Still, there is probably more agreement between Pascal and Kierkegaard on the use of thoughts of death for the sake of Christian dying to the world than there is between Luther and Kierkegaard. Besides the obvious similarities in the language that Pascal and Kierkegaard use to describe death and dying, they both differ from Luther in that they do not offer explicit comfort about impending demise. On the other hand, Luther is probably closer to Kierkegaard when it comes to dying to reason.

One possible explanation for this latter difference is that while Pascal is still reacting to a largely Catholic world, Kierkegaard is at least a theological generation and hundreds of miles removed from such an environment. At the risk of oversimplifying the situation (and ignoring other relevant historical developments), Luther's legacy of opposition to reason, or at least Scholasticism, has already done much of the heavy lifting when it comes to cleansing Kierkegaard's religious understanding of the sort of rationalism that dominated Catholic theology, via the Scho-

lastics and Jesuits, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Of course, Pascal was aware of the Lutheran movement, but it is unlikely that its particular brand of extreme mistrust of reason in a religious context could have been as well ingrained in Pascal in seventeenth-century France as it was in Kierkegaard, despite their Augustinian connections and other similarities between their situations.

Pascal (2005, 31) advocates a mere suspension or humbling of reason when dealing with the faith-based acceptance of Christian matters, but Kierkegaard recommends a more extreme approach.²⁴ As explained in *For Self-Examination* he does not believe, as Pascal seems to, that faith coexists and works with reason to guide an individual toward Christianity (e.g., *FSE* 82–83/*SKS* 13: 103–4). Because faith is opposed to reason for Kierkegaard, he is more apt than Pascal to embrace Christianity as absurd and offensive. Thus, Kierkegaard is not nearly as interested as Pascal (2005, 49–50) in finding reasons, such as miracles, for help in becoming and remaining a Christian (see *FSE* 68/*SKS* 13: 90).²⁵ The key difference between Pascal and Kierkegaard is, therefore, that while the former has a notion of Christian dying to the world that involves setting reason aside only at the proper moments, the latter's notion of Christian dying to the world involves a more substantial and sustained renunciation of reason, at least so far as one's progress toward Christianity is concerned.

This difference between Pascal and Kierkegaard on the subject of dying to reason is manifested most clearly in their respective goals as authors. Pascal's ultimate aim seems to be the production of *An Apology for the Christian Religion*, which was the original title for the ideas that are now known as Pascal's *Pensées* (Ariew 2005, xi). An apology of this sort, as evidenced by some of his own claims, is meant to demonstrate how "reasonable and happy" one can be in Christianity, and how "foolish and unhappy" one can be without it (Pascal 2005, 51).²⁶ Kierkegaard, on the other hand, never portrays the Christian and the unbeliever in such a way. Rather, his ultimate goal is to describe what a life in Christ is really like—it is absurd, offensive, painful, difficult, and dangerous. As if the dying to one's former self is not miserable enough, unlike physical death, which ends things, dying to the self is just the beginning of one's worldly sufferings (*FSE* 79/*SKS* 13: 100–101). These sufferings of a Christian, dead to the world in a sense, but still physically living in it, might include ridicule, persecution, or even worse (*FSE* 84–85/*SKS* 13: 104–5). A journal entry from 1854 finds Kierkegaard actually questioning whether Pascal is attempting to "coddle" himself instead of facing up to the fact that a proper Christian life of dying to the world might lead to "martyrdom, a bloody martyrdom" (*JP* 2: 367–68/*SKS* 25: 482). This sort of life hardly

sounds reasonable or happy.²⁷ In fact, it seems more reasonable to choose any life but this one.

A prime example of Pascal's attempt to make Christianity seem more reasonable and attractive to believers and unbelievers alike, which Kierkegaard would find particularly problematic, is his famous wager. I have pointed out elsewhere that Kierkegaard did not have much opportunity to encounter the wager (Buben 2011, 77–78), but this does not preclude imagining what his response would be. Even though the wager is not intended to produce faith (Pascal realizes that being faithful is not simply a decision that one can make), it is meant to demonstrate why someone would, or maybe should, want to be faithful. Since Kierkegaard is uninterested in convincing people of the benefits of Christianity (after all, he is writing for an audience that he believes has taken these benefits for granted), he would probably be quite critical of Pascal's strategy in this case. In fact, in his dissertation, Kierkegaard expresses a concern about Socrates's approach to the afterlife that may be just as applicable to Pascal: "If one also bears in mind that he still does not really know what the shape of the next life will be or whether there will be a next life, if amid this poetry we hear the prosaic calculating that it can never do any harm to assume another life . . . then one sees that the persuasive power of this argument is considerably limited" (*CI* 68/*SKS* 1: 126). Although in later writings Kierkegaard no longer wonders about Socrates's motives, the calculation described in this passage seems to be at the very heart of Pascal's wager. Pascal's (2005, 212–13) reasoning is something like this: since you have to adopt a position either for or against the existence of God and the afterlife (to abstain is, practically speaking, to be against), given that you already exist and will soon find out the truth of the matter the hard way, it makes sense to want to believe as this option offers the greatest possible reward for the same risk. Even if Pascal agrees with Kierkegaard that what matters most about the afterlife is not whether or not it is, but how one lives in relation to it, and that living this relationship is a difficult, anxiety-laden, lifelong struggle (and not a simple matter of giving assent), the wager is an un-Kierkegaardian affirmation of the attractiveness of Christianity.

After making it through an account of Kierkegaard's reception of the major thinkers in the Platonic strain in the history of the philosophy of death, it is clear that he is at least as worried about the historical ramifications of their views for Christianity, as he is impressed by the way Pascal and his predecessors personally embody their ideals. Kierkegaard actually has a great deal of respect for most of these figures, and he even acknowledges the need for their various polemical strategies given the

particular historical situations they were each up against. But despite what his sense of dying to the world derives from these high-water marks of Christian and pre-Christian thought, he also believes that their views, when misapplied, misunderstood, or just taken to an unwarranted extreme, have contributed to what passes itself off as Christianity in the nineteenth century. One way to describe this problematic historical development is to suggest that there is a dialectic between worldliness and dying to, and the Platonic strain is a repeated corrective assertion of dying to against a series of worldly loopholes in various historical contexts.

As Kierkegaard seems to understand things, Socrates, “the hero and martyr of intellectuality” (*JP* 3: 80 / *SKS* 23: 153), dies to a world of superficial and decadent Greek materialism by retreating to the purely intellectual. Whether or not Plato should receive more credit for contributions to the crafting of this approach to the world, he surely follows Socrates in some sense. Through the centuries this approach, which is initially characterized by uncertainty and irony, is degraded—first by Plato, according to Kierkegaard—and philosophy in its worldly conceit comes to represent the attainment of knowledge. Into this situation, Christianity emerges from the Hebrew tradition and reasserts the Platonic notion of the world’s corruption, but with the important correction that all human striving to overcome it is insufficient. This insufficiency is at least partially due to the fact that the human rational capacity is also corrupt. Whereas, on the Platonic view, one could work out one’s own place with respect to the afterlife through proper philosophical rigor, on the Christian view, divine assistance becomes necessary if one is to shed one’s worldliness and have eternal life. In the course of trying to affirm the need for divine grace against the heterodox Pelagians, centuries later, Augustine uses what Kierkegaard believes is Platonic rationalism to support faith. That is, in trying to prevent the full-blown establishment of rational effort in the world as a sufficient condition for salvation, Augustine establishes the limited use of such effort as a possible ally in salvation. This turns out to be a dangerous tactic (although perhaps somewhat understandable given the situation) because, removed from the early context of separating orthodoxy from heresy, it starts Christianity down a long road of attempting to make itself compatible with worldly reason. After a millennium of using this reason to justify all variety of strange and grotesque practices, by which humans can contribute to their own salvation, Luther and Pascal look back to Paul and Augustine in order to correct the medieval mistake. But as Luther overemphasizes the (nonetheless very important) idea that there is nothing people can do themselves to earn salvation, and Pascal does not entirely distance himself from Scholastic rationalism, they both make the mistake of simply diminishing the rigor

of Christian dying to the world (interestingly, rigorousness, although in the form of worldly perversions, was the one good thing about certain medieval developments for Kierkegaard). Luther inadvertently inaugurates a world-embracing tradition of making no effort whatsoever, and Pascal simply restores reason in Christianity to something like the still-problematic Augustinian level that makes it easier to come to terms with than it really should be.

Kierkegaard apparently understands himself as one more corrective in this history. In a journal entry from 1850, he states, "Luther's true successor will come to resemble the exact opposite of Luther, because Luther came after the preposterous overstatement of asceticism; whereas he will come after the horrible fraud to which Luther's view gave birth" (*JP* 3: 82/*SKS* 23: 323). Against the easygoing Protestant secularism that follows in Luther's wake, Kierkegaard relentlessly portrays the martyrdom of early Christians and the necessary suffering of anyone who takes up the cross. But Kierkegaard is more than just the latest swing of the pendulum of dying to the world; he also has the appropriate perspective from which to take in the whole dialectic. Without the ability to see the entire history for what it is—humans finding ever new and creative ways to understand their worldly endeavors as meaningful while certain alleged representatives and interpreters of divinity try to explain that looking for meaning in worldliness is a mistake—each Platonic thinker in the history simply patches a particular hole in the hull of the dying-to-the-world ship with material that was already preventing another potential leak. Since Kierkegaard is conscious of this dialectical historical development, he is in a position to take on the role of overall corrective. Rather than simply focusing on "a condition in Christendom at a particular time and place," he claims that "to reform Christianity requires first and foremost a comprehensive view of the whole of Christianity" (*JP* 3: 101/*SKS* 25: 400–401). With this comprehensive view Kierkegaard believes that he is able to help modern Christendom see what it lacks without mistakenly overstating the solution.

Kierkegaard Contra Epicurus

In keeping Christianity off of the road to worldliness, having the Epicurean strain in the history of the philosophy of death close at hand may be quite beneficial. The Epicurean strain, which is certainly more diverse in its interests and points of departure than the Platonic, is unified by its doubts about a personal afterlife and its relative lack of concern

about individuals' deaths. Kierkegaard realizes that many of the objective metaphysical, historical, and ethical claims of Christianity seem to melt away under the intense glare of this often more naturalistic or scientific worldview. He can also tell that the Epicurean strain grows increasingly aggressive in its opposition to any traditional metaphysical understanding of Christianity that views itself as a viable option in the modern world. But even though the Epicurean strain is apparently in direct opposition to many aspects of the Platonic, Kierkegaard sees an opportunity to use the former to focus the latter.

He believes that the genuine essence of Christianity is the subjective relationship-existence with Christ (a relationship partially characterized by imitating his dying to worldliness)—the emphasis here is on the *how* of existence, for example, how one tries to live out this relationship. What the Epicurean strain often argues about are certain objective issues concerning the nature of the world, and the rationality of behaving in accordance with its objective findings—the emphasis here is on the *what* of existence, for example, what happens after death. If people despair about Christianity, or feel the need to defend it rationally, in light of what the Epicurean strain says about death and the afterlife, then they are obviously not focused on the essence of Christianity. It has never been the practice of the true Christian, according to Kierkegaard, to reach for as much objective, rational security as possible, but rather to die to such security (however painful and difficult that may be), place trust in the divine, and live as one believes one should to the best of one's ability. Interacting with the Epicurean strain often serves as a way for Kierkegaard to test for proper Christian dying to the world, because if one is dead to the world then one should not be especially bothered by the views of worldly minded adversaries. The task at hand, then, is to see how Kierkegaard reacts to the unique challenges posed by the various representatives of this strain.

Toward the beginning of his "At a Graveside" Kierkegaard quotes Epicurus's famous mantra against the fear of death: "When it is, I am not, and when I am, it is not." This passage is at the top of Kierkegaard's long list of problematic understandings of death, both philosophical and everyday. He believes that Epicurus's explanation of the irrationality of the fear of death trades on its exclusion of any individual's particular experience of life. Immediately after quoting Epicurus, Kierkegaard remarks, "This is the jest by which the cunning contemplator places himself on the outside" (*TDIO* 73/*SKS* 5: 444). There may be something technically right about what Epicurus says, but I (as one thrust *inside* the flow of existence) have a great deal going on that is affected, even now, by the fact that I have an unavoidable conclusion at a time yet to be de-

terminated. Although there will be no “me” to feel the loss of anything once I am dead, while still alive right now, it feels like I have a lot to lose. Kierkegaard is surely not alone in his dismissal of Epicurus’s claim, but I would briefly like to take up the challenge of (partially) defending Epicurus against Kierkegaard’s attack.

To be clear, it is not as though I really disagree with Kierkegaard’s assessment of the particular claim in question; I do, in the end, think that Epicurus is guilty of the sort of mistake that Kierkegaard accuses him of making. Nonetheless, I wonder if Kierkegaard is being a bit uncharitable and taking this claim out of context as he passes judgment on it. If the relevant claim is evaluated within its original context, then perhaps one might find something more meaningful to attribute to Epicurus than a clever, but deceptive, cliché. It is not that the *Letter to Menoeceus* itself is necessarily misrepresented by the isolation of the passage about death, as there are other passages in the text that also suggest Epicurus’s vulnerability to Kierkegaard’s accusation. Rather, it is the apparent separation of this passage from its historical situation—especially the religious climate of the day—that might be cause for concern. George K. Strodach (1963, 186) points out that “it was . . . one of the chief social aims of Epicureanism to combat popular religion in all its forms and to substitute for it a theology that was ethically emancipating and elevating.”²⁸ As mentioned previously, the main Hellenistic religious belief that Epicurus takes issue with is the notion that there may be a great deal of suffering after death. It is in an effort to combat what Strodach (1963, 187) calls “mass phobia” about “the bizarre torments of the classical hell” that Epicurus offers his argument that since there will be no experience after death whatsoever, there will be no misery to fear.

Even though I think Epicurus’s beliefs about death are more justifiable when considering what he was up against, I do not believe that Kierkegaard’s criticism is ultimately mitigated by such considerations. Just after criticizing Epicurus, Kierkegaard goes on to criticize what seems to be the position of those against whom Epicurus fought. It is somewhat unclear whom Kierkegaard actually has in mind here, but it may be that he is not guilty of an ahistorical assessment of Epicurus after all. Kierkegaard states, “Even if the contemplation of death uses pictures of horror to describe death and terrifies a sick imagination, it is still only a jest if he merely contemplates death and not himself in death, if he thinks of it as the human condition but not as his own” (*TDIO* 73/*SKS* 5: 444). It seems that Kierkegaard is not exactly disparaging, at least not toward the beginning of “At a Graveside,” the content of the claims of either Epicurus or his opponents; it is not so much what one thinks about death but how one thinks about it that matters. Both sides of the Epicurean dispute

make the mistake of failing to emphasize the significance of death for each particular individual it touches and each life it will end. Because the subjective appropriation of death has beneficial implications for the life of one who takes it seriously—for example, it helps such an individual to grasp the inessentiality of ordinary worldly accomplishments—Kierkegaard finds it necessary to offer a warning (especially to aspiring Christians) about getting wrapped up in debates of this sort that treat death so impersonally.

If it were simply the issue of subjective appropriation, rather than the more objective question about the justifiability of fearing death, at stake here, perhaps Kierkegaard could side with either Epicurus or his opponents had one or the other approached death from the personal perspective. By the end of “At a Graveside,” though, Kierkegaard, advocating *for* the fear of death, would likely reject Epicurus’s position for reasons of objective content as well. Of course, Kierkegaard is certainly not encouraging the oppressive, superstitious sort of fear that Epicurus criticizes in his religious opponents; the fear of death recommended in “At a Graveside” is in no way based on a clear statement of belief in an afterlife, hellish or otherwise. Nonetheless, Kierkegaard would condemn the Epicurean position for its insufficient cultivation of fear, given that it does not allow one’s own death to have an appropriate impact on life (or really any significant impact at all). For various related reasons then, Kierkegaard can hold that Epicurus’s claim, that death should not bother the living, is unconvincing and unhelpful, without ever explicitly rejecting Epicurean doctrine about death as the final dispersal of the atoms that, prior to death, join together to make me an existing subject (compare Stokes 2006, 398–400).

Kierkegaard seems to find some of the same virtues and faults in the Stoic view of death that he finds in the Epicurean, with the notable difference that the former may have more in common with Platonic/Christian ideas. In journal entries from 1850, Kierkegaard expresses appreciation for Seneca’s appropriation of the Epicurean willingness to consider death (*JP* 4: 42–43/*SKS* 23: 244–45), but also claims that “having suicide in reserve naturally has a certain power to make life intensive. The thought of death condenses and concentrates life” (*JP* 4: 332/*SKS* 23: 231). While Kierkegaard sees similar intentions when these two pagan schools talk about death, he seems to believe that Stoic emphasis on suicide inadvertently betrays that they fall short of the ideal Epicurean attitude that “death is nothing to us.” It is this sort of falling short, and making life intensive instead, that demands closer attention because “Christianity also makes life intensive with the thought of death, immanent death, perhaps tomorrow, perhaps today” (*JP* 4: 332/*SKS* 23: 231).

In order to avoid confusion and further clarify what is essential in Christian dying to the world, the Stoics offer an excellent contrast.²⁹

There is a sense in which a willingness to commit suicide seems to suggest that one is dead to the world, but Kierkegaard believes that Stoic suicide is really the opposite of a proper Christian dying to the world. In 1853, he claims that

this is precisely what Christianity is alert to. When Stoicism would say: Now you have the right to kill yourself—precisely there is the real dying to the world—if one is to endure going on living. Stoicism has an enormous resiliency in being able to endure suffering many things from which a man would ordinarily shrink. But its resiliency can nevertheless fail—here, then, comes suicide—the resiliency of patience breaks—and here comes the essentially Christian act, to die to the world. (*JP* 4: 333/*SKS* 25: 176)

Stoic suicide is a reaction to the world, rather than a dying to it; Stoicism is not really characterized by an indifference to death, however it understands itself, but by sensitivity to the quality of life. Christian dying to the world, according to Kierkegaard, is more strenuous in that a Christian may come to the point at which a Stoic would check out, and yet still continue to endure the struggles of being alive. The key issue for the Christian is never whether or not one suffers, but being prepared and willing to suffer whether or not that should happen. Martyrdom may well come, but to seek it out as an avenue of escape from worldly suffering is, ironically, to remain attached to the world. This is not to say that the Stoics are somehow cowardly or frivolous, given that they only kill themselves when the world and those in it can no longer be benefited by their presence (Strem 1981, 153–54). Nonetheless, this analysis of benefits is a worldly mathematics and the true Christian martyr would never calculate in this way.

In addition to his negative use of Stoicism to sharpen his understanding of proper Christian dying to the world, Kierkegaard also seems to see some positive value in contrasting Stoic views on the afterlife with the one often found in Christendom. From an 1851 journal entry:

Cicero says . . . that the gods have no advantage over man, except immortality, *but this is not necessary for living a happy life*. Surely the way in which immortality is shoved upon people in Christendom is very confusing, making them think that they feel a deep need for immortality. On the whole, immortality first appeared with Christianity, and why? Because it requires that a person shall die to the world. In order to be

able and willing to die to the world—the eternal and immortality must remain fixed. Immortality and dying away correspond to each other. The hope of immortality is nourished by the suffering of dying away. But in Christendom we want to cheat our way into everything, and thus also into immortality. (*JP* 2: 380–81 / *SKS* 24: 448–49)

Immortality for the Christian must go hand in hand with suffering in the world rather than happiness, while Cicero's brand of Stoicism claims, quite correctly, that happiness in the world can be had without immortality. If worldly happiness is what one wants, then the Stoic (or more generally, pagan) life is best. But the supposed "Christians" of Christendom, missing both the Christian point about immortality and the Stoic, mistakenly believe that immortality is a necessary component of having a happy, secure life in the world; they want immortality without acknowledging its miserable companion. Kierkegaard seems to believe that by entertaining the Stoic indifference to immortality, he can help clear up Christendom's confusion: if happiness in the world is what you are after, then immortality is not what you need and a true Christian is not what you are.

Kierkegaard apparently has less use for the views on death of the neo-pagan thinkers of early modern philosophy. Although he gives a fair amount of attention to the study of Spinoza and Leibniz (if it is at all appropriate to call the latter a neo-pagan) up to 1846, and Montaigne in the few years after that, he has practically nothing to say about their respective death-related discussions.³⁰ While Kierkegaard's references to Montaigne are a bit less detailed and frequent, a recurring concern in Kierkegaard's more thorough reflections on Spinoza and Leibniz is that their views on the objective nature of things tend toward the exclusion of the subjective individual (e.g., *JP* 1: 17–18 / *SKS* 19: 392). This concern, which contributes to Kierkegaard's association of Hegel with Spinozism, would certainly apply to their views on death (compare Carlisle 2009, 180; *JP* 4: 686–87). In fact, in one of the few places where Kierkegaard seems to address the attitudes of these thinkers on a related issue (an 1849–1850 journal entry), he says, "The very way in which modern philosophy speaks of existence shows that it does not believe in the immortality of the individual; it does not believe at all; it comprehends only the eternity of 'concepts'" (*JP* 1: 460 / *SKS* 22: 433). While one could surely speculate about how Kierkegaard might use early modern approaches to immortality, or any of Montaigne's ideas about death (some of which are, as mentioned, well preserved in Pascal), to help keep Christians focused, the close bonds between these approaches and ideas and those of the Epicureans and Stoics might render such speculation a bit repetitive. I

will save this sort of conjecture instead for my discussion of how Kierkegaard might have responded to views he could have had no opportunity of encountering during his lifetime.

But before moving on, there is still one relatively early modern thinker to consider who is perhaps more helpful than the others in the fight to keep Christian dying to the world on the right track. Ironically, it is a thinker with whom Kierkegaard had probably no direct literary acquaintance: Hume. Thomas Miles (2009, 27) explains: "Hume seems eager to push religious believers into a position of fideism, the belief that religious beliefs are founded purely on faith and not reason, in order to extricate religious beliefs from the domain of philosophical and scientific enquiry. Kierkegaard, concerned about a passionless and spiritually deadening rationalism in religion, welcomes this push toward fideism." Although Kierkegaard apparently had only a secondhand knowledge of Hume, and likely no knowledge of his views on explicitly death-related issues, what he sees in Hume is the very objective doubt about religious matters that he believes should have no bearing on proper subjective Christian faith (Miles 2009, 23–26). Because Hume does such a thorough job of using this doubt to rule out all rational attempts to ground faith, he becomes an excellent ally for Kierkegaard in showing would-be Christians that faith is only to be had by dying to reason.³¹

Pressing ahead to the nineteenth century, Kierkegaard clearly has some serious concerns about the way reason is allowed to run rampant in Christendom. For example, he is famously critical of Hegel's speculative method, and the growing influence of Hegelianism in the Danish Lutheran church of his day (Stewart 2003, 2). While much of Kierkegaard's criticism is, therefore, actually aimed at particular Danish Hegelians such as Hans Lassen Martensen (1808–1884) and Johan Ludvig Heiberg (1791–1860), there is at the very least a core complaint that he consistently aims at Hegel himself.³² But before discussing this complaint, it is necessary to reiterate that Hegel holds a special place in my account of the philosophy of death, particularly in connection with Kierkegaard. Hegel surely understands the role that passing through death, in one sense or another, plays for the Christian, and yet his seemingly unorthodox views about the possibility of personal afterlife, which are reminiscent of early modern and pagan notions, render his treatment something of a precursor to the existential philosophy of death proposed by Kierkegaard and Heidegger. While Kierkegaard recognizes Hegel's bizarre blend of Christian and pagan views on these death-related issues, Kierkegaard does not see this blending as exactly the sort of careful sharpening of Christianity on the secular whetstone of doubts and criticisms that he advocates. For

Kierkegaard, Hegel is a wolf in sheep's clothing, and thus too dangerous to be beneficial for actual striving Christians (e.g., *JP* 2: 222–27/*SKS* 20: 44, 207; 23: 63, 68–69; 24: 442–43; 25: 271–72).

The major complaint about Hegel is that he, in some ways like the early moderns, is too busy speculating about the development of humanity in the abstract to be really concerned about the actual existing individual (Watkin 1990, 67–68; Stewart 2003, 451). But according to Climacus's anti-Hegelian views on the afterlife³³ and Kierkegaard's understanding of the church in the New Testament, genuine Christian existence emphasizes individuality. Climacus states, "The single individual's salvation indeed depends on his being brought into relation to that historical event [the crucifixion]" (*CUP* 1: 584/*SKS* 7: 531). Each and every individual is responsible for his or her own relationship to Christ, and the human community of Christians only exists in so far as each individual separately works on this relationship. In a certain sense, then, isolation from the rest of humankind is a necessary part of being a Christian—there is no becoming Christian as a crowd, and no such thing as a truly Christian special interest group (*CUP* 1: 584–87/*SKS* 7: 531–34).³⁴ Hegel, however, denigrates both the self-denial of early Christians and the imitation of Christ, which Kierkegaard identifies as essential components of an individual's relationship with the savior. To make matters worse, according to Kierkegaard, Hegel's disdain for these indispensable aspects of the individual task of Christianity comes in the service of his speculative development of a certain kind of allegedly "Christian," this-worldly community, which only superficially resembles Kierkegaard's sense of Christianity.

Solomon claims that Hegel has no real love for Christianity. So far as his writings might make it seem otherwise, consider the fact that he lived and worked at a time and a place in which explicit anti-Christian sentiments could have cost Hegel his livelihood (Solomon 1983, 582). Obscure as Hegel's claims may often be, Solomon (1983, 583) believes that Hegel's real goal is to undermine Christianity by presenting something resembling humanistic atheism in the language of Christianity. Recognizing this, Kierkegaard is not so much offering a criticism of Hegel, as he is screaming out a warning in order to prevent his fellow Copenhageners from letting this sneaky scoundrel make his way into the church (Solomon 1983, 584). On this reading, Kierkegaard and Hegel simply represent two opposing irreconcilable points of view—the former wants to preserve primitive Christianity in the face of growing doubt (compare *JP* 1: 86–87/*SKS* 24: 444–45), and the latter wants to overcome it. Solomon is surely right to point out that Kierkegaard's take on Christianity seems to exemplify the unhappy consciousness that Hegel is so critical

of. And the achievement of Hegel's community of divine human beings would probably be guilty of "entirely quash[ing] Christianity" as it was originally meant to be (Solomon 1983, 586 [quoted from *CUPL* 326]).³⁵

Jon Stewart suggests a more nuanced interpretation of Kierkegaard's apparent criticisms of Hegel. Because Kierkegaard probably has specific Danish Hegelians in mind even when he uses Hegel's name, it may be that his actual opposition to Hegel himself is overstated. I agree that this opposition is not quite as stark and complete as other scholars have claimed (e.g., N. Thulstrup 1980, 370, 379–81). However, by simply comparing what Hegel and Kierkegaard seem to be saying about Christianity in some of their most significant work, I think it is clear that there is indeed a meaningful difference between them. While Stewart (2003, 3) is right to be concerned about approaches that "abstract both Hegel and Kierkegaard from their respective historical contexts and analyze their positions directly vis-à-vis one another without taking into consideration other possible influences," there is simply no denying that Kierkegaard's core complaint is at least applicable to Hegel.

Kierkegaard's more subdued 1854 reaction to Schopenhauer³⁶ is more in line with his discussion of the value he finds in the Stoics, and his qualified appreciation clearly has something to do with their shared distaste for Hegelianism (e.g., *JP* 2: 227–28/*SKS* 25: 390–91). But the common ground Kierkegaard finds with Schopenhauer does not end there. Given Schopenhauer's apparent interest in something like dying to the world, it certainly makes sense that Kierkegaard would be drawn to his work as a corrective for the modern version of (especially Protestant) Christianity that finds itself compatible with, and even encouraging of, secular flourishing (Davini 2007, 278–79, 288; Stokes 2007, 74–75). In fact, he states, "Theological students who are obliged to live here in Denmark in this nonsensical (Christianly) optimism could be advised to take a daily dose of Schopenhauer's *Ethics* to guard against being infected by this drivel" (*JP* 4: 30/*SKS* 25: 376). Since Kierkegaard obviously has an appreciation for Schopenhauerian pessimism about life in the world, one might begin to wonder if any such agreement opens Kierkegaard up to the same sort of attack that Nietzsche levels against Schopenhauer.

Despite any corrective value that Kierkegaard might see, most of his comments about Schopenhauer are quite critical as he tries to put some distance between himself and his "inverse" double (*JP* 4: 26–29/*SKS* 25: 352–56). This criticism often focuses on the same sort of distinction that Kierkegaard makes between the Stoic "eudaimonistic" view, which he seems to associate with Schopenhauer (*JP* 4: 32–33/*SKS* 25: 389–90),³⁷ and proper Christian dying to the world (Davini 2007, 286–88; Stokes 2007, 75–76). Schopenhauer's pessimism about the world indicates a

weary and bitter attitude toward life, and although his goal is a tranquil detachment from the superficiality of this existence, his attitude betrays more sensitivity to the hardships of the world than any actual full-fledged detachment from it.³⁸ Kierkegaard believes that

there is something false . . . in his gloomy Indian view that to live . . . is to suffer. On the other hand it can be very good for the contemporary age to be confronted with such a melancholy view in order to become attentive to the essential Christian principle, . . . to be Christian is to suffer—something that the New Testament teaches as well. . . . It is erected directly upon Jewish optimism, [it] utilizes as foreground the most intensified lust for life . . . in order to introduce Christianity as renunciation. . . . If someone were to say: Wealth is an evil, show your asceticism by giving away your wealth, there would be a self-contradiction here, for in this case it is not asceticism to give away one's wealth. (*JP* 4: 31–32 / *SKS* 25: 389–90)

While Christian dying to the world is a willingness to sacrifice what is pleasant and reasonable and instead endure great hardships if need be, there is no sense of sacrifice of worldliness to be found when the world is not something one wants anyway, just something one is stuck with. Thus, like the Stoic view, Schopenhauer's apparent dying to the world is really just a cover for a certain kind of attachment to, or longing for, worldly comfort and peace (or at least freedom from worldly suffering).

Considering the nature of his final assessment of Schopenhauer, it seems clear that Kierkegaard is not susceptible to Nietzsche's criticisms of the pessimism about life in the world found in Plato, Schopenhauer, and many formulations of Christianity. Not only does Kierkegaard anticipate Nietzsche in rejecting views that indicate weariness in pursuit of escape, which they both attribute to Plato (perhaps unfairly) and Schopenhauer, but Kierkegaard also depicts a Christian dying to the world that demands a kind of embrace of all that might be unpleasant in life (a characteristic of Nietzsche's Dionysian). Furthermore, in response to Nietzsche's accusation that Christianity relentlessly condemns this world in favor of another more perfect world to come, Kierkegaard could point out that his understanding of Christianity does no such thing. Even though he may personally hold onto hope for an afterlife, it is always with an orientation toward how one lives in the present life. From a less defensive perspective, Kierkegaard might actually see Nietzsche's attack on Christianity as an asset for his own attack—Nietzsche demands honesty about the motivations that underlie anyone's pursuit of Christianity. Christianity is not, as Schopenhauer ultimately sees it, a flight from life and its difficulties.

What makes this issue of the relationship between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche even more interesting is that Nietzsche may have realized that Kierkegaard is exempt from his criticisms of Christianity. Miles points out that despite never reading any of Kierkegaard's books, Nietzsche actually had a great deal of access to works that discuss and quote Kierkegaard at length. Among the ideas Nietzsche would have encountered in his reading of Georg Brandes (1842–1927), and Kierkegaard's old adversary Martensen, is Kierkegaard's emphasis on the issue of how an individual lives in the here and now while still following Christ in dying to the world (Miles 2011, 268–74). Not only do facts like this complicate the standard view of Nietzsche's reception of Kierkegaard—that the former meant to read the latter before his breakdown but never got around to it, and therefore knew little of Kierkegaard—but they also call into question other common dogmas about the Kierkegaard-Nietzsche relationship. For example, it seems that Karl Jaspers (1883–1969) (1922, 256) might be mistaken in his claim that “from Nietzsche's standpoint Kierkegaard is hostile to life.”³⁹ Rather than removing meaning from this life, Kierkegaard's Christianity means to reinvigorate it, and Nietzsche is likely aware of this. Miles (2011, 274–78) goes so far as to claim that Nietzsche's positive portrayal of the original “life-affirming” views of Jesus over against the traditional doctrines of the Christian church in late writings, such as *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Anti-Christ*, is actually influenced by his reading about Kierkegaard's focus on primitive Christianity.

Despite the respect that Nietzsche has for Jesus and, perhaps indirectly, Kierkegaard, there is no denying that he is critical of even the less decadent Christianity that they represent. For example, Miles suggests that Nietzsche might view Kierkegaard as he views Pascal, another rare figure that earns Nietzsche's grudging respect. Specifically, Nietzsche's lamentation that Pascal had been led into dying to reason by Christianity might also apply to Kierkegaard (Miles 2011, 279–80). Of course, Kierkegaard would have no problem with being compared to Pascal in this way. If anything, he would say that Pascal did not go far enough in the direction that Nietzsche resents. Ultimately, it must be admitted that there is an irreconcilable opposition between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche given their respective religious views and despite their similarities. Nonetheless, the goal of this discussion is primarily to establish that Kierkegaard provides an account of Christian emphasis on death that is tempered by something like the Nietzschean embrace of existence.

Continuing the trend of speculation about how Kierkegaard would fit with more recent views on death, it seems that he could find some very unlikely allies in the twentieth-century appropriation of pagan and early modern ideas. At first glance, the sort of response to Epicurus offered by

certain analytic thinkers, in which death and life are brought into a kind of retroactive “copresence,” might seem similar to the Kierkegaardian critique of Epicurus. With a closer look, however, it will become apparent that the similarity only goes so far. Stokes (2006, 417) is sympathetic to the anti-Epicurean efforts of thinkers such as Nagel and Pitcher, but he ultimately rejects them for much the same reason that Kierkegaard dismisses Epicurus: “Kierkegaard’s approach to the question of death serves as a compelling response to Epicurean indifference and, at the same time, provides a diagnosis of the failure of contemporary analytic philosophers to ground our fear of death. Nagel, Pitcher and company locate the evil of death in frustratable interests and narratives of harm . . . but never adequately connect these harms to how we *feel* about our *own* mortality.” Even if these analytic thinkers do manage to combat Epicurus and achieve an account of how death that has not yet occurred might still be relevant to understanding life, they do it in such an impersonal way that, like Epicurus’s contemporary religious opponents, they are no better than Epicurus. Kierkegaard, on the other hand, makes death copresent in a way that allows me to experience *my* death while it plays a role in *my* life as *I live it*.

One thing that Stokes does not really address in his Kierkegaardian rebuttal of various analytic philosophers is the group of thinkers, exemplified by Rosenbaum and Jeffrie G. Murphy, who offer a defense of the Epicurean position. Although Rosenbaum provides the more explicit defense of Epicurus, I would like to focus briefly on Murphy’s ideas since they resonate interestingly with Kierkegaard’s assessment of Epicurus. Murphy (1993, 44) wants to develop the “pagan way of thinking about death” that is found in the Stoics, the Epicureans, and Spinoza. This is of course the way of thinking about death that is primarily interested in denying the rationality of fearing death, and thereby “extinguishing that fear” (J. Murphy 1993, 45). Because Kierkegaard argues that extinguishing the fear of death is not a good idea, it might seem as though he and Murphy are headed for conflict. What is fascinating, however, about Murphy’s development of the pagan view of death is that he takes what he finds valuable in the Epicurean intuition and tempers it with what he seems to understand as Spinozist pragmatism. Murphy (1993, 56–57) states, “The fear of death is irrational when it redounds, not to our profit, but to our loss.”⁴⁰ The fear of death is not to be discarded when it does something useful for an individual, but only when it ceases to be useful. I believe that this is roughly the same insight that is at the core of the Kierkegaardian notion of an appropriate fear of death.

However, while Murphy’s interpretation of the Epicurean position is both consistent with Epicurus’s apparent interest in overcoming debili-

tating fear of death due to superstitious beliefs, and perhaps also a handy warning to aspiring Christians who fear inappropriately, it is not without its problems from a Kierkegaardian perspective. The benefit of having a proper fear of death in "At a Graveside" is that such fear allows the thought of death to nudge an individual toward dying to the world. What Murphy seems to have in common with those other analytic thinkers—the ones who worry about frustratable interests—is the focus on worldly advantages and harms. Because Kierkegaard explicitly dismisses these sorts of issues as "incidental" or "accidental" what-concerns, he is unlikely to be overly impressed by any accounts of the rationality/irrationality of the fear of death in such terms.

Having considered what Kierkegaard might think of this most recent appropriation of the Epicurean strain in the history of the philosophy of death, it is worth noting in conclusion that by the twentieth century this strain generally (but perhaps not always) takes for granted that there will be no postmortem subjective experience. And yet Kierkegaard has a penchant for finding ideas from thinkers in this very present-world-oriented strain useful in his attempt to set Christianity back on the right course. Although his reactions to these figures are more diverse (and thus, a bit harder to characterize in a unified way) given that they are not as closely bound as the figures in the Platonic strain, there is a consistent message about dying to the world in these reactions: such dying does not depend upon any reasonable expectation of a personal afterlife. The key concern throughout Kierkegaard's discussion of any thinkers who philosophize about death is how individuals are to make use of death to sharpen the moment of their existence in the here and now. It is this interest in allowing death to play an active role in attributing meaning to life—without relying on an afterlife—that both distinguishes Kierkegaard from most Epicurean and Platonic thinkers, and identifies him as a significant precursor to Heidegger.

Death in *Being and Time*

Heidegger's account of death in *Being and Time* is one of the most controversial and difficult in the history of philosophy's dealings with the topic. In the preface to *Time and Death*, Carol White (2005, 1) claims that "the discussion of this issue in *Being and Time* is far from clear; its intentional false starts and dead ends easily mislead the reader." Even though I believe that there is a cohesiveness to Heidegger's account that makes sense of (at least some of) these so-called false starts and dead ends, I agree with White's general assessment of its misleading nature. Since I am yet to find an explication of Heidegger's death chapter that neatly fits together all of the major pieces of the puzzle, I intend to provide a detailed, section-by-section explication here. It may not be possible to clarify (let alone unify) every cryptic statement, but it will be a worthwhile endeavor if the elusive cohesiveness of these sections begins to emerge. Of course, the death chapter cannot be taken in isolation, and so, I will attempt in what follows to explain its connections to what comes before and after, first within Heidegger's magnum opus and, later, in the history of the philosophy of death.¹

Heidegger first takes up the problem of death at the beginning of "Division Two." It is here that, in an attempt to shed light on the primordial Being of Dasein ("being-there," Heidegger's word for the sort of being that humans are), he claims that it must be grasped in its wholeness. Such a complete and fundamental understanding of itself is necessary if Dasein is to uncover the meaning of "Being," a basic notion that is often taken for granted (the inquiry into these matters is what Heidegger calls "fundamental ontology"—his overall project in *Being and Time*). Because Dasein is "that entity which understands what it is to be" (Guignon 1983, 68), Heidegger is interested first and foremost in the Being of Dasein (*BT* 5–8, 14–15). And since a partial or derivative account of Dasein will not provide a clear and thorough picture of how Being shows up for Dasein, he must work out a complete and foundational account.² Heidegger states, "If the Interpretation of Dasein's Being is to become primordial, as a foundation for working out the basic question of ontology, then it must first have brought to light existentially the Being of Dasein in its possibilities of *authenticity* and *totality*" (*BT* 233). Unfortunately, it seems that Dasein can never be grasped

in its wholeness because “there is in every case something still outstanding” about it—its death (*BT* 233). Death is notoriously difficult to get a handle on since once it happens there is no longer Dasein. If one is to grasp the wholeness of Dasein, one will have to find a way to deal with this troublesome death issue.³ Thus, Heidegger seems to embark upon a quest for an understanding of death in which, contra Epicurus, death and I coexist (*BT* 236–37).

The Death Chapter

Heidegger begins his search by considering common approaches to death in order to expose its proper characteristics. In section 47, for example, he reflects on the possibility of grasping the wholeness of Dasein by witnessing the death of the other, but determines that the other’s death is not something that I, as this particular Dasein, can encounter in the relevant sense. Heidegger points out that “we have no way of access to the loss-of-Being as such which the dying man ‘suffers’” (*BT* 239). Thus, he concludes that only Dasein’s own death is of interest for the sake of grasping its wholeness:

Dying is something that every Dasein itself must take upon itself at the time. By its very essence, death is in every case mine. . . . Death signifies a peculiar possibility-of-Being in which the very Being of one’s own Dasein is an issue. In dying, it is shown that mineness and existence are ontologically constitutive for death. . . . If ‘ending’, as dying, is constitutive for Dasein’s totality, then the Being of this wholeness itself must be conceived as an existential phenomenon of a Dasein which is in each case one’s own. (*BT* 240)

In addition to getting at the first formal characteristic of death, “mine-ness” (*Jemeinigkeit*) or “ownmostness,”⁴ this passage also hints for the first time in the chapter that death is not to be understood in the usual way as an event that comes at the end of life. Since it is rather to be conceived as an “existential phenomenon,” Heidegger begins to explain this conception of dying (*Sterben*) by making it distinct from the “perishing” (*Verenden*) of living things (*BT* 240–41). However, as this is only the first of a few such distinctions, his explanation of this importantly odd use of otherwise common language will require more than one section of the death chapter to complete.

Because death is often said to be the end of Dasein, section 48

considers the different common ways of understanding the ending of things in order to determine which might apply to death. Among the possible ways of understanding ending is the fulfillment characteristic of ripening fruit. Even though Heidegger ultimately rejects ripening as the appropriate kind of ending for a description of Dasein's death (ripening is a realizing of a goal, while death initially seems to be what makes this sort of achievement impossible in that it often leaves projects unfinished), there is an aspect of his discussion of ripening that he retains in his understanding of death as an ending (BT 243–44). This aspect is the fact that, like the fruit which carries its “not-yet” ripe with it as it ripens, Dasein carries its not yet at an end with it while it exists. That is, it carries its death with it as that which it is not yet. In Heidegger's words: “Just as Dasein *is* already its ‘not-yet’, and is its ‘not-yet’ constantly as long as it is, it *is* already its end too. The ‘ending’ which we have in view when we speak of death, does not signify Dasein's Being-at-an-end [*Zu-Ende-sein*], but a *Being-towards-the-end* [*Sein zum Ende*] of this entity. Death is a way to be, which Dasein takes over as soon as it is” (BT 245). Not only does this passage begin to explain Heidegger's notion of death as “a way to be” instead of as an event, it also gives the reader a glimpse of how death need not render impossible a proper grasp of the whole of Dasein (BT 245–46). Since I am always my death, in the sense of being toward it, Heidegger may have found a way of showing how death and I can coexist.

To go with his new equation of Dasein's dying with Being-towards-death, Heidegger's section 49 supplements the explanation of his peculiar use of otherwise common terminology that he began when he distinguished death from the perishing of living things. It does so by adding a further term, “demise” (*Ableben*), and claiming that this term signifies the specific sort of passing away that only happens to Dasein. In other words, demise is to Dasein what perishing is to something alive. Heidegger explains: “The ending of that which lives we have called ‘perishing’. Dasein too ‘has’ its death, of the kind appropriate to anything that lives . . . as codetermined by its primordial kind of Being. . . . Dasein too can end without authentically dying, though on the other hand, *qua* Dasein, it does not simply perish. We designate this intermediate phenomenon as its ‘demise’” (BT 247). Once he makes this further distinction, Heidegger suggests that demise is the actual object of study when any ontic science (as opposed to ontological inquiry) picks up on the topic of human death. For example, psychology merely concerns itself with how people feel about the impending, final, and irreversible moment that shuts down their relationships, projects, and perspective; and theology deals with, among other things, what might happen after such an event (Heidegger seems to dismiss the Christian account of death

aimed at “edification” here, but it is unclear if he has Kierkegaard in mind) (BT 247–48).⁵

According to Heidegger, these ontic investigations into the significance of demise must not be allowed to contaminate the ontological, or existential, understanding of death as Being-towards-death. He asserts, “Methodologically, the existential analysis is superordinate to the questions of a biology, psychology, theodicy, or theology of death” (BT 248). Heidegger is attempting to provide a purely formal account of what Dasein is. Such an account will be sufficiently general so as to apply to (or underlie) any of the more content-laden and specific accounts of what it is to be human that are provided by the various sciences. As Heidegger has laid things out, Being-towards-death is the appropriately general sense of death for understanding the structure of Dasein. Because the sciences, in their dealings with death, address only the specifics of their respective views of demise, they cannot contribute to Heidegger’s treatment of Being-towards-death. In order to demonstrate further the importance of this treatment and show that it is not some arbitrary construction, Heidegger concludes this section by claiming that it must be connected with his earlier analysis of Dasein’s Being-in-the-world (BT 248–49).

In the last chapter of “Division One,” Heidegger designates the Being of Dasein as “care,” which he defines as “ahead-of-itself-Being-already-in-(the-world) as Being-alongside (entities encountered within-the-world)” (BT 192). That is, Dasein is essentially oriented toward its future, while already thrown into a past that includes not only its own past actions but also its capabilities and cultural background, and engaged with the things and others it encounters and the projects it is concerned about. To each of these three components of care, Heidegger gives a name of sorts—the “ahead-of-itself” he calls “existence,” the “Being-already-in” he calls “facticity,” and the “Being-alongside” he calls “falling” (BT 249–50). The purpose of section 50 is to explain how each of these components of care is manifested in Being-towards-death.

Heidegger begins this explanation by discussing Dasein’s ahead-of-itself/existence as manifested in the impending nature of death. Having given up on the idea of death as something still outstanding, because this idea understands death as an event that has not yet taken place, he must offer an account of death’s impending nature that does not make this same mistake. Thus, he provides his first list of the formal characteristics of Being-towards-death as an impending possibility—characteristics indicated by ordinary notions about death (e.g., that everyone dies alone, and that death is unavoidable).⁶ He starts with the ownmostness already mentioned and adds that death is “that *possibility . . . which is non-relational, and which is not to be outstripped* [*unüberholbare*]” (BT 250–51). As Being-

towards-death, Heidegger points out that Dasein is its own possibility of no more Dasein, and he believes that this means two things. First, since it is the possible disconnection from all that it has been, including its purely accidental relations to others, Dasein should understand its individuality in such a way that it cannot rely on these relations to explain itself. It is responsible for itself and its choices. Second, as its own constant possibility of no more Dasein, Dasein's Being-towards-death always stands before it and cannot be gotten beyond. In other words, so long as one is, one can never finish with death or actualize this unique possibility. It is in this sense of something always standing before it—that is, ahead-of-itself—that Heidegger sees death as impending. In fact, because nothing else seems to stand before Dasein in such a distinctive way, he states, in reference to the ahead-of-itself, “This item in the structure of care has its most primordial concretion in Being-towards-death” (BT 251).⁷

Since Dasein is essentially ahead-of-itself-Being-towards-death, it must have found itself “*thrown* into this possibility” (BT 251). That is, in existing, Dasein has from its beginning, as a fact of its existence, its possibility of its no longer being. Whether or not a particular Dasein is explicitly aware of it, this facticity is in some sense revealed by the presence of anxiety. Heidegger claims, “Anxiety in the face of death is anxiety ‘in the face of’ that potentiality-for-Being which is one’s ownmost, non-relational, and not to be outstripped. . . . This anxiety is not an accidental or random mood of ‘weakness’ . . . but, as a basic state-of-mind of Dasein, it amounts to the disclosedness of the fact that Dasein exists as thrown Being *towards* its end” (BT 251). This passage refers back to both the definition of anxiety in the last chapter of “Division One” and the discussion of state-of-mind (*Befindlichkeit*) in the penultimate chapter. Although it would surely be worthwhile to explore these ideas in connection with Kierkegaard’s extensive discussions of mood and anxiety,⁸ it is most important, for my present purposes, simply to note that despite Dasein’s ever-present state of anxiety, Heidegger believes that most of the time Dasein remains ignorant of the fact that it is essentially Being-towards-death (in fact, Dasein often remains unaware of its anxiety as well). Rather, Dasein “falls” into “the ‘world’ of its concern” (BT 252). In other words, instead of owning oneself as the possibility of no more possibility, one is often guilty of ignoring this fact by losing oneself in everyday activities and thereby “fleeing in the face of one’s ownmost Being-towards-death” (BT 252).

Having explained how all three components of care—existence, facticity, and falling—are manifested in Being-towards-death, Heidegger’s account of death does indeed seem less arbitrary. At the very least it now seems to fit in with the rest of *Being and Time* so far. However, Hei-

degger claims that this connection of care and death (where care contributes the basic structure of Dasein's Being and death primarily contributes the appropriate sense of the "ahead-of-itself" component of this structure), which he makes in order to get the whole of Dasein into view, requires some "phenomenal confirmation" in the way Dasein relates to its end in everyday dealings with the world (*BT* 252). While his account is purely formal in that it intentionally offers only the skeletal description of Dasein without recommending any particular material ways of life to fill it out (which Heidegger is careful not to do in order to avoid contaminating his inquiry with the ontic assumptions and baggage that make up such material), it is still helpful, both for understanding and corroborating his account, to see how death is dealt with on the ontic/existentiell level, particularly in common everyday parlance.

In search of his phenomenal confirmation, Heidegger's section 51 reminds readers of chapters 4 and 5 of "Division One" that everydayness is characterized by the "idle talk" of the public "they" (*BT* 252). The "they," taking death as something like mere demise, and relying on worn-out clichés and the old standard statistics of the ontic sciences, "tempts" Dasein both to forget that death is its own and to treat the event of death as something that need not be worried about just yet. In a passage that could easily be used to describe Epicurean views, Heidegger points out that "in such a way of talking, death is understood as an indefinite something . . . which is proximally *not yet present-at-hand* for oneself, and is therefore no threat. . . . 'Dying' is leveled off to an occurrence which reaches Dasein, to be sure, but belongs to nobody in particular" (*BT* 253). Here idle talk not only provides a questionable account of demise, but it also hides the fact that death, understood as Being-towards-death, is no mere eventual actuality; it is one's constant possibility. This hiding of Dasein's essential Being-towards-death by the "they" can often be seen in its "tranquilizing" of death, which involves focusing on the everyday world of concerns. For those who are more clearly near the end of life, this tranquilization manifests itself in the consolation that assures the dying that they will soon be back on their feet engaged in their normal activities. For the rest, tranquilization shows up in the attitude that treats the dying of others as an inconvenience that should be dealt with quickly so as not to disturb the everyday concerns of the living (*BT* 253–54).

In addition to temptation and tranquilization, the "they" also "alienates" Dasein from itself. This alienation is the result of a kind of double concealment of Dasein's essential Being-towards-death. As already pointed out, anxiety is the primordial state-of-mind of Dasein as thrown into its own Being-towards-death. Focusing on death in Heidegger's sense of demise, the "they," however, transforms "this anxiety into fear

in the face of an oncoming event" (*BT* 254). But this initial concealment of Being-towards-death is not enough for the "they," which then goes on to treat the fear of the event of demise as something weak and cowardly. In depicting such fear in this way, and recommending instead a sort of indifference to death, the "they" (sounding a bit like Stoics and Epicureans at this point) buries the anxiety that is a necessary part of Dasein as Being-towards-death under an extra layer of deception. Already removed from anxiety by one layer due to the substitution of fear in the face of demise, Dasein is then further encouraged to avoid an intimate encounter with this fear.

After concluding this explanation of alienation, Heidegger states, "Temptation, tranquilization, and alienation, are distinguishing marks of the kind of Being called 'falling'" (*BT* 254). More specifically, these three reactions to death suggest a way of falling in with the entities and activities of the everyday world that encourages "fleeing in the face of death" (*BT* 254). But even if one is unaware of what one is doing, fleeing is still a way of Being-towards-death. Given the connection of Being-towards-death and falling (discussed in section 50), which is one of the three components of care, it seems that fleeing provides the sought-after everyday confirmation of Heidegger's connection of care and Being-towards-death (*BT* 254–55). In looking at everydayness and its various death-related mistakes, however, it has become clear that his list of the formal characteristics of death is in need of expansion. Thus, the next step for Heidegger is "to try to secure a full existential conception of Being-towards-the-end" (*BT* 255).

As one might guess based on the errors of idle talk, section 52 will add certainty and the indefiniteness of this certainty to Heidegger's list of the formal characteristics of death. In everydayness, the "they" admits the fact that death, as the event of demise, is certain in the sense of "not doubted" (*BT* 255, 257). But Heidegger believes that this claim of certainty merely convinces the "they" that since it has already grasped death's certainty, it need not look into this matter any further. Thus, the proper sort of certainty that belongs to Being-towards-death remains hidden from the "they" (*BT* 257). Heidegger is distinguishing here between certainty as a way to be (perhaps like an attitude in the sense of self-assurance), as in "Being-certain," and the sort of certainty that he claims is derived from Being-certain and applied to the things one is certain about (*BT* 256). For example, I can be so assured that I must be prepared for rain that I manifest my attitude in the way I structure my day—the way I dress, the route I take to work, the activities I choose; and this Being-certain of myself as "prepared for rain" has nothing to do with whether or not it actually rains.⁹ This latter issue comes up when con-

sidering whether or not my attitude is appropriate given the likelihood of precipitation. It is this secondary concern with “actual” events, rather than ways of being, that leads to (often indifferent) statements like “it will certainly rain today.”

Because death is not to be understood as the event of demise for Heidegger, but rather as a way to be, it is clear that he must not be interested in the derivative sort of certainty that the “they” applies to this event. If Dasein is to grasp the original certainty of death, Dasein must *be* certain of itself as Being-towards-death, but this is precisely what is made difficult by viewing death’s certainty as the “they” does. Heidegger believes that “the ‘they’ overlooks the fact that in order to be able to be certain of death, Dasein itself must in every case be certain of its ownmost non-relational potentiality-for-being” (BT 257). Due to its focus on demise, the “they” can at best have only an empirical certainty based on witnessing the demise of others, but this empirical sense is mere distraction and contributes nothing to the only certainty that belongs to Being-towards-death according to Heidegger.

Despite the hiding of Being-certain of Being-towards-death behind the merely empirical certainty of demise, Heidegger claims that even in everydayness there is still some vague hint of this Being-certain. The very persistence of Dasein’s, perhaps not obvious, state of anxiety about itself as Being-towards-death, which is even found in Dasein’s falling, betrays some, albeit disowned, sense of Being-certain of Being-towards-death. Heidegger says, “The falling everydayness of Dasein is acquainted with death’s certainty, and yet evades *Being-certain*” (BT 258). Just as Being-towards-death is attested in falling everydayness, so is Being-certain of Being-towards-death. As odd as it may sound, everydayness is Being-certain by evading Being-certain; the mere fact that such evasion is possible shows that there is something to be evaded.

With the certainty of death comes its indefiniteness, but the “they” in its everyday way once again demonstrates its concealing of death’s certainty by failing to acknowledge such indefiniteness. Heidegger states, “Death is deferred to ‘sometime later’. . . . The ‘they’ covers up what is peculiar in death’s certainty—that it is *possible at any moment*. Along with the certainty of death goes the *indefiniteness* of its ‘when’” (BT 258). Because the “they” treats death as an event that is not due to take place anytime soon, it is clearly guilty of failure to acknowledge the indefiniteness as to when demise will take place. Rather than facing up to this mistake, Heidegger claims that the “they” retreats into a false definiteness associated with the activities of the everyday world of concern. That is, the “they” finds itself primarily, if not entirely, engaged in actualizing possibilities, accomplishing goals, and producing definite results in everyday

matters without giving much thought to passing away. The problem with this sort of definiteness is that, given the fact that demise can happen at any time, it is purely an accident (i.e., a contingent occurrence) if any particular possibilities reach “definition” or actualization. Here one can see, in the everyday evasion of the indefiniteness as to when demise will take place, an indication of the essential *Being*-indefinite that goes along with the Being-certain of Being-towards-death. The fact that all definiteness or actualization is accidental for Dasein suggests that Dasein is essentially possibility or unfinished indefiniteness. Viewed in this way, the “they” does not merely have a mistaken approach to demise; the “they” also uses this mistaken approach to conceal the true indefinite nature of Dasein’s Being-towards-death (BT 258).

After adding the indefinite certainty of death, Heidegger finally has a “full existential-ontological conception of death” (BT 258). Before moving on to the last section of the death chapter, however, he offers something in the way of a review. Given that he has now made explicit all of the formal characteristics of Dasein as it is “*towards*” its “not-yet,” Heidegger reminds the reader that “in Dasein, as being towards its death, its own uttermost ‘not-yet’ has already been included—that ‘not-yet’ which all others lie ahead of” (BT 259). As mentioned earlier, it is this inclusion of its own death, in the sense of Being ahead-of-itself towards-death when explained in terms of Dasein’s essential care structure, that makes grasping the wholeness of Dasein possible without its encountering demise. Heidegger’s understanding of death allows the ahead-of-itself aspect of Dasein to be seen in unity with the other aspects of the care structure (as opposed to seeking the ever-elusive characterization of the event that concludes or completes life). Even though Heidegger is approaching his stated goal of grasping the wholeness of Dasein, he still has a great deal of work left to do. To begin with, while he has made “*inauthentic Being-towards-death*” sufficiently clear as “everyday falling evasion *in the face of* death,” such inauthenticity presupposes the possibility of an authentic (*eigentlich*) Being-towards-death (BT 259).¹⁰ Heidegger himself wonders whether or not Dasein can “maintain itself in an authentic Being-towards-its-end” (BT 260). Until this issue is addressed, his account of death will not be complete.

Section 53, the final section of the death chapter, begins by suggesting that there may have been no point in providing the full existential-ontological conception of death, since there seems to be no existentiell instance (i.e., actual occurrence) of authentic Being-towards-death. All one sees in the world is inauthentic Being-towards-death (BT 260). However, given this evasive Being-towards-death as a kind of example of what

not to do, it should at least be feasible to describe what the taking on of one's death in a non-evasive, authentic way would be like (BT 260–61). Heidegger begins this description by ruling out the various ways in which one might relate oneself to death understood as the event of demise. These ways of relating—"actualization" (in the sense of suicide), "brooding," and "expecting"—are alike in that they all seek in some way or another to diminish death's possibility by looking for its actuality (BT 261–62).

But as the discussion of indefiniteness suggests, Dasein's Being-towards-death has nothing to do with actualization; rather, death understood in this sense shows that Dasein "at the most basic level is a reaching forward into possibilities," as Guignon (2011a, 197) explains. Heidegger eventually comes to the conclusion that the proper way to maintain Being-towards-death in its pure possibility is by what he calls "anticipating," or "running forward toward" (*vorlaufen*), death (BT 262; compare Guignon 2011a, 197).¹¹ Since what is revealed in anticipation is that Dasein is pure projection into possibility, there is nothing essential to be made actual so long as one exists. Heidegger states,

Death, as possibility, gives Dasein nothing to be 'actualized', nothing which Dasein, as actual, could itself *be*. It is the possibility of the impossibility of every way of comporting oneself towards anything. . . . The anticipation of this possibility . . . signifies the possibility of the measureless impossibility of existence. In accordance with its essence, this possibility offers no support for becoming intent on something, 'picturing' to oneself the actuality which is possible, and so forgetting its possibility. Being-towards-death, as anticipation of possibility, is what first *makes* this possibility *possible*, and sets it free as possibility. (BT 262)

This passage and others like it on pages 262–63 are perhaps the most obscure in the entire chapter, but what Heidegger seems to be suggesting here is that in anticipating death (i.e., authentically Being-towards-death) Dasein finds a certain freedom in being somewhat undefined as to the specific content of its existence. Dreyfus (1991, 312), in an apparent gloss on the sort of impossibility Heidegger is getting at, sees the anticipation of death as illustrating "that Dasein can have neither a nature nor an identity, that it is the constant impossibility of *being* anything specific." This is not to say that one is absolutely free in the superficial sense of "anything is available to me" since, as will become clear, there are certain limitations on the shape and scope of one's pursuits. Nonetheless, no concrete way of life can ever be essential to Dasein in the way

that pure possibility is. In order to see clearly how Heidegger reaches these conclusions about authentic Being-towards-death, he must re-view his formal characteristics of death through the lens of anticipation.

He goes through each of these characteristics in turn, repeating much of what he has already said about them, but now emphasizing the lessons that each characteristic provides when one anticipates death. Since Dasein has its ownmost possibility in death (i.e., no one else can take on my Being-towards-death), there is at least one possibility in which Dasein is distinct from the “they.” While this is always true, it is through authentic Being-towards-death that one can become aware of oneself in this distinction from the nebulous anonymity (*BT* 263). Because it is one’s own self that becomes an issue in this way of encountering death, there is a sense in which one must stand alone in anticipation, independent of relationships with other Dasein and things in the world. An authentic grasp of one’s Being-towards-death is non-relational in that it individualizes Dasein and demonstrates that while such an individual is always connected to these others, this connection cannot be wholly determinative of what one is. The anticipation of death, therefore, leads Dasein to take responsibility for itself (*BT* 263–64).

That death is not to be outstripped means that Dasein’s Being-towards-death, unlike all of the thoughtless accidental possibilities of the “they” that Dasein accrues like barnacles throughout its existence, always stands before it and cannot be gotten beyond. Whereas any other possibilities and projects can be finished or given up, one can never actualize or be done with this one unique possibility. Once Dasein realizes this in anticipation, it becomes clear that no particular possibility, other than Being-towards-death, is essential to Dasein, despite the attitudes of the “they” that say otherwise; and so, Dasein recognizes its freedom before all of the possibilities that are factually available to it so long as it is.¹² Heidegger states, “One is liberated from one’s lostness in those possibilities which may accidentally thrust themselves upon one. . . . Anticipation . . . shatters all one’s tenaciousness to whatever existence one has reached” (*BT* 264). Because the anticipation of death opens Dasein up to its essential projection into the possibilities that lie before it, Dasein is able to realize its constant ahead-of-itself orientation, which is a necessary part of grasping its wholeness.

The anticipation of the certainty of death, or authentically Being-certain of Being-towards-death, means being assured “of what is revealed by being-toward-death” (Guignon 2011a, 198). What is revealed, in connection with the notion that death is not to be outstripped, is of course that Dasein is pure projection into possibilities. Heidegger declares, “The certain possibility of death . . . discloses Dasein as possibility” (*BT* 264).

But being certain of itself as essentially possibility cannot be like the ordinary objective “taking something as true,” which may dictate behavior in the sense of “given fact x, I must proceed with behavior y.” Although no doubt helpful in particular cases, this sort of indifferent truth seems inappropriate given that it is Dasein’s very Being that is up for discussion here. Rather, Heidegger is suggesting a comprehensive and personal way of being true that compels and colors all of one’s behavior. He states, “Holding death for true does not demand just *one* definite kind of behaviour in Dasein, but demands Dasein itself in the full authenticity of its existence” (BT 265). An important part of this “holding death for true” in anticipation involves cultivating indefiniteness. As previously pointed out, the uncertainty with respect to the “when” of demise implies that Being-certain of Being-towards-death means proceeding into possibilities with no guarantee of completing or actualizing any of them, which might thereby allow one to define oneself as a particular sort of being. In the anticipation of death, one learns not only of the insecurity or anxiety of being such an essentially indefinite being, but one also discovers how to embrace this anxiety as a necessary part of existence (in contrast to how the “they” deal with fear) (BT 265–66).

Taking all of this together, Heidegger offers a summary “characterization of authentic Being-towards-death”: “*Anticipation reveals to Dasein its lostness in the they-self, and brings it face to face with the possibility of being itself, primarily unsupported by concerned solicitude, but of being itself, rather, in an impassioned **freedom towards death**—a freedom which has been released from the illusions of the ‘they’, and which is factual, certain of itself, and anxious*” (BT 266). The freedom towards death that results from the anticipation of the various aspects of death is, as suggested before, the freedom from ever being essentially determined by any particular possibilities or ways of understanding. In authentic Being-towards-death, Dasein is liberated not only from everyday ways of understanding death, but also from everyday ways of understanding anything, including itself. Rather than being defined by the goals and projects that the “they” expects one to pursue and complete in life, Dasein becomes free to be what it really is—ahead-of-itself for the sake of itself. Although Heidegger will have more to say on this topic in later chapters, perhaps such freedom is best described simply as Dasein’s being pure possibility—being open to the totality of available possibilities standing before it, with less concern about which particular possibilities may or may not be actualized (compare Guignon 2011a, 198; 2011b, 93–98).

It should come as no surprise by this point that even at the end of his death chapter, with an account of the “final” piece of the Dasein picture in hand, Heidegger still sees more work to be done: “The question

of Dasein's authentic Being-a-whole and of its existential constitution still hangs in mid-air" (BT 267). He has provided what he meant to in this final section of the chapter—a description of the form that an authentic existentiell Being-towards-death would have to take. In his own words, Heidegger "has made visible the *ontological* possibility of an existentiell Being-towards-death which is authentic . . . without holding up to Dasein an ideal of existence with any special 'content'" (BT 266). However, he feels that this is a hollow victory, "a fantastical exaction," unless he can also demonstrate that Dasein actually does "demand" such authenticity of itself (BT 266). Thus, Heidegger seeks to connect the anticipation of death with Dasein's complete structure in order to see how authenticity can happen.

Death and the Rest of "Division Two"

Armed with this detailed account of the death chapter, it should now be possible to pick up the pace in explaining how the anticipation of death relates to the rest of *Being and Time*. Since the anticipation of death only accounts for the "final" third—the ahead-of-itself, or "futuraity"—of Dasein's care structure in its authenticity, what must still be explained are the other two thirds in their authenticity.¹³ Heidegger begins to take up the issue of Dasein's thrownness or "pastness" in the second chapter of "Division Two," when he introduces the "call of conscience" and "guilt." The idea here is that while Dasein is pure projection into possibilities, it does not determine these possibilities for itself; rather, it finds itself thrown into a situation in which certain possibilities are available and others are not. Heidegger states, "Every Dasein always exists factically. It is not a free-floating self-projection; but its character is determined by thrownness as a Fact of the entity which it is" (BT 276). Even though Dasein has freedom from the "they" as to certain specifics, Dasein is not absolutely free insofar as it does owe a debt of gratitude "to the culture for an understanding of itself" within a certain horizon of what is available to it (Dreyfus 1991, 308). This debt is Heidegger's notion of guilt (*Schuld*), which he has cleansed of any moral or theological connotations. As an expression of Dasein's thrown Being-already-in, such guilt is an essential part of Dasein as care; thus, if Dasein is to reach its authenticity, its guilt or pastness (like its death or futuraity) must be related to properly (BT 283–84).

One must not ignore one's debt and behave as though all things are possible, or what is just as likely, use one's thrownness to deny any free-

dom or “say” in one’s existence at all. Instead, Heidegger believes that Dasein, as the Being that has an interest in what it is, must appropriate and take responsibility for its guilt even though it did not choose *to be* or to be in its particular situation (at least initially). He claims: “Existent Dasein does not encounter itself as something present-at-hand within-the-world. But neither does thrownness adhere to Dasein as an inaccessible characteristic which is of no importance for its existence. . . . Dasein has been thrown *into existence*. It exists as an entity which has to be as it is and as it can be” (BT 276). Although Dasein is in a sense constrained by its thrownness, just as no particular possibility to be actualized is as essentially determinative of Dasein’s Being as pure projecting into possibilities, there is no particular possibility or set of possibilities that Dasein is thrown into that can absolutely account for Dasein’s choices. It is in the choosing rather than in what can be chosen that Dasein essentially defines itself. While Dasein has to choose to act on certain possibilities that are available to it, Dasein does so to the exclusion of other available options, and its choosing some rather than others cannot be simply blamed on its thrown situation. Dasein chooses, or projects itself into possibilities, with nothing in its pastness or futurity to justify its choices. Heidegger states, “Freedom . . . is only in the choice of *one* possibility—that is, in tolerating one’s not having chosen the others and one’s not being able to choose them. . . . Thus ‘care’—Dasein’s Being—means, as thrown projection, Being-the-basis of a nullity (and this Being-the-basis is itself null). This means that *Dasein as such is guilty*” (BT 285). This passage suggests that, in making unsupported choices based on its foundation of available options, Dasein freely takes on the debt or guilt (whether one knows it or not) of having such options.¹⁴ But perhaps the question remains why it matters whether or not one acknowledges, or attempts to “lucidly understand” (Dreyfus 1991, 307), one’s responsibility for having chosen among the possibilities that one’s thrownness makes available.¹⁵

It will be helpful at this point to explain the notion of the call of conscience: “The call of conscience has the character of an *appeal* to Dasein by calling it to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being-its-Self; and this is done by way of *summoning* it to its ownmost Being-guilty” (BT 269). Again stripped of any moral or theological connotations, this call is something like Dasein’s innate awareness that it owes it to itself to take on its thrownness as indispensable to what it is. That is, once it realizes its essential structure as care, Dasein must acknowledge that it has an intimate connection to both its inherited pastness and its indeterminate futurity built right into its very Being (BT 306–7). Conscience calls out to Dasein to be authentic, to own up to what it is, and what it is, is the inherited possibilities it is ahead-of-itself toward (BT 277–78, 284–85).

The responsible acknowledging or understanding of one's essential guilt, which Dasein demands of itself in the call of conscience, is what Heidegger calls "resoluteness" (*Entschlossenheit*, literally "un-closedness"). He states, "Wanting-to-have-a-conscience resolves upon this Being-guilty. To project oneself upon this Being-guilty, which Dasein is *as long as it is*, belongs to the very meaning of resoluteness" (BT 305). Resoluteness is the authentic way of relating to one's "pastness" in that in it Dasein takes ownership of its thrownness, but maintains its essential lack of determination by any particular possibilities that it is thrown into or given by the "they." While Dasein acknowledges that these particular possibilities may not be its own in some sense, it remains open (i.e., "un-closed") to owning up to them by making its own unsupported decisions based upon its "current factual Situation" (BT 307).¹⁶

Given that Heidegger has provided an account of Dasein's authentic grasp of both its "pastness" (resoluteness) and its "futuraity" (anticipation of death), it seems that Dasein can almost be understood in its authentic totality. Heidegger asserts, "*Temporality gets experienced in a phenomenally primordial way in Dasein's authentic Being-a-whole, in the phenomenon of anticipatory resoluteness*" (BT 304). In order to complete an account of this "phenomenally primordial temporality," all that remains to be explained is the resolute "making present" of the thrown possibilities that Dasein runs forward toward (BT 326).¹⁷ In other words, one might say that this remaining issue concerning anticipatory resoluteness is the question of the sense of authentic "presentness" that binds Dasein's "pastness" to its "futuraity," or its "birth" to its "death." This "presentness" is what Heidegger calls the "moment of vision" (*Augenblick*, literally "blink of an eye").¹⁸ He states, "To the anticipation which goes with resoluteness, there belongs a Present in accordance with which a resolution discloses the Situation. In resoluteness, the Present is not only brought back from distraction with the objects of one's closest concern, but it gets held in the future and in having been. That *Present* which is held in authentic temporality and which thus is *authentic* itself, we call the '*moment of vision*'" (BT 338). This moment, which is certainly not the "now-moment" of everyday temporality but rather the "between" that "stretches along" from authentic Dasein's birth to its death (BT 374), represents something like responsibly choosing and projecting toward a possibility that it has knowingly taken over from its thrownness. Heidegger provides his clearest statement of the connection of these difficult ideas in his discussion of Dasein's historicity. Here he claims that in the moment of vision one hands one's thrown possibilities, or cultural "heritage" (*Erbe*) down to one's projecting or "fate" (*Schicksal*) in an act of "repetition"¹⁹ of these "past" possibilities (BT 383–86).²⁰

It is in such repetition, “which is futurally in the process-of-having-been” (BT 391), that one can find the glue that finally makes grasping the wholeness of Dasein possible. Perhaps a brief summary will help to make this unity apparent. In the anticipation of death, one comes to understand that one is essentially free toward possibilities so long as one is. This freedom means that the incessant preoccupation with actualized “output,” which is not essential to Dasein but is characteristic of the “they,” is undermined (BT 383–84, 388). But resolute acceptance of one’s birth or inherited guilt makes it clear that Dasein’s freedom toward death is limited in its range of possibilities by its factual situation. In an often-quoted passage about Dasein’s anticipatory resoluteness, Heidegger speaks of “the power of its finite freedom” in which “it can take over the *powerlessness* of abandonment” to throw Being-towards-death “and can thus come to have a clear vision for the accidents of the Situation that has been disclosed” (BT 384). This clear moment of vision allows Dasein to choose from its horizon of possibilities, while preserving its essence as freedom or pure possibility, that is, without treating either this horizon or these particular choices as entirely determinative of what Dasein is (Guignon 2011b, 96–98; compare Kisiel 1993, 340).²¹ Heidegger puts all of this together when he says, “When its heritage is thus handed down to itself, its ‘birth’ is *caught up into its existence* in coming back from the possibility of death (the possibility which is not to be outstripped), if only so that this existence may accept the thrownness of its own ‘there’ in a way which is more free from Illusion” (BT 391). So Dasein in its authentic and unified structure is a running forward toward possibilities that it allows itself (as opposed to taking them over accidentally or uncritically from the everyday practices of the “they”) based upon what was available to it.

The account of Heidegger thus far has focused on the nature of his thoughts on death in *Being and Time* and their relationship to other important concepts in this text. Along the way it has been possible to draw attention to a few instances in which his comments may have been directed at, or were at least relevant to, the views of some of the key philosophers of death that I have considered in previous chapters. Most notably, I have suggested that his characterization of the role that death plays in the care structure of Dasein is in some sense a response to Epicurus. What remains to be seen is how his treatment of the topic relates to the ideas of other philosophers of death, especially those in the Platonic strain. And even more interesting than this is of course the relationship and the issue of influence that exists between Kierkegaard

and Heidegger. Although there are obvious connections, and numerous suspicions amongst scholars about what Heidegger appropriates from Kierkegaard, it is perhaps not immediately clear how much their “existential” accounts of death overlap. This is the problem that will attract much of my attention going forward.

Heidegger's Reception of Kierkegaard

The Existential Philosophy of Death

It should come as no surprise by now that Heidegger relies on Kierkegaard when describing “Being-towards-death” in *Being and Time*, despite the fact that he does not explicitly mention the Dane in this regard. In addition to this relative silence, however, determining what precisely Heidegger owes to Kierkegaard on this topic is further complicated by Heidegger's general opinion that his efforts dig deeper than Kierkegaard is able to working in a more overtly Christian context. By looking closely at the many points of convergence between the Kierkegaardian and Heideggerian descriptions of allowing death to penetrate one's existence, and at what can be determined about Heidegger's reception of Kierkegaard, I will provide a thorough understanding of the relationship between them when it comes to the issue of death.

Ultimately, I believe that Kierkegaard's influence goes right to the very heart of Heidegger's project; despite their differences, there is an overarching sense in which Kierkegaard and Heidegger are working on the same philosophy of death. The complicated role of death in *Being and Time*, much like Kierkegaard's treatment of the topic, could hardly have been developed without relying upon the vast assortment of philosophical dealings with death that came before it. As we have seen, this rich history can be roughly broken up into two strains: the Platonic, which emphasizes personal afterlife and recommends meditation on death as preparation for this postmortem experience, and the Epicurean, which casts doubt upon personal afterlife and encourages becoming desensitized to death. While both Kierkegaard and Heidegger are rooted in the soil of the Platonic/Christian tradition, they react to and incorporate Epicurean insights, thereby advancing a compelling way of living with death—an “existential philosophy of death”—that is in some sense a blending of, or compromise between, the Platonic and the Epicurean strains. In the course of providing a more thorough account of the connection between Kierkegaard and Heidegger on death-related issues

than has previously been offered, I also further expound my unique characterization of the genealogical development of their largely shared project.

What Heidegger Was Reading

Although Heidegger rarely discusses Kierkegaard in any great detail (as he does so many other thinkers that have a profound impact on his thought), there is little doubt that he was well versed in Kierkegaard's writings. Consider, briefly, what was available to him. Besides the numerous translations of Kierkegaard's works that appeared in German prior to the twentieth century (Himmelstrup 1962, 25–28), a twelve-volume collected works, edited and mostly translated by Christoph Schrempf, appeared between 1909 and 1922; and all but two of these volumes were published by 1914.¹ This date is significant given that Heidegger himself admits that between 1910 and 1914 he enthusiastically read Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, and Kierkegaard, among others (*FS* x; compare Guignon 2011a, 184; McCarthy 2011, 99). In his courses leading up to *Being and Time* Heidegger even quotes *Either/Or*, *Practice in Christianity*, and the *Attack* from the Schrempf edition; he also refers to *The Concept of Anxiety* from this edition in the first of his *Being and Time* notes on Kierkegaard (*PI* 137; *OHF* 83; *BT* 190n4).² But it is not just Schrempf's work that makes 1914 a significant year for Heidegger's reception of Kierkegaard. For it was also in this year that Theodor Haecker's translations of Kierkegaard's more edifying, or upbuilding, works³ (with accompanying commentary) began to appear in the Austrian journal of cultural and literary criticism known as *Der Brenner*; and Heidegger was a subscriber to this periodical from 1911 until it ceased publication in 1954 (Janik 1984, 220; van Buren 1994, 150; Malik 1997, 371–77).

On the topic of death, Heidegger was exposed to the complete range of Kierkegaard's thoughts well before writing *Being and Time*, and there can be little doubt that these thoughts had a most significant impact upon his notion of Being-towards-death.⁴ In 1915, Haecker's translation of "At a Graveside" (titled "*Vom Tode*"), curiously missing most of the introductory reflection at a funeral (*VT* 15), appeared in *Der Brenner*,⁵ and as Theunissen has argued, it did not escape Heidegger's attention. In fact, Theunissen (2006, 328) believes that his remark about Kierkegaard's "'edifying' writings" (*BT* 235n6), in a note just before the death chapter (*Being and Time*'s second mention of Kierkegaard), refers primarily to this, Kierkegaard's most concentrated discussion of death.⁶

But there is plenty of reason to believe that Heidegger was also well acquainted with many of Kierkegaard's other significant treatments of death-related matters. For example, within *Being and Time*'s death chapter itself, Heidegger includes a note of appreciation for Jaspers's discussion of death as a "limit-situation" in *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* (BT 249n6). Interestingly, it is in this very section of Jaspers's (1922, 269–70) magnum opus that one can find a massive quotation from the brief but focused discussion of thinking death as an example of how to become subjective in Kierkegaard's pseudonymous *Postscript* (CUP 1: 165–70 / SKS 7: 153–58).⁷ Thus, even if Heidegger was not thinking of "At a Graveside" specifically in writing about death in *Being and Time*, it seems certain that some of its major themes—which *Postscript* rehashes—were on his mind (compare van Buren 1994, 175–76).⁸

Among the other texts that have important contributions to make toward an overall understanding of Kierkegaard's views on death, Heidegger also seems quite familiar with *Anxiety*, which he explicitly acknowledges, and *Sickness*, which he does not. At the very least, he must have had a thorough secondhand knowledge of these detailed pseudonymous discussions of the fallen, sinful situation of humans and its connection to various senses of death via Jaspers's "review of Kierkegaard" (which Heidegger mentions in his third and final Kierkegaard note in *Being and Time* [338n3]).⁹ This "review" focuses on the "kairological" understanding of temporality found in *Anxiety* and *Sickness* (Jaspers 1922, 419–32), an understanding that is derived from the New Testament and comes to play a significant role in Heidegger's account of death.

Moving on to somewhat more speculative ideas about his reading activities, it must be said that Heidegger never explicitly acknowledges Kierkegaard's consideration of the radical Christian sense of dying to the world in late writings such as *For Self-Examination* and *The Moment* (although both texts are found in the Schrempf edition and before [FSE/JFY xiii]). Given his fascination with the Kierkegaardian concept of "the moment," and his apparent familiarity with the attack literature, however, it is hard to believe that Heidegger completely overlooked Kierkegaard's series of pamphlets by the same name. Additionally, various collections of journal entries and discourses that deal with death, including *Works of Love* and *Christian Discourses*, appeared in German both before and after the turn of the century. In fact, it seems that almost every work (at least in part) of real significance to Kierkegaard's philosophy of death was available in German well before Heidegger began working on *Being and Time*. The two notable exceptions are Kierkegaard's dissertation, which gives some attention to death in Plato's works, and the "Purity of Heart" discourse that, according to some scholars, has interesting resonances

with Heidegger's treatment of death (Himmelstrup 1962, 25–28; Malik 1997, 381–82; Schulz 2009, 388–91; Davenport 2011, 171–72).

Clearly Heidegger had access to Kierkegaard's work, read it, and found value in it, especially those texts that deal most extensively with death. Why then does Heidegger only occasionally acknowledge Kierkegaard in *Being and Time*, with none of those occasions in the death chapter, and why are these acknowledgments so seemingly dismissive of someone he obviously relies upon? Some have suggested simple egotism or even gone so far as to accuse him of approaching blatant academic dishonesty (e.g., Caputo 1993, 203–4; McCarthy 2011, 114). I am not sure, however, that these sorts of suggestions and accusations are entirely fair given Heidegger's apparent willingness over an extended period of time to point out Kierkegaard's influence on a number of topics, even if only briefly. While the reasons for the seemingly dismissive nature of his statements about Kierkegaard in *Being and Time* will take a bit longer to decipher, I would like to suggest two mitigating factors in the meantime that ought to be considered when evaluating the thoroughness of Heidegger's citations. My goal is not to exonerate Heidegger completely or excuse his oversights, but rather to provide a more nuanced understanding of his possible motivations.

To begin with, he expresses concern in several places about the rampant "Kierkegaardism" in educated German circles in the early 1920s (Kisiel 1993, 275, 316, 397, 541).¹⁰ Heidegger seems to feel that this new fad is superficial and fails to grasp the proper lessons of Kierkegaard (*FC* 150–51; also see McCarthy 2011, 99). In order to avoid being associated with such a trend, it may be the case that Heidegger is not overly eager to make reference to Kierkegaard by the mid-1920s, even if Kierkegaard remains an important influence on his thinking (compare Guignon 2011a, 184; McCarthy 2011, 100–103).

But even if this potential explanation of Heidegger's reticence is unconvincing, there is another, perhaps more substantial, reason as to why Heidegger might be less interested in drawing a great deal of attention to his debt to Kierkegaard. In *Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, just after acknowledging the "impulses" he has received from Kierkegaard and others, Heidegger makes an intriguing claim about the irrelevance of listing his historical influences in this way. He states, "This is for those who 'understand' something only when they reckon it up in terms of historical influences, the pseudo-understanding of an industrious curiosity, i.e., diversion from what is solely at issue in this course and what it all comes to. One should make their 'tendency of understanding' as easy as possible for them so that they will perish of themselves. Nothing is to be expected of them. They care only about the pseudo" (*OHF* 4).

Basically, Heidegger seems to believe that these sorts of trivial historical concerns can only distract from the meaningful task at hand. While he demonstrates that he is more than willing to name names, he claims that such lists will fascinate only the shallowest of minds when there is serious philosophical work to be done. With this admonishment in mind, it would be best at this point to turn away from questions about what Heidegger was reading and when, in order to consider more substantial issues of influence with the goal of attaining a more thorough grasp of the development of the existential philosophy of death.¹¹

A Few Apparent "Borrowings"

Although many connections between Kierkegaard and Heidegger on death-related issues have already been made in the surrounding literature, especially concerning anxiety and "the moment," much less has been said when it comes to things like dying to the world and the ideas about mortality and the afterlife presented in "At a Graveside" and the more overtly Christian discourses. While it is surely worth taking note of the many fruitful points of convergence that have already been suggested, the main focus here must be on those connections that have received too little attention and remain in need of further development. Ultimately, it will be of most interest to see how Heidegger begins to join Kierkegaard in forging an existential philosophy of death by interacting with certain figures from the key strains in the history of philosophy's dealings with the topic.

Perhaps the best way to start looking at the relationship between these two thinkers on the matter of death is in terms of "At a Graveside," even though Heidegger never cites it. There are both obvious connections concerning issues such as the uncertainty, or indefiniteness,¹² of the "when" of death, and other less frequently discussed clues that also hint at Heidegger's debt to this discourse. One of these clues is the way Heidegger dismisses the experience of the death of the other in his quest for the proper approach to death.¹³ As we have seen in section 47 of *Being and Time*, he claims that the other's death is not something that a particular Dasein can experience in the relevant sense, and so, he concludes that only one's own death is of interest for the sake of his inquiry. Of course, limiting himself to a consideration of one's own death makes more sense once he comes to explain death as a way to be. If the issue at hand were simple passing away, or "demise," one could argue that no one has any better access to their own death than to the death of another, but there is

something uniquely accessible about one's own particular Being-towards-death. Later in the chapter, when Heidegger goes on to describe the authentic self provided by the anticipation of death,¹⁴ he states, "Understanding does not primarily mean just gazing at a meaning, but rather understanding oneself in that potentiality-for-Being" (BT 263). To try to understand Being-towards-death by focusing on the other would amount to nothing more than this gazing, while true understanding comes only through appropriation.

It is precisely this sort of appropriation that Kierkegaard is after in "At a Graveside," when he speaks of the "jest" of thinking about death in general without also thinking of oneself in connection with it. Although this discourse takes the imagined funeral of a loved one as its point of departure, Kierkegaard's purpose in depicting this imagined occasion is to show the difference between the effect of the other's death on the living and the effect that relating to one's own death can have on the living. He asserts, "To think of oneself as dead is earnestness; to be a witness to the death of another is mood" (TDIO 75/SKS 5: 446). While this shared interest between Kierkegaard and Heidegger concerning the benefits of a proper relationship with one's own death may not be very shocking (compare Theunissen 2006, 335–36), it is of crucial importance for grasping the points of intersection that follow.

Another clue to Heidegger's debt can be found in his closely related discussion of "Being-certain" of death (compare Magurshak 1985, 185–86). Although the certainty¹⁵ of death is an often-discussed link between Kierkegaard and Heidegger, the surprising difficulty of making this connection in the right way renders it an issue worth revisiting. Heidegger points out that while "everydayness" is empirically certain of death in the sense of not doubting some coming event, this uncritical everyday attitude is not certain in the sense of Being-certain of Being-towards-death (BT 255–58). This difference is between a derivative disinterested assent to some objective fact and an involved making something one's own and behaving accordingly. Heidegger states, "The explicit appropriating of what has been disclosed or discovered is *Being-certain*" (BT 307). Because death is not to be understood as the objective event of demise for Heidegger, but rather as a personal way to be, it is clear that he is less drawn to the derivative sort of certainty that everydayness applies to the thing it calls death (demise).

Although Kierkegaard does not draw such a sharp death/demise distinction,¹⁶ and therefore, might initially seem guilty of only dealing with what Heidegger describes as the empirical certainty of demise, there is a way of seeing Kierkegaard's discussion of certainty as a precursor to Heidegger's notion of Being-certain. Kierkegaard does not even concede

that everydayness is certain of—in the sense of not doubting—demise. In everyday conversation people may say that they are certain, but their actions speak louder than their words. If they really do not doubt death, why then do they behave in ways that treat life as though it is without limits (compare *JP* 1: 335 / *SKS* 27: 362–63)? As examples of this behavior (and its underlying attitude), Kierkegaard mentions an excessive “soul-destroying” sorrow and paralyzing shock at the unexpected deaths of loved ones (as though certain death can ever be entirely unexpected), and the taking on of projects without consideration for the fact that death can come at any time (*TDIO* 75, 95–96 / *SKS* 5: 446, 463–64). Like Heidegger, Kierkegaard seems to be distinguishing between an empty objective acknowledgment of certainty and a sort of genuinely appropriated Being-certain that is manifested in the way one behaves in the world.

A third “At a Graveside” clue concerns the anti-Epicurean nature of Kierkegaard’s and Heidegger’s respective projects.¹⁷ While Epicurus’s famous claim denies that one’s own death can really impact one’s own life, Heidegger, like Kierkegaard before him, attempts to provide an account in which “you are and death also is” (*TDIO* 75 / *SKS* 5: 446). Heidegger tries to get at Dasein’s coexistence with death by showing how it is possible, through Being-towards-death, to grasp Dasein’s “wholeness” and essential structure. This is remarkable given that under the standard view of death as demise it seems that Dasein is always missing something (what is still to come) while it exists, and at the moment of possible completion there is no longer Dasein. Heidegger explains,

Defining the existential structure of Being-towards-the-end helps us to work out a kind of Being of Dasein in which Dasein, *as Dasein*, can be a *whole*. The fact that even everyday Dasein already is *towards* its end—that is to say, is constantly coming to grips with its death . . . shows that this end, conclusive . . . and determinative for Being-a-whole, is not something to which Dasein ultimately comes only in its demise. In Dasein, as being towards its death, its own uttermost “not-yet” has already been included. (*BT* 259)

Because death understood as Being-towards-death is something that one carries along with one (or simply *is*) in existing, and does so authentically, as we have seen, in anticipating death, Heidegger seems to have in some sense avoided problems that have traditionally been associated with the inability to experience the event of demise. But it appears that in developing his strategy for avoiding these problems Heidegger may have had the benefit of a prototype.

In discussing Kierkegaard’s “retroactive power” (*tilbagevirkende*

Kraft) of death, Connell (2006, 436) claims that it “is very like Heidegger’s notion of authenticity and resoluteness in the face of death.”¹⁸ What Connell (2006, 434–35) seems to have in mind about Kierkegaard’s account is the way in which an individual’s death, rather than simply annihilating this individual’s life, meaningfully impacts this life while it is still being lived. Kierkegaard states, “What is decisive about the explanation, what prevents the nothingness of death from annihilating the explanation, is that it acquires retroactive power and actuality in the life of the living person; then death becomes a teacher to him and does not traitorously assist him to a confession that denounces the explainer as a fool” (*TDIO* 97/*SKS* 5: 465). It appears that in this retroactivity, Kierkegaard has, like Heidegger, found a way of understanding death as somehow coexistent with the life of an individual. Although Kierkegaard does not exactly put this coexistence in terms of the lessons Heidegger learns from authentic Being-towards-death, it does not seem too far-fetched to see in the idea of death as a teacher, death as a way to be.

Similar Projects

Heidegger’s apparent connections with the graveside discourse do not tell the whole story of the similarity between the role of death in *Being and Time* and Kierkegaard’s death project. Not only does Heidegger share particular concepts with Kierkegaard, they also seem to have a similar purpose in overcoming the Epicurean view and encouraging an existence so intertwined with death. In Kierkegaardian terms, the goal here is dying to the world as exemplified by Christ, described in the New Testament, and passed down, more or (occasionally) less rigorously, by a series of Christian thinkers as I have discussed in previous chapters. Despite the fact that Kierkegaard remains firmly engaged in this Christian conversation, he expresses a great deal of disdain for the objective metaphysical speculation that some of these thinkers engage in when it comes to issues such as the afterlife. Kierkegaard understands the doubts and difficulties concerning the possibility of a personal afterlife posed by thinkers in the Epicurean strain, and rejects attempts to demonstrate that there will be such an afterlife by certain thinkers in the Platonic strain. However, he treats both these difficulties and these demonstrations as irrelevant and faithfully appropriates the afterlife, behaving as though it will be so.

This combination of maintaining a sense of dying to the world while refusing to speculate about the afterlife is largely what distinguishes the existential philosophy of death from its Platonic/Christian and Epicu-

rean predecessors. Thus, it is absolutely crucial, for understanding Heidegger as engaged in something like Kierkegaard's blending of lessons from these two key strains, to point out that Heidegger also sees speculation about the afterlife as an irrelevant diversion from his treatment of death (BT 247–48). But is there a conflict between their views given that Kierkegaard seems to retain faith in personal immortality in the face of his concession to the doubt found in the Epicurean strain? While there is little reason to believe that there is a similar retention in Heidegger, one need not see insurmountable opposition since Heidegger's bracketing of this issue does not include an out-and-out rejection of the afterlife.¹⁹

On the other side of Kierkegaard's existential combination, it is just as crucial to realize that Heidegger is involved with something like a secularized version of the Christian sense of dying to the world.²⁰ Dreyfus (1991, 312) is surely onto something when (in discussing *Postscript*'s notion of dying to immediacy) he claims, "For Heidegger being-unto-death . . . is dying to *all* immediacy."²¹ And, without mentioning Kierkegaard, Thomson (2004, 456) emphasizes Heidegger's Pauline "movement in which we turn away from the world, recover ourselves, and then turn back to the world, a world we now see anew, with eyes that have been opened."²² Just as Kierkegaard is critical of all ways of relating to oneself that are dictated by human understanding of the world, since they forego or prevent a genuinely faithful relationship with Christ, Heidegger is interested in undermining the connections to one's existence that have been unquestioningly received from "the they" in everydayness, because these connections prevent grasping what one "authentically" is. In other words, one must die to the distracting ways of existing that one just happens to have "fallen" into in order to see clearly what is most properly one's own (compare van Buren 1994, 177–82; McCarthy 2011, 108–11).²³ Both Kierkegaard and Heidegger describe the distractions handed down by the everyday world as "accidental" or "incidental" (*tilfældige* in "*Ved en Grav*," *zufällige* in both *Der Brenner's* "*Vom Tode*" and *Sein und Zeit*) in the sense that there is nothing that one can receive from this everydayness that is absolutely essential to one's existence.²⁴

Whereas the world tends to focus on *what* can be accomplished or actualized in a given period of chronological time (which of course can never be guaranteed, rendering all actualization merely accidental), Kierkegaard and Heidegger emphasize the kairological moment²⁵ in which *how* one relates (regardless of the chronological time available) to the possible is what really matters (Magurshak 1985, 180).²⁶ In both his own name and under pseudonym, Kierkegaard describes the new sense of time that Christianity introduces as the intersection of eternity with worldly temporality in a "present" moment that reconciles the fallen con-

dition one comes from with the salvation one runs toward. For example, Haufniensis states, “The fullness of time is the moment as the eternal, and yet this eternal is also the future and the past” (CA 90/SKS 4: 393). To put it another way: in a movement that transcends any common sense of temporality, one comes to participate in the past, yet timeless, act of cleansing sacrifice (the crucifixion) and thereby receives another chance for the future (van Buren 1994, 192–93). With ever-present anxiety and vigilance one renews or repeats one’s commitment to the divine in repentance of sins and longing for mercy. The moment of life comes to take on an eternal significance by constantly shaking loose from lostness in a highly contingent temporal worldliness.

Despite Heidegger’s apparently dismissive claim that Kierkegaard could not see the “more primordial temporality” that underlies the theological view of the moment in terms of the eternal (BT 338n3), the de-theologized account that Heidegger provides shows many signs of benefiting from Kierkegaard’s work on this topic. Heidegger is also interested in something like a lived synthesis of Dasein’s past and future—Dasein is a projecting ahead of itself based on limitations it has fallen (or been thrown) into. In owning up to the possibilities that are available to it given the situation, and responsibly choosing from among them which to pursue (the resolute repeating of inherited or past possibilities into the future), Dasein pulls itself out of its standard (in the sense of a default-setting) fallenness and takes possession of itself (compare van Buren 1994, 192–95).²⁷ Among the many descriptions of such a development that Heidegger provides (some others were quoted in the previous chapter), consider the following: “*Only an entity which, in its Being, is essentially **futural** so that it is free for its death and can let itself be thrown back upon its factual ‘there’ by shattering itself against death—that is to say, only an entity which, as futural, is equiprimordially in the process of **having-been**, can, by handing down to itself the possibility it has inherited, take over its own thrownness and be in the moment of vision for ‘its time’*” (BT 385). Like Kierkegaard, Heidegger is looking for a way out (albeit not necessarily one that is easily maintained) of an unreflective and deficient state that prioritizes contingent worldly accomplishment and the quantifiable temporality that such accomplishment requires. According to their view, anything that is qualified purely by this everyday chronological sense of time is necessarily a distraction that facilitates fleeing from one’s essential responsibility to be oneself (whether before God or not) (see van Buren 1994, 191, 194–95; compare CA 92–93/SKS 4: 395–96).

It is their shared concern about what is chronologically accidental and their interest in avoiding strong attachment to it that leads both Kierkegaard and Heidegger to describe this process (of avoidance) in

terms of death. In considering physical death, which is not their primary focus, they are able to pick out important indications of essential features of human existence and a deeper sense of dying. This consideration of more concrete notions of death suggests the contingency of all attachments to, and ways of understanding one's place in, the world. For both Kierkegaard and Heidegger the image of death is employed because there is no better way to awaken someone from the complacent slumber of a thoughtless existence (e.g., as a merely cultural Christian, or a "they"-self) that is not essentially and necessarily theirs.²⁸ That one will die signifies that existence has to be given up one way or another, and taking this seriously already seems to weaken the bonds of meaning that are passed down to us simply by existing in the world. But what is more, the uncertainty with regard to the when of demise suggests a general indefiniteness in existence, particularly in connection with worldly endeavors and understanding. Given this structural indefiniteness one need not feel constrained to interpret existence strictly as a function of the specific projects, relationships, and goals that the world recommends. Without such constraints, both Kierkegaard and Heidegger believe that it is possible to appropriate meaning for oneself in the light of one's contingent, culturally textured situation.

Bonding over Fear and Anxiety

Having already examined much about how Kierkegaard and Heidegger construct their view of death with the help of, and occasionally in spite of, certain elements of the two traditional strains, there is still one other key issue to consider on which they see eye to eye. Turning first to the thinkers from the Epicurean strain, with whom they have in common the avoidance of various metaphysical conundrums surrounding a personal afterlife, Kierkegaard and Heidegger have a major problem with treating death as though it is "nothing to us." Because Epicureans, Stoics, and their more modern admirers encourage ignoring or at least "defanging" death, it appears as though they are trying to withhold or suppress what seems like the best way to get an indication of what one really is.²⁹ Through such withholding, the Epicurean view enables getting lost in everyday life as it is understood by one's culture.

But perhaps it will be objected that since the existential conception of death is not entirely focused on death as the event of physical passing away, it might be the case that Kierkegaard and Heidegger are no longer directly engaging with the Epicurean position. If offering up the sort of

coexistence with death that Kierkegaard and Heidegger describe seems like an underhanded way of dodging a straightforward Epicurean claim, maybe some further discussion of their existential account will demonstrate that there is something more substantial to their critique of this strain.³⁰ As previously suggested, it might be said that Kierkegaard and Heidegger are simply conceding part of Epicurus's argument: death (in the sense of demise or physical passing away) cannot be experienced. However, the further claim that death need not be feared, which is often somehow grounded on the fact that it cannot be experienced, remains a source of concern about Epicurus's view and any of its more recent incarnations. The issue that Epicurus seems to miss has nothing to do with the evils of death, experienced or not, but with the indefiniteness of life given death. Why should this issue not trouble one still capable of being troubled?

Heidegger claims that anxiety is the necessary, even if not always obvious, state-of-mind of *Dasein*, given its essential Being-towards-death (*BT* 251).³¹ As he says about the "they," treating death as Epicurean thinkers do seems to transform "this anxiety into fear in the face of an on-coming event." Such thinkers then often disparage fear of this event as foolish and cowardly, discouraging any intimate encounter with it, and adding yet another layer of deceit to the already disingenuous swap of anxiety for fear (*BT* 254). If Heidegger is right in holding that some anxious grasp of Being-towards-death underlies any notion or fear of death understood as passing away (which, again, cannot be experienced), then it is possible to view the famous Epicurean mantra (and its Stoic and modern counterparts) as nothing more than an evasion of the only way one can really experience or know one's own death at all.

But the Epicurean strain is not alone in facing this criticism related to the overcoming of fear. Although the Platonic strain is, on the surface, more supportive when it comes to cultivating a relationship with death, the mitigation of the fear of death with promises of a personal afterlife that one often (but perhaps not always) finds in this strain is no less evasive of the anxious relationship with the indefiniteness that is essential to one's existence, according to Heidegger and Kierkegaard. Besides facing the same problems that plague the Epicurean attempt to overcome fear, Kierkegaard suggests a further concern about Platonic/Christian mitigation. While this tradition often finds some comfort in taking an afterlife for granted, the quality of this afterlife remains to be seen. Kierkegaard points out that constant concern about one's posthumous situation should be an integral aspect of a truly Christian understanding of life. Given that, so long as one lives, one's relationship with the divine is always at risk (e.g., of being ruined by falling into worldly temptation),

Kierkegaard is opposed to seeking security or using faith in the afterlife to provide comfort and diminish worries about death. Instead, impending death coupled with such faith should intensify the pressure and anxiety surrounding the uncertainty of one's soteriological standing.

The upshot of all this is that while it is possible to identify particular aspects of each strain's views on death that are appropriated (or at least appreciated) by the existential philosophy of death, it is also the rejection of the one major aspect that the Platonic and Epicurean strains have in common—the desire to make death less frightful—that helps unify Kierkegaard and Heidegger in their existential account.

A Last Word on Influences

In focusing on his relationship to Kierkegaard, I do not mean to diminish the significance of death-related connections with other thinkers that are unique to Heidegger's account (in certain cases necessarily so given Heidegger's access to post-Kierkegaardian thought). Fortunately, it has often been possible to make note of instances in which Heidegger borrows from other thinkers, with or without his acknowledgment, to supplement what he takes from Kierkegaard.³² This is especially true when it comes to their Platonic/Christian and Epicurean predecessors. Regardless of what Heidegger may find on his own in their work, however, he and Kierkegaard ultimately learn many of the same lessons from the study of these predecessors, and together they forge an existential philosophy of death. As this chapter has mostly been a discussion of what Kierkegaard and Heidegger have in common, something should now be said about how they differ.

The Limits and Legacy of the Existential Philosophy of Death

Having attended to the somewhat murky issue of Heidegger's debts to Kierkegaard's writings, it is safe to say that these two have much in common when it comes to the employment of death in their work. Despite this kinship, there have been numerous efforts from both the Kierkegaardian camp and from Heidegger himself to distinguish sharply the one from the other. Heidegger, of course, makes several somewhat condescending comments about Kierkegaard's endeavors, while some observers (both avowed Kierkegaardians, and those just interested in criticizing Heidegger) explain why the Dane would not (and should not) be interested in pursuing a project like Heidegger's (e.g., Mjaaland 2006, 370).¹ In addition to commenting on Emmanuel Levinas's (1906–1995) famous concerns about both thinkers, I would like to consider what I take to be the most significant complaint from each side and suggest a more nuanced understanding of the Kierkegaard-Heidegger relationship.

French Thought and the Death of the Other

The legacy of the existential philosophy of death is a topic well worth a detailed consideration of its own, perhaps as a kind of sequel to the project I have been engaged with thus far. The diverse appropriations and transfigurations of the ideas of Kierkegaard and Heidegger found in the writings of twentieth-century francophone thinkers, such as Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980), Levinas, Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005), and Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), are enough to occupy a sizeable tome without even beginning to consider the reception by thinkers from other backgrounds. In connection with this rich history of influence, such thinkers do not hold back in critiquing Kierkegaard and especially Heidegger. Sartre, for example, infamously aims a series of explicit criticisms at Heidegger's notion of Being-towards-death that for the most part seem to miss the mark. Even though Sartre (1956, 546–47) joins both Kierkegaard and

Heidegger in making finitude central to his understanding of freedom and meaning, he seems to conflate Heideggerian death with physical demise when he rebukes Heidegger for associating finitude and death.² Unfortunately, neither the full range of these criticisms, apt or not, nor the more positive instances of French reception of the existential philosophy of death are entirely relevant here. What is of interest to the present discussion is the potential difference that might surface between Kierkegaard and Heidegger on the death of the other when considering this issue as described by Levinas and Derrida.

Levinas is particularly critical of Heidegger's prioritization of death as an isolating force in *Being and Time*, and he offers an alternative account of death in which death demonstrates otherness. He states, "This approach of death indicates that we are in relation with something that is absolutely other. . . . My solitude is thus not confirmed by death but broken by it. Right away this means that existence is pluralist. . . . In death the existing of the existent is alienated" (Levinas 1987, 74–75). In conjunction with death understood as an indication of one's essential other-relatedness, Levinas emphasizes the significance of the death of "the Other" over against Heidegger's explicit lack of interest in this issue. The problem with Heidegger's account, on his view, is that by excluding the death of the other, Heidegger misses the opportunity to make ethics an integral aspect of his early ontological project—thus making possible some, to put it mildly, unfortunate political decisions. But given that Kierkegaard also dismisses the death of the other in texts such as "At a Graveside" and *Postscript*, is his account of death just as problematic and potentially dangerous?

In a certain sense, it might seem that Kierkegaard's treatment of the death of the other is even more problematic and dangerous than Heidegger's. As Llevadot (2011, 206–8) points out, Levinas focuses both on the sense of responsibility that arises through one's awareness of oneself as potential murderer and survivor, and also on one's capacity to sacrifice one's life *for* another, while Kierkegaard's pseudonym silentio discusses the sacrificing *of* the other. Because Abraham, silentio's paragon of religious faith, sets aside any communal ethical demands in order to follow a voice that speaks to him alone, even when this voice tells him to kill the other, Levinas finds Kierkegaard guilty of "introducing a violent and irrational impulse into philosophy, paving the way . . . for German national socialism" (Mjaaland 2006, 378). Whereas Heidegger's views on death simply left ethics ambiguous or of secondary importance behind the self-mastery of the individual, Kierkegaard seems to advocate a more pernicious isolation of the individual and a supersession of ethics that even allows for murder.

There is no doubt that Levinas's reading of *Fear and Trembling* is at least uncharitable and probably just inaccurate given that its author goes out of his way to point out that he is not invalidating ethics, but transforming it (*FT* 70/*SKS* 4: 162; compare Mjaaland 2006, 378; Llevadot 2011, 209). Rather than rushing to identify these shortcomings of Levinas's criticisms, however, Derrida offers an alternate reading of silentio's Abraham. Instead of viewing Abraham's silence as a disturbing unethical tendency toward isolation (which Levinas does), Derrida suggests that his refusal to justify himself to others is an indictment of the ordinary ethical realm that demands such justification (Llevadot 2011, 210–11). Derrida (1995, 61) states, "He keeps quiet in order to avoid the moral temptation which, under the pretext of calling him to responsibility, to self-justification, would make him lose his ultimate responsibility along with his singularity. . . . This is ethics as 'irresponsibilization.'" In his silent inwardness, Abraham is taking on total responsibility for the death of the other, while in the ethical realm at least some of this responsibility is shirked by trying to bring others "on board" in the form of a rationally compelled consensus (compare Duckles 2011, 221–22). When I, for example, explain to the officer why I was speeding, it is my hope that he or she will understand and sympathize with my predicament in such a way that, although I admittedly broke the law, I will not be held accountable to the degree that a fine will be necessary.

Llevadot will go on to argue that the non-preferential love cultivated in the *Works of Love* discourse on recollecting the dead is Kierkegaard's extension of this taking on of absolute responsibility for the death of the other (even the enemy), but one need not follow her in order to ask our question about how all of this pertains to the Kierkegaard-Heidegger relationship. If Derrida's reading is convincing and Kierkegaard escapes Levinas's criticism by suggesting an even more stringent sense of taking on responsibility for others in the face of death, does Kierkegaard avoid the Heideggerian pitfalls and do a better job of addressing this issue? Of course, such a question assumes that Levinas's criticisms of Heidegger are in fact legitimate, and this may not be the case. Keep in mind that Heidegger does not simply forget to consider the death of the other in *Being and Time*; rather, he intentionally sets it aside because he believes that it is an issue that cannot deliver the sorts of essential insights he is looking for.

The interesting thing about Derrida's portrayal of silentio's Abraham is that absolute responsibility comes only through a certain isolation of the individual—an isolation that Derrida believes is realized through a relationship with death (compare Duckles 2011, 224). Thus, Derrida's defense of Kierkegaard from Levinas's charges demonstrates Kierkegaard's

commitment to a higher ethics based on the sort of individuating character of death that Levinas is particularly critical of. Kierkegaard, of course, describes this individuating character (and the sense of urgency and responsibility it brings) in several texts, but what is perhaps more troubling for a Levinasian account is that Heidegger also develops his sense of individual responsibility in the same way. In fact, just before saying that “everyone must assume his own death, . . . therein resides freedom and responsibility,” Derrida (1995, 43–44) acknowledges that he remains “within Heidegger’s logic.”

While it may be true that, compared to Kierkegaard, Heidegger is less obviously interested in ethics and the death of the other, his primary point seems to be that these are matters for consideration after grasping the essence of individual responsibility for oneself. Given that both he and Kierkegaard make individualization or “becoming subjective,” as Climacus would say, the foundation for any subsequent genuine ethical behavior, it is not clear to me that Heidegger’s account is significantly different from Kierkegaard’s. If this is so, then Derrida’s take on *Fear and Trembling* might also be seen as a defense of Heidegger, and maybe as a rejection of Levinas’s attempt to ground ethics in the death of the other. Whether or not one is sympathetic to this attempt, what all of this means for my present purposes is that the often-discussed criticism that Heidegger should have paid more attention to the death of the other does not distinguish him in any definitive way from Kierkegaard.³

Heidegger’s “Atheism” and the Theology of Kierkegaard

So what does definitively distinguish the two when it comes to death-related issues? Heidegger clearly does not share the theological concerns at the heart of Kierkegaard’s account of dying to the world. At least during the few years leading up through the writing of *Being and Time*, Heidegger holds that there is a “fundamental atheism indigenous to philosophy” (Kisiel 1993, 80; compare *PI* 148). This atheism is necessary in order to distinguish philosophy from the aforementioned ontic science of theology (see my treatment of *BT*, section 49). Proper philosophy is absorbed in ontology, which is an inquiry into Being in general, while theology merely posits some basic regional idea about the nature (or being) of God—or, according to Heidegger, the nature of the Christian connection to God—and inquires into matters pertaining to what it posits (*BT* 9–11, 34–35).⁴ In order for philosophy to retain its status as

the more primordial, general, and pure form of inquiry, it cannot allow itself to be contaminated by theological concerns. Because Heidegger is engaged with fundamental ontology in *Being and Time*, he must maintain a “methodological atheism” throughout his consideration of death and related issues (compare *BT* 247–48).

For Heidegger, Kierkegaard is a theologian because he simply posits humans as derived from the Christian God, and then proceeds to consider the particulars of relating to this God (e.g., *SUD* 13–17/*SKS* 11: 129–33; compare Magurshak 1985, 193).⁵ He is a great theologian because, unlike so many others, he joins Luther in emphasizing faith alone as the difficult, but proper way of appropriating and existing in this relationship, to the exclusion of a diluted theology that relies on reason to explain away and soften any difficulty (compare *BT* 10). It would be hard to deny the accuracy of Heidegger’s assessment of Kierkegaard’s theological propensities given that Kierkegaard himself states, “I have never broken with Christianity. . . . From the time it was possible to speak of the application of my powers, I had firmly resolved to employ everything to defend it, or in any case to present it in its true form” (*PV* 80/*SKS* 16: 59). But if he is indeed a theologian of some sort, it seems that Kierkegaard’s theological treatments of human guilt, anxiety, conscience, and even death cannot provide the primordial ontological understanding of these matters that Heidegger seeks in *Being and Time*. Thus, according to Heidegger, Kierkegaard’s works are mostly just interesting ontic analyses that might provide helpful starting points for a more penetrating investigation into what underlies the derivative phenomena of religious experience (see, e.g., *BT* 338n3). While Heidegger seems to rely on these starting points quite heavily, particularly on the topic of death, he does apparently remove specific ideas in several of Kierkegaard’s works from their theological trappings, and push them further until these ideas become more broadly relevant (e.g., to the non-religious).

Consider “At a Graveside,” where Kierkegaard argues that it is important to think about death, but does not overtly make a case for this importance on theological grounds. Despite the discourse’s relative silence on the matter, it is not as though God never comes up. Thus, even though it appears that Heidegger is indebted to this discourse for its impact on his own views on death,⁶ he would still likely complain that it is not sufficiently free of the theological. It is not the mere mention of God, however, that Heidegger might find inappropriate for a more philosophical inquiry. Appearances aside, as previously explained, it does ultimately turn out that even Kierkegaard’s least religious discussion of death can only be properly motivated by appealing to the “infinite significance” of the divine. Unless one shares Kierkegaard’s Christian interests,

it will remain unclear why his approach to life through death is preferable to other possible attitudes. In contrast, because Heidegger treats death without such theological commitments, it seems that he needs only appeal to what it is to be *Dasein* in order to make his account of death compelling.

The Emptiness of Anticipatory Resoluteness

While Heidegger clearly sees the limitations of Kierkegaard's attempt at a religious-existential philosophy of death, it remains to be seen what Kierkegaard might think of Heidegger's more secular version. Some commentators have wondered if there is not something about offering an account as general as Heidegger's that Kierkegaard would find particularly problematic (e.g., Guignon 2011a, 200–201). Kierkegaard has a well-known aversion to any abstract system building and, although it is debatable whether or not this is what Heidegger is up to, it could simply be the case that despite Heidegger's condescension there is something about Kierkegaard's formulation of the existential philosophy of death that points to a shortcoming in Heidegger's.

There is no denying, for example, that Heidegger strips away so much content from his consideration of what it is to exist that he cannot even allow himself to speak about humans. The primary aim of raising the objection that he is excessively formal and abstract, though, is to suggest that when one detaches from (or dies to) so many of the "everyday" specifics of the world in which we have to live, as Heidegger seems to in his discussion of authenticity and anticipatory resoluteness, it becomes difficult to reconnect to any specifics at all.⁷ Furthermore, his attempt to describe such reconnection is, according to some, so vague that it remains hard to see by what means one can ever come to determine *what* to do; all that has been laid out is about *how* one should do it. Commentators such as Daniel Berthold-Bond and Patricia J. Huntington claim that Kierkegaard would be unsatisfied by the empty formality that Heidegger provides. On their view, Kierkegaard argues that one needs some sense of *what* one ought to do if there is to be any genuine meaning to one's existence. Bare authenticity does not provide such meaning and neither does Heideggerian openness.

In making a connection between Heidegger's emphasis on formality and his questionable politics, both Berthold-Bond and Huntington debate the value of anticipatory resoluteness. For example, the former

says, "It seems that we are thrown back onto a criterion for action and authentic existence which is so formal, abstract, and indefinite that the prospects for non-arbitrary action in the concrete situations we face in the world are quite problematic" (Berthold-Bond 1991, 128); and the latter, relying on Berthold-Bond, claims that "Heidegger's abstract account of authentic resolve, because empty, provides no material criteria for political action" (Huntington 1995, 56). Because Kierkegaard does not go so far out of his way to sever his notion of authentic existence from the aesthetic realm, according to Berthold-Bond, and the ethical, according to Huntington, he has easier access to the sort of normative criteria that might rule out something like membership in the Nazi Party. What Berthold-Bond (1991, 128–29) and Huntington (compare 1995, 47, 59) apparently want in an account of human existence are "signposts" that motivate or lead one to behave in certain ways rather than others.

On Berthold-Bond's (1991, 133–37) view, Heidegger's notion of the distracting curiosity characteristic of inauthenticity is very much like Kierkegaard's understanding of the aesthetic realm of existence in which one makes no commitment to anything in particular and simply drifts from one amusing diversion to another. While both of them treat this frivolous way of existence with a great deal of suspicion and scorn, Berthold-Bond points out that according to several of Kierkegaard's early pseudonyms, the aesthetic is not to be disregarded in moving to a higher sphere of existence, but transformed and its possibilities understood in a new light. It is from these possibilities, which have been taken over from the aesthetic sphere, that one is able to choose concrete courses of action in an authentic ethical or religious manner. Because Heidegger never offers a similar redemption of curiosity, but rather perseveres in disparaging it, he seems to lose touch with its vast stores of specific possibilities that could be reappropriated in the formal authentic manner he describes. Thus, Berthold-Bond (1991, 138) states, "Kierkegaard's theory of the sublimation of the aesthetic through authentic repetition presents a way to resolve the abstract and formal character of Heidegger's phenomenology of authentic being."

There seem to be two problems with Berthold-Bond's account, however. First, when considering Kierkegaard's later and more obviously Christian writings, as I do when demonstrating the similarity between Kierkegaard and Heidegger on dying to the world, it is not at all clear that the sympathetic understanding of the aesthetic realm that Berthold-Bond relies on is maintained. If there is in fact good reason not to rely too heavily on what certain early pseudonyms have to say when comparing Kierkegaard and Heidegger, then Berthold-Bond's account of what

separates the two might be called into question. Second, I believe that Berthold-Bond is less than charitable in his assessment of Heidegger's abstractness due to "dislocation" from concrete possibilities. While Heidegger is surely critical of the attitude of curiosity (which he associates with the "idle talk" of the "they" [BT 173]), he does not disparage the particular possibilities that are made available in curiosity by one's thrownness (even if discussing them is not his priority). If anything, Heidegger might be more open to the possibilities of curiosity, if authentically appropriated, than Kierkegaard would be from a more strictly Christian perspective. Berthold-Bond (1991, 130–31, 137) certainly acknowledges that Heidegger means "to allow for a recovery of the world in a transformed way" based on a "criterion for choice [that] can only be made by concrete reference to the past," but for some reason that continues to elude me, he seems to believe that this description of what Heidegger is up to is more abstract and ungrounded than what Kierkegaard supposedly takes from the "aesthetic 'theatre of infinite possibility.'"

Without rejecting Berthold-Bond's account, Huntington tries a slightly different approach. Her argument relies on a purported difference between Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's respective treatments of the social realm and its normativity. Kierkegaard's authentic individual spurns the thoughtless mass known as "the crowd" as a kind of inauthentic community, but does not distance him- or herself from one's essential sociality in itself, or rule out "the possibility of a true community of 'individuals'" (Huntington 1995, 49). Such a community would "embody a set of norms without absolutizing" them and "without lapsing into a herd-like communitarianism" (Huntington 1995, 51). Heidegger, on the other hand, fails to distinguish "between inauthentic participation in 'everydayness' and social life per se," which makes it possible to see the authentic individual in near complete opposition to "the public world of norms" (Huntington 1995, 50). In other words, Heidegger apparently associates social normativity with the everydayness that is to be overcome (so far as possible), and thereby loses touch with such normativity. In the absence of norms that could direct his actions, he seems to advocate an empty and arbitrary "decisionism" that leaves him open to, among other things, "involvement in National Socialism" (Huntington 1995, 56).

Given that their approaches to offering a Kierkegaardian critique of Heidegger are quite similar, it should come as no surprise that I have roughly the same two problems with Huntington's account that I had with Berthold-Bond's. The first is of course the fact that she pays little attention to the specifically Christian ideas in Kierkegaard's later writings, where one can find important parallels with Heidegger's version of dying

to the world. Without this attention, Huntington's portrayal of Kierkegaard and sociality fails to take notice of his more "community-hostile" views, and is therefore *at least* in tension with his later thought. Considering that this portrayal is central to her explanation of what Kierkegaard has and Heidegger lacks, such tension renders her entire comparison of the two questionable. But even if this were not the case, I would still suggest that Huntington (1995, 53, 59) is less than fair in her description of Heidegger's "antinormative" and antisocial tendencies. As I argued earlier in this chapter along Derridean lines, there is no reason to see Heidegger's emphasis on the formal aspects of individual self-mastery as a rejection of one's communal and ethical relationships (compare Young 1998, 192). In fact, he is quite similar to Kierkegaard in arguing that the individualizing capacity of dying to the world is the prerequisite for the authentic "re-taking" of communal relationships and the normativity that comes with community.⁸ While such relationships are derived from, and in some sense secondary to, Heidegger's "existential 'solipsism,'" this establishment of order does not distinguish him in any profound way from Kierkegaard.⁹

Even though I disagree with much of what Berthold-Bond and Huntington have to say, their primary point is not one that I would necessarily dispute. It does indeed seem that Kierkegaard would reject the empty formality and abstractness of Heidegger's notion of anticipatory resoluteness, but on religious—and specifically Christian—grounds rather than on aesthetic or ethical grounds. Although Kierkegaard dramatically emphasizes the more formal *how* aspects of Christian existence, which indeed makes him look very similar to Heidegger, it would not be *Christian* existence without some notion of *what* Christianity is and *what* it demands.¹⁰ It is precisely such a *what* that provides the sort of content and specific direction to existence that Heidegger's account lacks. Whereas for Kierkegaard dying to the world has a concrete purpose in leading to Christian rebirth, for Heidegger dying to the world leads to an open-ended self-possession that seems like it could manifest itself in a diverse range of concretions that might include apparently contradictory possibilities such as Nazism and pacifism. In fact, it is conceivable that on Heidegger's view one might even find it necessary to switch from one to the other given serious enough oscillations in the circumstances one encounters. This self-determination of a somewhat tentative content might be the best that one can do in trying to attribute specific meaning to one's existence according to Heidegger, but Kierkegaard would likely see a certain bankruptcy in trying to find meaning in such an arbitrary and potentially transient way. It is only through participation in some-

thing eternal—the relationship with the divine—that one can find a more solid sense of meaning and avoid this almost nihilistic bankruptcy.

A Mutual Understanding

With this Kierkegaardian criticism of the sort of dying to the world found in Heidegger, the best shot from each camp has been fired. While Kierkegaard is too ontically narrow for Heidegger, Heidegger is too abstract and arbitrary for Kierkegaard. But is there perhaps another way to understand what seems to be a fundamental disagreement? I believe that the key to such an understanding lies in the peculiar way that Kierkegaard explains the development of the necessary relationship with the divine.

In a short preface to the otherwise pseudonymous *Practice in Christianity*, Kierkegaard, in his role as editor, states, “The requirement should be heard . . . so that I might learn not only to resort to *grace* but to resort to it in relation to the use of *grace*” (PC 7 / SKS 12: 15).¹¹ As I have already argued (particularly in my discussion of *For Self-Examination*), he believes that this requirement, which ought to be associated, at least in part, with the stripping away of one’s worldly meaning in dying to the world, is so difficult that no human can meet it on his or her own. It is therefore necessary for something beyond human to step in and offer assistance if one is to die to the ways of the world and fill up one’s cleansed and empty existence with divine meaning. As Caputo (1993, 217) puts it, one must quit “the illusion that a man can make himself whole by his own powers, then a healing power from without can intervene.” Humans do not come to God, having earned his mercy; God comes to humans out of compassion for such impotent beings, and offers them the eternal religious meaning—which Kierkegaard sees in participating in Christ’s death—purely by grace. Not only is the sacrifice of God’s son an act of divine mercy, but even our own ability on some level to imitate Christ’s dying to the world is the result of the divine gift of faith—a receptivity that would not be possible without the “Spirit working within us.”

The problem with reliance on divine assistance for the sake of attributing meaning to one’s existence is that one is left with little hope of meaning if a faithful life turns out to be elusive or unappetizing. This view of faith seems to be especially compelling in modernity when the various articles of Christian dogma begin to look more and more foolish under the light of scientific and technological advances. As we have seen, Kierkegaard understands the trends of modernity (even using its

Epicurean manifestations as a test and corrective for Christian dying to the world) and argues that increasing doubt with respect to the objective “facts” of Christianity should have little impact on a genuinely striving Christian who cultivates a subjective relationship with Christ. Heidegger, on the other hand, chooses a different approach to the search for meaning in the modern situation.¹² Rather than refocusing one’s religious endeavors in dying to the world, he suggests a version of “dying to” that sets aside the problematic religious issue. Heidegger describes the process of redeeming oneself by stripping away all of the so-called meaning that comes from simply having fallen into the world, and rebuilding a new sense of significance by critically taking over what is available in one’s thrown state. Thus, as Vincent McCarthy (2011, 113) points out, Heidegger comes to play the role of a sort of “Pelagius to Kierkegaard’s Augustine.”

In a world in which Christian absolutes no longer seem tenable, however, the meaning that Heidegger gives to himself is not meaning “in the positive Kierkegaardian sense that . . . gives Dasein a self-definition in terms of something specific” (Dreyfus 1991, 313). It may be that without these kinds of absolutes, there is just going to be the sort of indeterminacy, albeit within a determined range of possibilities, which Heidegger’s account suggests. Although disappointing to thinkers such as Berthold-Bond and Huntington, there may be no definitive signposts hammered in, but only a series of well-worn paths that one can somewhat arbitrarily choose between. While this choice is necessarily conditioned by the world and its norms, it is the choice itself that gives certain norms priority over others and allows them to provide a kind of specific meaning to existence that remains open to revision (Guignon 2011b, 97–99). And this might just be the best that a modern irreligious world can do once the power of grace to render some particular choice enduringly significant is off the table.

This understanding of the existential philosophy of death in which the goal is to gain a certain mastery over the meaning of one’s existence (as opposed to being mastered by the meaning of the world one happens to be thrown into), either through option A (with God’s help—redeemed sinfulness) or option B (without such help—anticipatory resoluteness), suggests the possibility of “agreeing to disagree.” Both Kierkegaard and Heidegger seem aware of the difficulties that individuals are up against in their search for significance in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Interestingly, the disagreement between their respective responses to these difficulties as I have laid them out finds a close parallel in Miles’s work on Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.¹³ Over the last few pages of his paper, Miles (2011, 283–86) describes a Kierkegaard that seems to

hold out hope for a more substantial and incontrovertible meaning than Nietzsche seems to think is possible. Nietzsche argues against a descent into nihilism, but like Heidegger, refuses to resort to religious faith in divine assistance in order to avoid such a descent. While Kierkegaard would not be happy with the result of Nietzsche's efforts, Miles (2011, 286–87) seems to conclude that they must each concede that the other's point of view cannot be easily ruled out. Although Christian faith may be an extreme and, in a certain sense, unjustifiable option, its renunciation of such justification means that it need not defend itself from Nietzsche's criticisms. And even though Nietzschean self-mastery (like its Heideggerian counterpart) has its limitations, one can certainly appreciate its value if it is the alternative to a risky and desperate leap of faith. I would suggest that a similar concession must ultimately be made in the case of dying to the world according to Kierkegaard and Heidegger.

In fact, certain developments in the views of both Kierkegaard and Heidegger suggest that they might come around to making such a concession. It is no secret that Kierkegaard realizes how miserable, uncertain, and dangerous a true Christian existence can be. After all, he spends much of his later authorship trying to make these perils clear. Although he has the hopeful recourse of grace and divine mercy, Kierkegaard does not want to repeat what he sees as Luther's mistake, and thus, he cautions his readers against making too much of this consolation—there is work to be done and it will not be pleasant so long as one exists in the world. It is because grace does not excuse an individual from striving in existence that Kierkegaard even expresses concerns about the preface to *Practice* that I quoted from above. Without a willingness to die to worldly ways, which includes admitting one's failure to do so, "one does not have the right to draw on grace" (NA 70/SKS 14: 213).¹⁴

Heidegger, on the other hand, seems to lose his Pelagian spirit throughout his later work. In Caputo's (1993, 222) words: "Heidegger later on conceded . . . that the transition from inauthenticity to authenticity is not something effected *by* man but rather something effected *in* man by a saving grace." Although there is no reason to think that Heidegger has a specifically Christian sense of grace in mind, he does make several telling comments, which support Caputo's general assessment. For example, in an interview released after his death, Heidegger famously asserts:

Philosophy will not be able to bring about a direct change of the present state of the world. This is true not only of philosophy but of all merely human meditations and endeavors. Only a god can still save us. I think the only possibility of salvation left to us is to prepare readiness,

through thinking and poetry, for the appearance of the god or for the absence of the god during the decline; so that we do not, simply put, die meaningless deaths, but that when we decline, we decline in the face of the absent god. ("SI" 56–57)

This is of course an issue that deserves more attention than it can receive here, but the point of mentioning it briefly is to suggest that while Kierkegaard seems to understand the drawbacks of relying on grace to give life meaning, especially when considered from a non-Christian perspective,¹⁵ Heidegger might eventually come to appreciate the drawbacks of trying to find meaning through one's own endeavors. Thus, these two pioneers of the existential philosophy of death could ultimately end up with a greater sense of mutual understanding and respect for each other's approach than initially seems possible.

Conclusion

Since it is not out of the question that one could sympathize with both approaches to the existential philosophy of death, there will be no ultimate decision in favor of either Kierkegaard or Heidegger. The potential tension in Heidegger's "atheistic" appropriation of and abstraction from Kierkegaard's more Christ-oriented ideas about death, which I wondered about in the introduction, need not lead to the conclusion that Heidegger takes the existential philosophy of death too far. Nor, conversely, must one conclude that Kierkegaard does not take it far enough, as the Heidegger of *Being and Time* would likely suggest. Nonetheless, the essential difference between their accounts of dying to the world cannot be ignored, and (bracketing any possible change of heart on the later Heidegger's part) their views on death and salvation, therefore, remain in certain respects opposed to each other. As a result of this most fruitful opposition though, there are a couple of interesting observations worth making in closing.

The first such observation concerns proximity to the Platonic and Epicurean strains in the philosophy of death. As I have argued throughout, both Kierkegaard and Heidegger have firm roots in the Platonic/Christian notion of dying to the world; and they both have a healthy respect for the concerns of the Epicurean strain even as they attempt to overcome, or at least sidestep, some of its most central insights. However, while Kierkegaard sees the Epicurean strain as more of a corrective for

a Christianity that has lost sight of the nuances of proper dying to the world, Heidegger's approach to death might constitute more of a true compromise between the two strains. Because Kierkegaard's portrayal of death is based on a commitment to at least one piece of Christian metaphysical dogma (the god-man who died but lives), he cannot really entertain, as a possibility for himself, the Epicurean disdain for these sorts of religious beliefs even if he understands, respects, and makes use of such disdain. Since Heidegger, on the other hand, willfully jettisons a wide array of metaphysical beliefs, including Christian ones, his relationship to both the Platonic and the Epicurean strains remains somewhat more neutral. Even though his anticipatory resoluteness is largely Christian in its basic structure, he adopts aspects of each strain with no particular investment in seeing either propped up.

The other observation I want to make concerns the destructive and destabilizing nature of an unchained dying to the world, and the closely related potential dangers of taking one's own death at all seriously. This is of course an issue (with certain parallels in the situation of post-Cartesian epistemology) that Berthold-Bond and Huntington seem to suggest in criticizing Heidegger: is it not the case that dying to the world continuously undermines any attempt to derive significance from one's existence in the world? Although I have already explained why Heidegger need not concede the futility of such attempts despite encouraging a sort of dying to the world, it is still fair to say that this dying does rule out deriving an absolute and incontrovertible meaning from existing in the world. Kierkegaard is only able to preserve a sense of absolute meaning (in the face of extreme opposition, mind you) by chaining his account of dying to the world to a previously posited absolute that he can never be certain of. That is, he directs his entire death project toward the goal of an improved relationship with the divine. While I have said much of this in slightly different terms before, the general point that I am trying to emphasize here with respect to the existential philosophy of death is that whether or not one approaches one's own death or dying to in the service of such an assumed (and thus questionable) absolute, the result is likely to be a somewhat destabilized, or at least insecure, existence.

I conclude on this somewhat bleak note, not to suggest that one is better off with the false sense of security that comes from never becoming intimate with thoughts of death (let alone engaging in a full-blown dying to the world), but to highlight the risks that are inherent in striving for a more honest and complete grasp of one's existence. These risks must surely be weighed against the potential benefits of such an awareness of what it is to be—benefits that include a new and possibly more

composed perspective on the everyday problems that occupy life in the world. The interesting thing, however, is that regardless of the outcome of this analysis, the precariousness of existence remains the same. Not even the most thorough attempt to ignore it can keep this essential aspect of what one is from lurking in the shadows of one's daily life.

Notes

Introduction

1. For a few examples of these attempts at something like topically or chronologically comprehensive accounts of the philosophy of death, see Choron (1963), Barry (2007), and Scarre (2007). While the others are mostly quite helpful, Barry's textbook includes a suspect description of Heidegger's views on death.

2. One such philosopher, Jeffrie G. Murphy (1993, 44), seems to agree with my general dichotomy, albeit without the association of Plato and Christianity, when he states that "such an idea [that fearing death is irrational] is found in the Stoics and the Epicureans among others and is, in many respects, interestingly different from the way of thinking about death that Christianity introduced into our civilization."

3. Kierkegaard was for most of his life a practicing Lutheran, and considered retiring to the life of a country pastor (e.g., *JP* 5: 310; 6: 124/*SKS* 18: 278; 21: 289). Heidegger spent part of his early education in training for the Catholic priesthood. For excellent discussion of Heidegger's religious background and theological interests, see Caputo (2006) and Crowe (2006).

4. I do not use the term "existential" here in Heidegger's more technical sense, as he seems to believe that such usage might exclude the work of Kierkegaard. As will become clear, I simply mean to suggest that these two thinkers allow death to penetrate and interact with one's existence in a way that the Platonic and Epicurean strains do not.

5. For some helpful descriptions of how death was treated by philosophers prior to Plato, see Choron (1963, 31–41) and Kramer and Wu (1988, 5–8, 53–60). Several of these early philosophical views on death will be addressed briefly in connection with more recent ideas in the next two chapters.

6. All references to Socrates will correspond to the character in Plato's works unless specifically stated otherwise. I will not assume, since I have little reason to do so, that the views of the historical Socrates are accurately represented (or clearly distinguished from Plato's, which are not so easy to pin down either) in any of Plato's dialogues. For support in these ideas, see Tarrant (2000) and Waugh (2000).

Chapter 1

1. Given the tone with which Socrates addresses the assembly in the *Apology*, it seems fair to say that Socrates has no intention of trying to get himself off the hook. In this sense, Socrates's defense is arguably a tremendous success.

2. The *Phaedo* is actually Plato's writing about the character Phaedo's recounting of Socrates's final words and deeds; both those characters present in the prison and those present during Phaedo's retelling are Pythagoreans (Cooper 2002, 93–94).

3. Nonetheless, suicide is not a viable way to attain postmortem goods more quickly according to the *Phaedo*, since Socrates argues that as possessions of the gods, humans have no right to destroy themselves unless they do so with the permission of their owners (61e–62d).

4. I find his binary opposition of life to death especially interesting (e.g., *Phaedo* 71c–72a). Clearly life must come from a lack of life, but he calls this lack “death.” Why not call it “nonexistence,” or in this case, “non-life existence”? Given Socrates's discussion, it seems somewhat more accurate to define death as that perhaps unidentifiable moment of transition between living and another period of nonexistence or non-life existence.

5. For an example of Paul's knowledge of Greek thought, see 1 Corinthians 15:33 where he uses the words of a Greek poet to help get his Christian message across (Acts 17:28 offers another, perhaps less reliable, example). Maybe Paul also found it easier to explain Christian doctrines about death given the already established, related ideas of Platonic philosophers. One possible connection, which is admittedly very speculative, is that Christ's martyrdom might strike a certain chord in those familiar with the story of Socrates.

6. I certainly do not mean to leave out the obvious “Old Testament,” or Hebrew, foundations of Paul's teachings, particularly as they shape his views on death. For a brief, but helpful, description of the views of the *Tanakh* on death, see Choron (1963, 81–83). For an excellent discussion of the Christian merging of Hebrew and Greek thought on the issue of death see Podmore (2011, esp. 44–47, 52–53).

7. On the issue of the relationship between Platonism (specifically “Middle Platonism”) and Christianity after the New Testament, second- and third-century thinkers such as Justin Martyr, Clement (and Origen) of Alexandria, and Tertullian are key precursors to Augustine. In setting the stage for Kierkegaard's use of Socrates, Karen L. Carr (2001, esp. 177–78) provides a helpful historical orientation concerning the varying proximity of Platonism (and rationality more generally) relative to Christianity.

8. He also includes a highly influential discussion (Book 11) on the nature of time.

9. It is not that he believes the world is essentially evil in itself; all existence comes from the pure goodness of the creator, after all (see Augustine, *Enchiridion* 11–14). Nonetheless, once sin enters the world, it is possible to have an inappropriate relationship with worldly goods, and this is evil on Augustine's view.

10. In his *City of God Against the Pagans*, Augustine (*De civitate Dei* 13.1–9, 16) has a great deal to say both about death as a harm in general, and about death

as punishment. Despite some agreement with Platonic doctrines, on the issue of death as a punishment he actually argues against Plato that death is indeed a punishment arising from original sin, a concept foreign to Platonism. He even speaks in greater detail about the two different senses of death, one of the soul (separation of the soul from God) and one of the body (separation of the soul from the body).

11. Augustine (*De civitate Dei* 13.17–18) also argues against the Platonists, in another interesting innovation of Christianity, that a resurrection and redemption of the body is possible. Of course, I do not mean to suggest that Augustine is the originator of this key Christian doctrine (see McGuckin 2004, 292–95). While this is surely a crucial difference between Christians and Platonists, the details of its development need not be described here. For my purposes, it is enough to recognize that Christians and Platonists alike (as opposed to thinkers in the Epicurean strain) argue for some form or another of postmortem continuation of particular subjective experience.

12. In discussing the claims of Clement and Justin Martyr, Carr (2001, 176–79) points out that the Scholastics are by no means the first thinkers in Christian history to hold views that differ from the Augustinian position in this way. Unlike the case of these early Christian thinkers, however, Scholastic ideas about the proper use of reason come to dominate church doctrine in a way that seems to overshadow Augustinian Christianity for some time.

13. “But the devil’s bride, reason, the lovely whore comes in and wants to be wise, and what she says, she thinks, is the Holy Spirit. Who can be of any help then? Neither jurist, physician, nor king, nor emperor; for she is the foremost whore the devil has [*Vernunft . . . ist die höchste Hur, die der Teufel hat*]” (Luther 1959, 374). In making this specific claim, Luther (1959, 378–79) actually seems to have in mind “fanatical antisacramentalist[s]”; and in less fiery moments he suggests that reason is not to be thrown out entirely, but tempered by faith. Thus, I only mean to claim that Luther is critical of the stand-alone use of reason (given that it can be bent to serve the needs of all comers) as seen in particular examples from the work of thinkers like Anselm and Aquinas (such as their arguments for God’s existence), and not that he is necessarily some kind of radical irrationalist. See also the following claims: “He who wishes to philosophize by using Aristotle without danger to his soul must first become thoroughly foolish in Christ. . . . No person philosophizes well unless he is a fool, that is, a Christian” (Luther 1957b, 41). Luther does not rule philosophy, or Aristotle, out altogether, but recommends a certain Christian caution.

14. Among other texts in which he deals briefly with the various senses of death, some of the most interesting are his *Lectures on Genesis*, which Heidegger seems to think highly of, and his “Heidelberg Disputation” (e.g., Luther 1957b, 69). The most helpful discussion of death in the former text comes in his commentary on Gen. 3:15 (Luther 1958, 196–97). However, it seems best to approach these lectures carefully since they may have been tampered with by their early editors (Pelikan 1958, ix–xii).

15. It was only a few months later in 1519 when Luther openly rejected most “nonscriptural sacraments.”

16. For similar statements of suffering as evidence of true Christianity, and biblical support for such statements, see also Luther (1968b, 184–85).

17. For an excellent account of the difference between Pascal and his sixteenth- and seventeenth-century French precursors/contemporaries concerning skepticism, see Maia Neto (1992). Interestingly, just as the Scholastics were moved to extreme rationalism by the rediscovery of ancient Greek texts—those of Aristotle—these French thinkers were moved to question the capabilities of rationality by the rediscovery of (or at least renewed interest in) ancient Greek texts—those of skeptics such as Sextus Empiricus.

The relationship between Pascal and these other figures on the topic of death and dying is also a fascinating one. Despite his reaffirmation of the Platonic notion that philosophy is practice for death, Montaigne will be of most interest during the consideration of the Epicurean strain of the philosophy of death. Compare, however, Pascal's ideas about death and the insufficiency of human reason with the claims of Montaigne's houseguest, Charron (see Popkin 1979, 56–59). He states, "That well to prepare our souls for God and the receiving of his holy spirit, we must empty, cleanse, purify them, and leave them naked of all opinion, belief, affection; make them like a white paper, dead to itself and to the world, that God might live and work in it, drive away the old master, to establish the new" (Charron 1971, 242). Notice also the similarity between this formulation and Descartes's project in the *Meditations*.

18. Pascal (2005, 96–102, 239–61) also spends a great deal of time discussing the importance of fulfilled prophecy as evidence in favor of the truth of Christianity.

Chapter 2

1. It is perhaps somewhat unclear which camp Aristotle ultimately falls into on the issue of posthumous existence, but it is certainly the case that he does not explicitly rely on any notion of such existence in considering the possibility of posthumous harm.

2. Epicurus is in some ways a follower of Socrates's contemporary and so-called pre-Socratic atomist, Democritus, but with the notable difference that Epicurus is not a hard determinist. Rather, he introduces the notion of chance (and choice) into atomic theory via his idea of the capacity of atoms to "swerve" spontaneously from their ordinary falling trajectory (see Strodach 1963, 245; compare Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus* 134).

3. This argument is traditionally called the "symmetry argument." Without explicit reference to Lucretius, Augustine seems to offer a response. He suggests several analogies to explain why we ought to be more concerned about the future of our souls than about their origins: for example, "There is no harm done to someone sailing to Rome if he has forgotten the port from which he set out, as long as he remembers where he is headed" (Augustine, *De libero arbitrio* 3.21).

4. One interesting treatment from a contemporary analytic philosopher deals entirely with the criticism of Epicurean views on death (and responses to

this criticism) throughout history, from the ancients to the present day (Warren 2004). Some more recent criticisms will be discussed later in this chapter.

5. No complete early Stoic documents (e.g., those of Zeno and Chrysippus—both flourishing mostly in the third century B.C.E.) are extant (Rees 1961, xiv; Gould 1970, 1). On the issue of possible Epicurean influence on Stoics, see Gould (1970, 30) and Strem (1981, 121, 163). Jeffrie G. Murphy (1993, 44) simply groups the Epicureans and the Stoics together under the “pagan conception” of death, but given the connections I describe between a couple of prominent pagans—Socrates and Plato—and the Christian view of death, I think Murphy could have been more careful in his characterization.

6. Although a Greek school of thought, like the Epicureans and Cynics (an even earlier group that influences Stoicism), the Stoics attained perhaps their highest level of notoriety during the first two centuries of the common era under Roman emperors such as Nero (the great persecutor of early Christians), whose tutor was the famed Stoic Seneca, and Marcus Aurelius (121–180), who was himself an important Stoic author (Rees 1961; Strem 1981, 35–110).

7. In comparing Luther and Pascal, however, it is clear that not every Christian writer emphasizes personal physical death in the same way.

8. Another thinker with quasi-Stoic sympathies who follows certain claims of Plato’s Socrates on death issues is Marcus Tullius Cicero, the first-century B.C.E. Roman thinker and political figure. In providing an excellent overview of ancient Greek views on death and the postmortem situation of the soul, he seems to lean toward a continued existence (and thus away from Epicurus), while maintaining an open and optimistic outlook on both postmortem possibilities (Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, Book 1).

9. With thinkers that span over half of a millennium, the Stoics are clearly a diverse group, whose various members do not see eye to eye on every issue. For example, there seem to be different views on the nature and duration of postmortem existence; some Stoics even hold that individual souls subsist (although it remains unclear what this means in terms of something like subjective awareness) beyond death for a time before rejoining the primordial substance in the next “conflagration” (Gould 1970, 32–33, 127–28). Maybe those Stoics that hold such a position have, like Cicero, more in common with Plato than Epicurus. At the risk of overlooking some very interesting nuances, I find it helpful, for the sake of keeping my account manageable, to synthesize a general interpretation of Stoicism based on credible secondary sources, especially Gould and Strem, and reference to my paradigmatic Stoic figure, Epictetus.

10. Despite the apparent similarity, “Pascal violently rejected the megalomaniac pride of the Stoic philosopher” (Salomon 1955, 7).

11. Montaigne (1958b, 65) does speak briefly of death as an integral aspect of one’s very being in the sense that everyone exists as “dying.”

12. Compare Epictetus’s (*Enchiridion* 8) claim: “Demand not that events should happen as you wish; but wish them to happen as they do happen, and you will go on well.”

13. I should point out that Spinoza does not follow the Stoics in all things. He explicitly opposes the Stoic notion of willfully eliminating or overcoming the

emotions (Spinoza 1955, 194–95, 244). Also, on the issues of pleasure and God's involvement in human affairs, Spinoza (1955, 217–20, 256) actually seems to side with the Epicureans against the Stoics.

14. As explained above, for Spinoza (1955, 54–59), God is the one and only substance that makes up the natural order, or universe (compare Leibniz 1989a, 242).

15. Similarly, Leibniz (1965, 160; compare 1989b, 140) also explains that “complete generation” never really happens either.

16. In one of his earliest works, Nietzsche (1997, 133) states, “I am one of those readers of Schopenhauer who when they have read one page of him know for certain they will go on to read all the pages and will pay heed to every word he ever said. I trusted him at once and my trust is the same now as it was nine years ago. . . . I understand him as though it were for me he had written.”

17. As opposed to Hegel and Schopenhauer who simply offer radical re-interpretations of Christianity.

18. In Marx's criticism of the master/slave dialectic, one can see an anticipation of Nietzsche's criticism of Christianity. Marx (e.g., 1977, 84–87) is opposed to the exchange of the material goods we actually do have for the promise of some future ideal goods that we will likely never receive. This opposition underlies his famous claim about religion being the opiate of the people (Marx 1977, 63–64).

19. For some key discussion in this debate see Kojève (1973) and Inwood (1986).

20. On Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) as another important precursor to Hegel's views on death, see Piotr Hoffman (1983, viii, 3, 65). For more on death-related issues in Hobbes's thought, see Pocock (1972, 148–201) and Mark Murphy (2000).

21. Consider, for example, Hegel's (1977, 114) claim that “death is the *natural* negation of consciousness.”

22. For discussion of these positions see, for example, Kojève (1973, 120–24), Burbidge (1981), Solomon (1983, 580–89), Inwood (1986, 116–19), and Anderson (1996, 35–36).

23. While I find Solomon's account of these topics helpful, his interpretation of Hegel's often-obscure text is not beyond reproach. J. N. Findlay (1977, 527, 576–77), for one, offers an alternative interpretation of the unhappy consciousness and beautiful soul.

24. I believe that it is his bizarre combination of both Platonic/Christian and Epicurean aspects of dealing with death that makes Hegel's account the closest ancestor of the existential philosophy of death.

25. Although Hoffman appreciates aspects of Hegel's account, he is critical of passages like this. Among other things, he argues that it is unnecessary for individuals to prove themselves in this way; there is no reason to think that life must be actively risked in order to face up to the threat of death posed by the other (Hoffman 1983, viii–ix, 92–103).

26. Schopenhauer (1958, 489) points out that Christianity is inconsistent, but gets things half right when it posits “the restoration of all things.” The in-

consistency is that it posits a beginning, or birth, to go with its notion of no end, without satisfactorily explaining how something can come from nothing. It may appear that the Christian combination of Indian (via Egypt) and Jewish thought improves upon the Jewish doctrine of birth (creation) and death (annihilation), but Schopenhauer (1958, 488) argues that at least the Jews were consistent.

27. Schopenhauer (1958, 616) claims that the nineteenth-century misunderstanding of Christianity by its opponents “is evidence of a mental obscurity to be explained only from the fact that the minds of those men, unfortunately like thousands of others at the present time in Germany, are completely ruined and for ever confused by that miserable Hegelism, that school of dullness, that centre of stupidity and ignorance, that mind-destroying, spurious wisdom that people are at last beginning to recognize as such. Admiration of this school will soon be left to the Danish Academy alone; in their eyes, indeed, that coarse and clumsy charlatan is a *summus philosophus*.” Here Schopenhauer criticizes the Hegelian influence in Denmark that so disturbed Kierkegaard in the 1840s.

28. Schopenhauer (1958, 479, 487, 495) approves of similar ideas in Spinoza, and elsewhere speaks briefly of enduring atoms.

29. Although Schopenhauer claims to be in line with Plato on several points, as we see here and in his appreciation above for the Socrates of the *Apology*, he seems less interested in the views on death and the afterlife offered in the *Phaedo*.

30. Schopenhauer points out that this is also the Epicurean view and the view of the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the *Upanishads*—the veil of illusion (thinking particulars are significant) must be pulled back. He also cites Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) on this issue of realizing that our particular subjective perceptions (phenomena) do not give us knowledge of the true universal reality (noumena).

31. Besides interesting material for a comparison with Darwin, these pages contain references to Parmenides and Plato on the unchanging nature of reality despite the illusion of change.

32. He also acknowledges that the notion of prolonged individuality in another world is often suggested in order to connect our behavior here with reward or punishment elsewhere, but following Kant (see 2012, 4: 397–402), Schopenhauer believes that behavior done out of inclination is of questionable moral worth. Thus, he holds that there is a fundamental ethical flaw in positing an afterlife for the purposes of reward or punishment (compare Kant 2009, 6: 159–62). For more on the issue of ethics and the afterlife in Kant (including his postulate of the soul’s immortality given potentially unending moral progress [Kant 1997, 5:128]) and Schopenhauer, see Pihlström (2002) and Surprenant (2008).

33. Schopenhauer sees Kant dissolving Lucretian asymmetry concerns. Since time is part of our temporary, subjective, self-conscious, phenomenal experience, the ultimate objective, unchanging, noumenal reality is atemporal or eternal. Schopenhauer claims (citing Plotinus) that our subjective sense of finitude is but an apparent reflection of a real eternity. For the noumena, there is no before or after to be concerned about (Schopenhauer 1958, 479, 484, 489–90).

34. It is not the case that my ego perishes while the world goes on without me. The world is, like my ego, a mere phenomenal manifestation of reality that

is particular to me. When I go, so does the world I represent, but reality—will—continues on (Schopenhauer 1958, 500–501).

35. When offering his interpretation of Christian self-denial, Schopenhauer (1958, 603–4, 607–8, 612, 615, 617) refers to nearly every thinker that I included in my earlier discussion: Plato, Jesus, Paul, Clement, Plotinus, Augustine, Luther, and Pascal. He even seems to criticize the rationalistic apologetics that I suggest is at least mildly opposed to proper Christian self-denial (605, 611).

36. Nietzsche does consider the possibility, which Plato seems to suggest, that Socrates is best interpreted as a quasi-divine savior who was sent as a corrective for a crumbling Athenian society with confused priorities. Nietzsche's (1990, 42–44) ultimate conclusion about this possibility is that the highly destructive Socratic "cure" is no better than the Athenian "disease." Suicide will take care of my head cold, but I would not say it returns me to health.

37. Although Nietzsche generally avoids extended discussion of death, choosing rather to focus on life, there is a fair amount of attention paid to death in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, particularly in sections such as "On the Preachers of Death" and "On Free Death" (on his treatment of death in even earlier writings, such as *The Gay Science*, see Parkes [1998, 86–97]). Here he comes to many of the same critical conclusions that one finds in his later work about those who preach death—"or 'the eternal life.' It's all the same to me" (Nietzsche 2006, 32)—out of fear or bitterness at life in the world. Rather, he approvingly states, "The consummated one dies *his* death, victorious, surrounded by those who hope and promise. Thus one should learn to die; and there should be no festival where such a dying person does not swear oaths to the living! To die thus is best, . . . free for death and free in death. . . . Do not allow your death to be a slander against mankind and earth" (Nietzsche 2006, 53–55). Nietzsche (2006, 55) even suggests that Jesus might have "learned to live and to love the earth" if he had just lived longer.

38. Several recent books provide a more thorough overview of topics of interest within the rapidly growing field of analytic philosophy of death (here are a few examples, just from 2009: Belshaw 2009; Bradley 2009; Fischer 2009; Luper 2009). One important debate that can only be mentioned briefly here concerns the desirability of immortality. Bernard Williams's (1993) naysaying "The Makropoulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality" has spawned a cottage industry of defenders and critics of immortality.

39. Although an atheist, whose views were influenced by both Hume and the Vienna Circle logical positivists, Ayer (see 1994) had a near-death experience toward the end of his life that raised some doubts for him about his formerly firm belief that there is no postmortem continuation of subjective experience.

40. Just before this he echoes Schopenhauer, stating, "So to at death the world does not alter, but comes to an end" (Wittgenstein 1961, 6.431).

41. In response to "Annihilation" by Steven Luper (1993), Stephen Rosenbaum (1993a, 293) points out, "However inane and absurd he may feel Epicurus's reasoning was, he, like numerous others, takes the argument seriously enough to devote considerable intellectual effort to its defeat." Most recently, *The Oxford*

Handbook of Philosophy of Death has devoted almost a third of its chapters to Epicurean problems (Bradley, Feldman, and Johansson 2013).

42. While dying is technically the living process that leads to the moment of death, which separates the dying from the dead, the term “death” is often used ambiguously to discuss all three of these issues (Rosenbaum 1993b, 120–21). This is an ambiguity that Heidegger seems to revel in.

43. Rosenbaum (1993b, 132–33) does discuss this issue briefly, but he seems to dismiss it as irrelevant to the main thrust of Epicurus’s argument. With no confusion in my use of terms, I take it that Epicurus’s claims about why our living status as dying should not disturb us are at least as important as his claims about why being dead is nothing to us.

Chapter 3

1. I mention Socrates here rather than Plato because Kierkegaard seems to draw a more significant distinction between them than I am usually comfortable doing. For example, while he is often intrigued by how Socrates lived his life, he is less impressed by Platonic metaphysics (e.g., *JP* 3: 527; 4: 212–13/*SKS* 23: 187; 22: 377). As I suggested in a previous note, I am not sure if it is appropriate to associate Plato’s character “Socrates” closely with the historical figure. I am, furthermore, a bit wary of distinguishing between when this character speaks the words of the historical figure and when this character speaks on behalf of Platonic metaphysics. Kierkegaard clearly does not share my concerns (also see *CI* 66/*SKS* 1: 125–26).

2. Interestingly, in a journal entry from 1838, before writing any books (and five years before the publication of *Either/Or*), Kierkegaard considers what sort of work he would like to produce and says the following: “I was just searching for an expression to designate the kind of people I would like to write for, convinced that they would share my views, and now I find it in Lucian: [*paranekroi*] (one who like me is dead), and I would like to issue a publication for [*paranekroi*]” (*JP* 5: 115/*SKS* 18: 107).

3. Although *Judge for Yourself!* is intended to be the “Second Series” of *For Self-Examination* and was written shortly after, it was not published until well after Kierkegaard’s death. He provides an explanation for his reluctance to publish in an appended note from 1855 (see the Hongs’ “Historical Introduction” [*FSE/JFY* xi–xiii] and *JFY* 215/*SKS* 16: 259).

4. Because Julia Watkin is perhaps the only author who has previously attempted to provide a comprehensive account of Kierkegaard’s various texts that deal with death (although Eva Birkenstock [1997] discusses connections between a few of them), it seems worth offering a brief assessment of her views. Watkin (1990, 65; compare 1979, i–ii) claims that a major theme in Kierkegaard’s authorship is the critique of what she calls the “immanentist” view of existence. In all of its forms, this view focuses on existence in the here and now of the natural order of things, and does not put much stock in some sort of transcendent af-

terlife (Watkin 1990, 66–70). Thus, Watkin seems to make something like the distinction I suggest between the Platonic and the Epicurean strains in the philosophy of death, where the former overlaps with what she calls the “transcendentalist” view and the latter with the immanentalist.

Despite the apparent overlap in our categories, her questionable characterization of several key figures, most notably Plato and Kierkegaard, raises some concerns. Watkin is right to emphasize the importance of beliefs about the afterlife, but perhaps there is value in paying more attention to the way death is allowed to penetrate this life. Of course, these two issues may often be closely related, but I wonder if it is a mistake to set aside other possible reasons (i.e., other than belief in a transcendent afterlife) for allowing death to play an active role in life. Even if Watkin (1990, 68–70) is right about Plato having an immanentalist understanding of the afterlife, her rigid distinction seems to miss the fact that his views on death overall have a great deal more in common with the “dying to the world” of the early Christians than with the more obviously immanentalist views of the Epicureans. Her dichotomy becomes even more problematic once she categorizes Kierkegaard and, briefly, Heidegger (Watkin 1990, 65). Watkin may well be right that Kierkegaard believes in something like a transcendent afterlife while Heidegger does not, but this is hardly the most important factor in determining their places in the philosophy of death. In subsequent chapters it will become clear that these two thinkers are not so easily distinguished (compare Dreyfus 1991, 312). Because Kierkegaard does not allow his transcendentalist beliefs a place of prominence in his argumentation, and Heidegger methodologically sets such issues aside, concerns about the afterlife almost fade into irrelevance as one realizes that they are offering a radical “living with death” alternative to the options provided by the traditional philosophy of death. If one wants to make a list of who believes in heaven and who does not, then Watkin’s account might be sufficient, but it simply is not nuanced enough to characterize accurately the philosophy of death, or Kierkegaard’s place in it.

5. See Watkin’s helpful “Historical Introduction” (*EPW* xxiv) and Pattison (1999, 109).

6. Several other issues that Kierkegaard mentions, but does not yet discuss in detail here (see “At a Graveside,” where they are taken up in much greater detail), are death’s equality, the certainty of death, the uncertainty it causes, and the sense of urgency or anxiety that arises when thinking properly about this uncertainty (*EUD* 184–86, 272, 280 / *SKS* 5: 188–91, 267, 274). He also speaks briefly of what is involved in Christian dying to the world (*EUD* 325 / *SKS* 5: 315), which he will not fully describe until several years later.

7. Given the more positive assessment of Socrates on this topic in certain later works, Kierkegaard’s relationship to both Socrates and the afterlife is obviously somewhat complicated. Marks’s paper is a helpful guide in navigating the relevant twists and turns.

8. These quips are scattered about the “Diapsalmata” and “The Unhappiest One” sections (*EO* 1: 19–43, 219–30 / *SKS* 2: 27–52, 213–23).

9. In Abraham’s case (and as progenitor of the Israelites and paradigm for

the way they are supposed to relate to God, his is the prototypical Hebrew case), worldly blessings are not simply the product of his labor or the fruit of his loins, but the gifts of an eternal God for whom all things are possible.

10. This account of a progression is also helpful for understanding the relationship between *Anxiety* and the late pseudonymous work, *The Sickness unto Death*. The phenomenon of anxiety is merely a mental or psychological malady since Haufniensis has not yet made the “qualitative leap” (CA 91–92/SKS 4: 394–96) to understanding humans as eternal spirit that is necessary for interpreting this malady as the spiritual sickness (or living death) of despair, or (Christianly speaking) sin.

11. For a thorough examination of Kierkegaard’s use of this metaphor, see Mooney (2011).

12. Interestingly, Kierkegaard’s multi-pseudonymous *Stages on Life’s Way*, which also contains three major sections and was published the day after *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*, contains a brief discussion of the common use of the language of death to describe failed erotic love that is similar to what is said in *Repetition* (both discussions of this topic are by the pseudonym Constantin Constantius) (SLW 31, 53–55/SKS 6: 36, 55–57; R 181–82/SKS 4: 52–53). For consideration of the relationship between the three parts of *Stages* and the three discourses, including the connection of Constantius’s discussion in “In Vino Veritas” (the first part of *Stages*) with “At a Graveside,” see Burgess (2000).

13. Kierkegaard’s use of the term *Stemming* in “*Ved en Grav*” is reserved for inappropriate ways of thinking about or approaching death. He does not consistently use this term in this pejorative sense in his other works.

14. Theunissen (2006, 322) claims, “The whole issue turns on remembering the certainty of the ‘that’ and the uncertainty of the ‘when.’” The certainty and the uncertainty of death are indispensable aspects of thinking earnestly about death, but Kierkegaard emphasizes other aspects as well because he believes that even if one grasps the certainty and the uncertainty of death, it is still possible for one to fall into an inappropriate mood toward death. Theunissen seems to realize the significance of these other aspects without highlighting them as I do.

15. Even though there is no appropriate degree of fear here, I find the terms “insufficient” and “excessive” helpful for understanding two common ways that one can fail to fear death properly. I am grateful to Andrew Burgess for helping me to clarify this point.

16. Here one can see how Kierkegaard connects thinking about death with the kairological sense of time Haufniensis discusses in *Anxiety*. Focusing on “how” concerns that have no necessary temporal duration might allow one to give eternal significance to whatever one is doing temporally.

17. The account of Kierkegaard’s notion of life with the earnest thought of death that I have presented here is largely based on a more complete version that I offer elsewhere (Buben 2008).

18. This brief and general statement of the nature of *Postscript* does not express two key issues, which need not be thoroughly dealt with here, but seriously complicate matters in this text overall. First, it seems that there is no final step for

humans, but rather a reckless, blind leap made possible only by the grace of God, who provides “the condition” for such a leap (this important issue will be dealt with later in this chapter); and second, at the end of the book Climacus revokes what he has written so as to leave behind no ladder for others to use to follow him (*CUP* 1: 576, 618–21/*SKS* 7: 523, 561–64). On the first point, see Marie M. Thulstrup (1978, 162).

19. In these last two paragraphs I have attempted to synthesize the accounts of Marks (2011, 283–87) and Possen (2011) on the issue of immortality in *Postscript*, since I believe that they each focus on different, but key, aspects of what Climacus is up to. What I do not attempt to deal with here is the disagreement between them on the significance of Climacus’s use of Socrates as the model for the subjective relationship with immortality. This is an issue that is best put off until the next chapter when I can properly address Kierkegaard’s complicated dealings with Socrates.

20. I do not mean to suggest that there is no important difference between Kierkegaard’s signed works and those written under the pseudonym Climacus. For example, I think Kierkegaard’s overall relationship to the thought of Hegel is quite a bit more complicated than Climacus’s. But their views on the nature of Christianity are often so similar that it is not necessary to make any real distinction here. Nonetheless, I continue to credit the claims that are made in *Postscript* to Climacus because Kierkegaard asks that his “poetically actual” pseudonymous authors be cited for the claims they make (*CUP* 1: [625–27]/*SKS* 7: 569–71).

21. The reasons for this new direction need not be delved into here in any detail, but there has been a great deal written on both Kierkegaard’s intention to discontinue his writing after *Postscript* in order to become a rural pastor, and also on his change of heart in light of his struggle with *The Corsair* periodical. For a brief overview of these issues, see the Hong’s “Historical Introduction” (*UDVS* ix–xiv). Although I see a fairly smooth transition from the first to the second authorship on the topic of death and dying to the world, there are some more jarring differences on other topics. Most notably, the use of the “indirect communication” of pseudonymity changes—pseudonyms are no longer the driving force in Kierkegaard’s writings, and when they are used (e.g., H. H. and Anti-Climacus), they tend to inhabit perspectives explicitly entrenched in Christian dogma.

22. See also “Part Two” of *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, entitled “What We Learn from the Lilies in the Field and from the Birds of the Air” (*UDVS* 202–3/*SKS* 8: 298–99). Kierkegaard will also make similar points in a later discourse (1849) on the lilies and birds (*WA* 28, 40–41/*SKS* 11: 32, 44–45).

23. Although this application of proper love for the dead is undeniably significant in this discourse (and there has been much written on this topic [e.g., Søltoft 1998, esp. 125; Keeley 1999, esp. 241; Ferreira 2001, esp. 211–13]), there is also much that could be said simply about loving the dead themselves. Despite very different approaches, Jeremy Allen (2011) and Patrick Stokes (2011) both offer compelling explanations as to how one can love the dead even though there is seemingly no one there to love.

24. See also *The Lily in the Field and the Bird of the Air*, where Kierkegaard briefly discusses the irrelevance of death for those who receive Christ's promise of "this very day" as seen in Luke 23:43 (WA 44–45/SKS 11: 47–48).

25. If Kierkegaard does not emphasize the good news of the rebirth on the other side of such death, it is because he understands himself as speaking to a world (Christendom) that has grown soft, taking the joyous benefits for granted. He focuses on the nastiness of the "death first" because he thinks nineteenth-century Copenhageners need to hear it. There is more on this topic to come, particularly in connection with Luther.

26. As is often the case when one of Kierkegaard's works deals with the afterlife, a discussion of Socrates is not far behind (CD 218–19, 241–42/SKS 10: 226–27, 247–49). Once again Marks provides a thoughtful account of Socrates's place in the debate. While I agree with her account of Kierkegaard's assessment of Socrates in *Christian Discourses*, I think she may overstate her case when it comes to contrasting this text with *Postscript* on the importance of the objective fact of immortality (Marks 2011, 290–93). There is surely some difference between the two works on this point, but given that they both go out of their way to emphasize the uneasy subjective issue of how one relates to immortality (see esp. CD 244/SKS 10: 250–51), the difference is perhaps rightly overshadowed by the similarity. There is little doubt that Kierkegaard believes in something like a traditional Christian afterlife and ultimately eschews Socratic ignorance on this topic, as we see in *Christian Discourses*, but in neither text is the objective issue allowed to play a prominent role.

27. Despair is basically failing to be a proper self, and sin is failing to be a proper self while having some sense that God demands such selfhood of a person (SUD 13, 77–79/SKS 11: 129, 191–93).

28. Both Connell (2011, 26–30, 33–41) and Podmore (2011, 46–51, 56–59) offer excellent discussions of the metaphor of despair as a zombie-like living death. Podmore's account, which largely agrees with mine, even continues on to consider how "dying to" is a treatment for this condition.

29. Concerning physical martyrdom, it should be mentioned that Kierkegaard actually believed for a time that he would be martyred for his statements against the church (Burgess 2007, 191). In his late works he offers two apparently conflicting views on the appropriateness of martyrdom while writing under two different pseudonyms. As H. H. he writes, "No individual human being or no individual Christian dares . . . to let others become guilty of putting him to death for the truth" (WA 88/SKS 11: 92). On the other hand, as Anti-Climacus he seems to claim that martyrdom is representative of the highest sort of Christianity (PC 226–27/SKS 12: 221–22). For a more detailed account of these issues see Buben (2007, 25–28).

30. Under the silentio pseudonym, Kierkegaard discusses the meaning of Luke 14:26 in detail. Drawing a distinction between Cain and Abraham, silentio points out that God does not demand actual hatred, but a willingness to give up even what you love most in the world (FT 73–75/SKS 4: 165–67). Pia Søltoft (2007) finds a similar interpretation of hatred toward the world in

Christian Discourses, especially in the discourse “‘See We Have Left Everything and Followed You; What Shall We Have?’ (Matthew 19:27)—and What Shall We Have?” However, in her eagerness to distance Kierkegaard (and Christianity) from the usual connotations of “hate,” she might make too many concessions to some of the worldly bonds—for example, the preferential bonds between family members—that Kierkegaard argues, both in *Christian Discourses* and elsewhere, must be loosened or done away with altogether (Søltoft is right, though, to point out Kierkegaard’s emphasis on humility, honesty, and grace, given that humans might not be capable of giving up worldliness on their own). It is not that I think Kierkegaard advocates something like asceticism or monasticism, but if striving Christians are going to have relationships with others in the world, Kierkegaard believes that they must not be relationships defined by worldly standards. Søltoft claims that just as God loves his creation, love is the proper way for a Christian to relate to this creation. What she seems to overlook is that in our corrupt and fallen state, renunciation is often the proper way to relate to the creation; hatred of the world is in some sense the proper way to love God. Matters in the world are backwards after the fall, and redemption, life through death, is necessary. Participation in Christ’s death, which is a snub of all aspects of worldliness, must come before any truly loving relationship with others is possible. Although these ideas are present throughout Kierkegaard’s works, they are perhaps most forcefully stated in his late journals (1851–1855: e.g., *JP* 3: 279, 281–82, 287–89, 294–95, 297, 302/*SKS* 24: 330; 25: 60–62, 313–14, 329–30, 370–72; 26: 342–44; 27: 656).

31. For another description of the apostles’ dying to the world see *Christian Discourses* (CD 184/*SKS* 10: 194–95); and compare both texts with the distinction that Kierkegaard draws between the apostles and modern clergy with respect to “dying to” in *Judge For Yourself!* (*JFY* 116, 132–33/*SKS* 16: 171, 186–87).

32. Anti-Climacus also claims that more than “a little self-denial” might be in order when it comes to the use of reason or understanding, if faith, which is the only way to grasp the “essentially Christian,” is to flourish (*SUD* 99/*SKS* 11: 211).

33. For more on this issue see Carr’s (1996; 2001) discussion of “anti-rationalism.”

34. For an account of “dying to” that focuses on the relationship between *Postscript* and *For Self-Examination*, see Walsh (2002).

35. He actually does publish several similarly themed articles in the few months leading up to *The Moment*, but he had been “silent” for the three years prior to this. See the Hong’s “Historical Introduction” (*TM* xxix–xxx).

36. This passage surely resonates with the statement above from page 353 of *Works of Love*.

37. Connell does not make this point about Epicurus specifically.

38. I have argued that the claims made in “At a Graveside” run parallel to those made by certain samurai authors (Buben 2008).

39. And if, as I suggest, his entire body of work is building up to such dying, then one must at least wonder about the legitimacy of attempting to isolate any of his works from his ultimately Christian project.

Chapter 4

1. In a late journal entry (1851), Kierkegaard addresses the encroaching doubt of modernity, without touching on the afterlife specifically, when he contrasts “primitive” Christianity with “traditional” or “historical” contemporary Christianity. As modern “scholarly doubt grows stronger and stronger and takes away one book after another” (*JP* 1: 86/*SKS* 24: 444), Kierkegaard claims that merely traditional Christianity, which relies mostly on the objective “facts” of Christianity (e.g., about the authorship and timing of New Testament writings) that modern research calls into question, loses hope. Primitive Christianity, on the other hand, avoids such hopelessness by focusing more on the subjective task of relating to God, regardless of rising objective doubt. Kierkegaard comes to see the doubt of modernity as practically doing a service to true Christianity by helping to expose the suspect nature of the “faith” of so-called Christians. On the issue of the afterlife, then, one could see why Kierkegaard might allow the doubt of the Epicurean strain to creep in—in order to correct a Christianity that has lost its primitivity and spends its time arguing about objective matters.

2. Robert Puchniak (2008b, 123–26) offers a concise but helpful account of Kierkegaard’s reception of the views of Pelagius, Augustine’s contemporary and opponent on issues of original sin and the nature of grace.

3. Although I do not believe that Kierkegaard would ever suggest that proper Christian dying to the world is primarily motivated by life-weariness, as he says about the Platonic version here, it is interesting to contrast the optimistic view of Christianity in *Irony* with the much darker view he offers once his critique of Christendom is under way in the authorship proper. For example, while Christian suffering is a constant theme in his later writings, in *Irony* he states, “The Christian does not dwell upon the struggle, the doubt, the pain, the negative, but rejoices in the victory, the certitude, the blessedness, the positive” (*CI* 77/*SKS* 1: 135).

4. The purpose of Constantius’s *Repetition* is to illustrate that such repetition (which, in contrast to recollection, is necessarily forward-looking) is only possible in the case of relating to the eternal; ordinary worldly attempts at repetition always fail in some respect (compare Quist 2002, 78–79). Van Buren (1994, 193) offers a similar account of the Kierkegaardian problem with a backwards-looking Platonic dying away. Perhaps the most thorough account of the string of criticisms of the Platonic understanding of time and eternity found in Kierkegaard’s early works is Janne Kylliäinen’s (2010) discussion of *Phaedo* and *Parmenides*.

5. In *Anxiety*, Haufniensis explains that without a notion of sin and its corresponding intensification of what is at stake in life, “the pagan view of death was milder and more attractive” (*CA* 92/*SKS* 4: 395). As evidence of this mildness he refers to G. E. Lessing’s contribution to an eighteenth-century debate on the way death is portrayed in art. In this essay, Lessing (1769) contrasts the pagan use of the genius peacefully and solemnly extinguishing a torch with the more disturbing use of the skeleton in the Middle Ages.

6. I do not mean to suggest that Kierkegaard thoughtlessly makes an arbitrary distinction. As is clear from his dissertation, he is engaging an obviously

well-developed secondary literature on the issue of what is specifically Platonic and what can be properly attributed to the historical Socrates (e.g., *CI* 29–32, 79–80 / *SKS* 1: 90–93, 138–39). Kierkegaard takes this issue seriously and acknowledges the difficulty of coming to conclusions while still continuing to speculate on the matter.

7. Having said all of this about why it is perhaps unfair and inaccurate to separate Plato and his character Socrates, however one understands their relationship, the sort of disembodied transmigration of souls discussed in Plato's dialogues (and Neoplatonic writings, which Kierkegaard only mentions once in his published works, and on this very topic [*EO* 1: 300 / *SKS* 2: 289]) remains at odds with the Christian notion of the resurrection of the body (e.g., *CI* 74 / *SKS* 1: 133; *CD* 205, 241 / *SKS* 10: 214, 247–48).

8. Not only do passages like this suggest a change in Kierkegaard's view of Socratic dying to the world over time (see *JP* 4: 214 / *SKS* 24: 32 for an unrelated instance of reevaluating a harsh judgment of Socrates in the dissertation), but they also raise the possibility that *Postscript's* emphasis on the lifelong task of maintaining Socrates-style concerned ignorance about one's postmortem status remains viable in the later writings. This possibility seems to undermine Marks's (2011, 295–96) criticism that Possén (2011, 127–29) makes too much out of Climacus's praise of Socrates on this issue.

9. In the end, Kierkegaard seems to take some (admittedly common) interpretive liberties in using Socrates to express his concerns about both Platonic and even problematic Christian implementation of dying to the world. It seems that Socrates can be of no further help to Kierkegaard only once it becomes clear that dogmatic reliance on grace is necessary for the complete dying to the world that proper Christianity requires. I take it that something like this idea is behind the anti-Socratic discussion in *Christian Discourses*.

10. It is also worth making special note of the resonance between dying to reason in *For Self-Examination* and his claim about Paul only using prudence (*Klogskab*) without danger once he acts "decisively against reason" (*Forstand*) and embraces "total madness" (*Galskab*) (*JP* 3: 468 / *SKS* 23: 74). Compare Luther (1957b, 41). Kierkegaard's understanding of Paul's "moment" might also rely upon Augustine's ample discussion of time, even if only indirectly (e.g., via his general Lutheran background).

11. I am grateful to Guignon for fruitful discussions on this topic. Dreyfus (1991, 360) also mentions it briefly.

12. Kierkegaard does occasionally take issue with Paul, although only in a very limited way, particularly when it comes to the relationship between the imitation of Christ in dying to the world and grace (e.g., *JP* 2: 354, 368 / *SKS* 24: 491; 26: 44). Kierkegaard surely acknowledges Paul's dying to the world, but seems to think that his emphasis on atonement and grace might be a bit too strong, given that a depraved humanity is likely to see in this emphasis an easy loophole that allows circumvention of the painful requirements of renunciation and self-denial demanded by Christ's "follow me" (Matt. 4:19).

13. It is for this reason that the New Testament only mentions (adult) individuals, never groups, being baptized. While it might be pointed out that one is

baptized into a community, it must be remembered that it is the individual choice to accept Christ in baptism, and the ongoing individual struggle to maintain this acceptance, that is the foundation for any subsequent communal membership.

What essentially distinguishes the Christian from the pagan or Jew, for Kierkegaard, is the mediation of Christ. As redeemer, Christ steps into the middle of all relationships of culpability between humans and says, “forgiven.” For the Christian, then, relating to other humans—for example, within a community—is not done directly in the ethical manner of the pre-Christians, but indirectly by first relating to Christ who loves and redeems (Col. 3:13; 1 John 4:19). The community is always secondary to the individual relationship with Christ.

Patricia J. Huntington, focusing on *Two Ages*, provides a very helpful account of Kierkegaard’s view of authentic community from a non-religious perspective. Although her account centers on the primacy of the individual’s relation to whatever brings a group together, she is ultimately unable to see how subordinate community is for Kierkegaard because she does not consider his more developed Christian perspective (Huntington 1995, 49–50). At the very least, his late journal entries would not mesh well with her optimistic reading of Kierkegaard’s sense of community. I will return to these ideas in a later chapter.

14. He does, however, seem receptive to the ideas of certain thinkers from the first couple of centuries after Paul. For example, Paul Martens (2008, 107–8) briefly suggests that Kierkegaard’s limited and indirect exposure to Irenaeus may have influenced his notion of dying to the world.

15. In several places, Kierkegaard (in his own name and under pseudonym) seems to approve of a similar passion in the monastic movement of the Middle Ages as well. Despite concerns about monasticism’s excessive focus on externality and its own meritoriousness, he suggests that the dedication it often requires is preferable to the lukewarm, compromising attitude of modern Christianity (e.g., *CUP*1: 401–5/*SKS* 7: 365–69; *JFY* 192/*SKS* 16: 238–39).

16. Haufniensis actually mentions Augustine’s formulation of original sin (*CA* 27/*SKS* 4: 333–34). See also the very helpful discussion of the relationship between Kierkegaard and Augustine on this particular issue in Barrett (1985, 48–52).

17. Despite this Christian-oriented criticism of the Greeks, in one late journal entry Kierkegaard does cry out to his pagan paragon, Socrates, against a rationalistic appeal by Augustine to numerical majority in support of his views (*JP* 4: 220/*SKS* 26: 31).

18. Barrett (2008, 173–74) also considers Hegel’s attempt at a resuscitation of Anselm’s ontological argument, which epitomizes, for Kierkegaard, the dangerous influence of such rationalistic theology even in his own day. Bøgeskov (2008, 184, 202) briefly makes similar points about Hegel in connection with Aquinas.

19. One older essay that is quite helpful for orienting oneself in the Luther-Kierkegaard relationship is Regin Prenter’s (1981) “Luther and Lutheranism.”

20. David Yoon-Jung Kim (2009, 85–97) offers a very helpful account of the “Peasants’ Revolt” of 1525 and the antinomian controversy that plagued Luther’s Reformation years.

21. Kim also outlines both Luther's written attempts to curb antinomian and secular interpretations of his views, and the efforts of his successors, Philipp Melancthon (1497–1560) and John Calvin (1509–1564). See also Barrett (2002, 88, 104–5).

22. Kierkegaard seems to say as much in a journal entry from 1850 (*JP* 3: 81/*SKS* 23: 314). In several entries from 1854, Kierkegaard even suggests that Luther should have become a martyr (*JP* 3: 97–100/*SKS* 25: 303–4, 330, 399–400).

23. Kierkegaard seems to agree at one point that Luther grasps the dialectic. In 1849 Kierkegaard states, "The tragedy of Christendom is clearly that we have removed the dialectical element from Luther's doctrine of faith, so that it has become a cloak for sheer paganism and epicureanism. We completely forget that Luther urged faith in contrast to a fantastically exaggerated asceticism" (*JP* 3: 70/*SKS* 21: 323). However, while he is right to think that Luther grasps the issue of faith versus works on some level, there is a larger dialectic at play in the history of Christianity, for which Kierkegaard believes Luther lacks the proper perspective. In 1850 Kierkegaard compares Luther to his ancient standard for dialecticians and claims, "The only important thing to me in this is to get it dialectically clarified. As for the rest, I have the deepest respect for Luther—but was he a Socrates? No, no, far from that" (*JP* 3: 80/*SKS* 23: 152–53). I will have more to say on this issue shortly.

24. It may seem as though Kierkegaard's criticism of Augustine—that he makes faith into a kind of intellectual position that precedes knowledge—is applicable to Pascal as well, given Pascal's discussion of faith as a capacity that has its own sorts of experiences and reasons. However, Kierkegaard does approve of Pascal's claims about knowing God in an 1850 journal entry: "Pascal means that knowledge of the divine is essentially a transformation of the person; one must become a different person in order to know the divine" (*JP* 3: 420/*SKS* 24: 99). Whether or not Pascal is guilty of the error that Kierkegaard sees at the foundation of medieval Christianity, there is no doubt that he, like Augustine, avoids the extreme rationalism of the Scholastics. While Pascal uses reason (or at least reasons) to support the faithful by showing that their attitude is not ridiculous, Anselm and Aquinas carve out a more substantial place for reason—designating a specific role in some cases for reason in establishing Christian doctrine. Even so, Pascal does share some of the Scholastic interest in showing how reasonable Christianity can be, and thus, he is more their theological heir than Kierkegaard.

25. While Pascal might rule "Reason" out of Christian faithfulness temporarily, but allow it back in later in the form of reasons, Kierkegaard seems to rule out both Reason (*Forstand*, *Fornuft*) and reasons (*Grunde*) in the service of Christianity. Perhaps some will suggest both that Kierkegaard makes a distinction between *Forstand*, which is commonly translated as "understanding," and *Fornuft*, which is translated as "reason" or "rationality" more strictly, and that he opposes only the former but not the latter to faith. I argue elsewhere that such a suggestion is misguided (Buben 2011, 79).

26. Kierkegaard is explicitly critical of this sentiment in Pascal in an 1850 journal entry, even going so far as to liken him to the Danish bishop Jacob Peter

Mynster (1775–1854), whose world-accommodating theology is so disturbing to Kierkegaard (*JP* 3: 423–24/*SKS* 24: 119).

27. Of course, Climacus, like Luther, points out that it is precisely this kind of worldly suffering that is indicative of one's eternal happiness or salvation (*evige Salighed*), but beyond this odd experience of joyful suffering, a truly Christian individual existing in the world does not necessarily have any experience of happiness (*CUP* 1: 452/*SKS* 7: 411). Given that Pascal and Kierkegaard (in *For Self-Examination*, at least) both seem to be describing the life of a Christian in the world, it seems appropriate to focus on the absurdity and misery when talking about Kierkegaard's position. I thank Pat Stokes for helping me to clarify this issue.

28. This formulation suggests parallels with Luther's project, which Kierkegaard criticizes despite obvious appreciation for the difficulties of that particular historical situation. Given that Kierkegaard also faces a problematic religious milieu, he could no doubt sympathize on some level with the circumstances facing Epicurus. Kierkegaard also feels the need to discuss death, not in order to combat widespread fear, of course, but rather to shock a culture riddled with frivolity. Nonetheless, just as Kierkegaard criticizes Luther, and especially what happens in Luther's name, he could take Epicurus to task for his dialectical ineptitude in his excessive battle against the fear of death (compare *JP* 3: 70/*SKS* 21: 297, 323).

29. In the published works, there are a couple of instances of a Kierkegaard pseudonym using Stoicism "as an antagonist for him to define himself polemically against" (Furtak 2010, 204). In the first volume of *Either/Or* Marcus Aurelius seems to be an inspiration for the aesthete, who represents the lowest sphere of existence (Furtak 2009, 72–73). And in *Sickness* Anti-Climacus identifies the defiant form of despair with Stoicism, although he seems to have a broader pagan view in mind (*SUD* 68–69/*SKS* 11: 182–83).

30. Claire Carlisle (2009, 173–84) suggests a fairly thorough understanding of Spinoza on Kierkegaard's part, although Spinoza rarely comes up after 1846. Håvard Løkke and Arild Waaler (2009, 51–54) claim that Kierkegaard's study of Leibniz was almost exclusively confined to a thorough reading of the *Theodicy* in 1842–1843. Søren Landkildehus (2009, 114–16) points out that as far as anyone can tell Kierkegaard's encounter with Montaigne's work was mostly casual and confined to 1847 and 1850.

31. Løkke and Waaler (2009, 55–57) focus on Kierkegaard's early (1842–1843) reception of Leibniz's discussion about whether faith is "above reason" or "against reason," and argue that Kierkegaard means only the former when he speaks about dying to reason for the sake of the Christian paradox (compare *JP* 3: 399–400/*SKS* 19: 390–91). It is unclear whether or not they believe that their conclusion applies only to this early period in Kierkegaard's thought, but I have argued elsewhere that this conclusion cannot apply to Kierkegaard's views in general (Buben 2011, 72–76, 80; 2013). Not only does Miles seem to share my understanding, but so does Carlisle (2009, 184) in comparing Kierkegaard to Spinoza, and the Hongs in discussing Leibniz (*JP* 3: 796).

32. Kierkegaard often only mentions Hegel, even when he really has these

Danish Hegelians in mind (Stewart 2003, 33–34, 452). Out of politeness or respect, Kierkegaard seems to have had a lifelong aversion to explicit public criticism of the living. For example, he wrote but did not publish *The Book on Adler*, which criticizes a small parish minister who claimed to have had a revelation, in order to spare Adler from excessive public humiliation (*JP* 5: 401, 405, 419; 6: 117/*SKS* 20: 196, 201, 264; 21: 275–76). Stewart (2003, 42) actually attributes Kierkegaard's pseudonymity, at least partially, to a desire "to avoid embarrassment or unnecessary offense" of others in the relatively close-knit intellectual community of Copenhagen.

33. It is in Climacus's writings that one can find Kierkegaard's most anti-Hegelian expressions (Stewart 2003, 451).

34. Compare the discussion in *Postscript* with Anti-Climacus's claims about Christianity's essential relation to "the single individual" given sin (*SUD* 120–21/*SKS* 11: 231–33). Anti-Climacus even connects this idea with the kind of necessary isolation of death seen in "At a Graveside."

35. While its tone is certainly representative of this portion of *Postscript*, this phrase does not appear where Solomon says it does.

36. Although Kierkegaard was surely aware of Schopenhauer much earlier, given the significant number of journal entries (there are no explicit references in the published works) dedicated to Schopenhauer that are entirely confined to 1854, it seems likely that his reading of the German pessimist was limited to the last year or so of Kierkegaard's life (Davini 2007, 277–78; Stokes 2007, 68–69).

37. This pessimistic view is very much like the one Kierkegaard attributes to Plato (but not necessarily Socrates) in his dissertation. However, Kierkegaard does make the further distinction there between the more optimistic "Greek" (in this context, Platonic) notion of overcoming individual existence and the "Oriental" notion that Schopenhauer seems to advocate (*CI* 63–66/*SKS* 1: 122–25).

38. Kierkegaard recognizes Schopenhauer's acknowledgment that he is not actually living up to the requirements of the way of life he recommends (*JP* 4: 34/*SKS* 26: 142). Both Davini and Stokes address Kierkegaard's criticism that Schopenhauer does not demand of himself the ethical position he advocates.

39. "*Vom Standpunkt NIETZSCHES ist KIERKEGAARD lebensfeindlich.*" Jaspers says this just before his discussion of limit situations, which relies heavily on Kierkegaard and has a major impact on Heidegger.

40. Compare this with Spinoza's brief statement about death (which I quoted in the second chapter) where he speaks of "seeking his own true advantage."

Chapter 5

1. One issue that I will not treat in great detail is the nature of Heidegger's occasional comments related to death after *Being and Time*, for example, the inclusion of "mortals" in his discussion of "the fourfold" ("BDT" 352–56), and his consideration of Rilke's views on death and negation ("WPF" 124–26). Both because Heidegger seems far less interested in focusing on death as a theme

in itself in his later writings and because the connection of Heidegger to other thinkers on the topic of death relies almost entirely on his work prior to 1930, it seems sensible to set aside his later reflections that touch briefly on death. On the issue of Heidegger's pre-*Being and Time* discussions of death, it is probably fair to suggest that the account at the beginning of "Division Two" is simply the final refined version of what he had been saying about death in texts such as *History of the Concept of Time* (see HCT 312–18).

2. By questioning what one is, stripped of the views handed down by the metaphysical tradition (e.g., a rational animal, a created being, a thinking thing, etc.), one becomes free to see how whatever is shows up without looking through the lenses that these views require one to use (Huntington 1995, 46–47).

3. Inversely, given its constant inclusion in the death chapter, it would seem that incorporating the notion of wholeness is absolutely crucial to understanding Heidegger's inquiry into death. Dreyfus's foreword to White's book, however, suggests that few significant interpreters of Heidegger on death emphasize the centrality of wholeness, with Guignon as the notable exception. While Dreyfus (2005, xviii–xxxi) raises some concerns about Guignon's early account, Guignon (2011a) has recently updated his views on Heideggerian death while still maintaining the centrality of wholeness.

4. See page 253 of *Being and Time* for an association of these two terms: many things might be accidentally mine, but what is "essentially mine" (death) seems to be part of my "ownmost self." See pages (BT) 42–45 for Heidegger's more general discussion of the essential "mineness" of my existence.

5. Dreyfus (1991, 309) surmises that "demise" is really Heidegger's word for Dasein's culturally interpreted event of what for mere living things would be simple perishing.

6. Theodore Kiesel (1993, 339–40) and Iain Thomson (2004, 465) both offer helpful statements of the Heideggerian concept of "formal indication" in connection with death. See also Heidegger's "Comments on Karl Jaspers's *Psychology of Worldviews*," where he seems to connect the formal indication of existence with Jaspers's limit-situations ("KJ" 9). Briefly, formal indication is Heidegger's method of looking to everyday "factual life as the inroad for developing concepts to bring what is hidden on a pre-philosophical level to an explicit philosophical understanding" (Schalow 1994, 311). "Formal" here means "without content," and the idea is that one might be able to derive unnoticed schematic or structural aspects of, in this case, the role of death in human existence by examining more common content-laden notions of what death is all about (compare BT 241). One key example already considered is the indication of the structural "not-yet" found in Heidegger's discussion of ripening fruit.

7. As will become clear, this association of death and the ahead-of-itself aspect of the care structure is among the most important points made in the death chapter.

8. In addition to some similar usage by Kierkegaard and Heidegger, it ought to be pointed out that the German term *Stimmung* (a key topic in Heidegger's account of "state-of-mind") and the Danish *Stemning*, both often translated as "mood," are cognates. Heidegger also shows a particular affinity for Kier-

kegaard's "treatise on the concept of anxiety" (BT235n6). There will be more to say about this affinity in the following chapter.

9. The key component of "Being-certain" is appropriation (compare BT 307). I will say more about this in the following chapter.

10. *Eigentlichkeit*, usually rendered "authenticity," can be more literally translated as the rather awkward "enowned-ness" or "enownment," which suggests that becoming authentic means becoming one's own, or owning up to what one is; and authentic Being-towards-death is an owning up to oneself as this sort of Being. Even though Heidegger seems uncomfortable speaking, as Climacus does, in terms of subjectivity as opposed to objectivity (Heidegger often puts these terms in scare quotes because this dichotomy displays a common misunderstanding of the nature of what is), there is much to compare here with *Post-script*'s idea of becoming subjective, which also means something like becoming one's own.

11. Although Heidegger does not make such a connection explicit, Thomson (2004, 464) and others claim that the term *vorlaufen* implicitly calls to mind the *Blitzkrieg*—blindly running out into the field of battle toward almost certain death.

12. The idea here seems to be something like this: if I am paying attention, I can see that none of my specific pursuits are necessary. These possibilities can be "outrun" if I choose to pursue others instead, but what cannot be avoided or "outrun" is the fact that I am able to pursue things as long as I exist.

13. Of course, none of these three essential structures happens before the others according to some sequential or chronological understanding of time. Rather, they are the three equiprimordial aspects of Dasein's being as care (although "*the primary phenomenon of primordial and authentic temporality is the future*" [BT 329]) that make any ordinary understanding of sequential temporality possible (Guignon 2011a, 198–99). See pages 323–31 of *Being and Time* for Heidegger's initial connection of care and temporality. These key ideas are the indispensable lens for viewing the rest of "Division Two."

14. Compare Jeff Malpas's (1998, 122–23) interesting account of this constrained sense of freedom and responsibility in which he intentionally avoids relying on Heideggerian terminology.

15. Kisiel (1993, 432) asks a related, but more general question: "How does the ontological can-be turn into an ontic have-to-be? How does existential possibility become existentiell compulsion?" Basically, the issue is whether or not one *should* care about being authentic or about taking responsibility just because Heidegger points out that one *can* be authentic or acknowledge responsibility. As I will suggest, the answer to such questions is that one simply is "care," and so, not to pursue authenticity or responsibility is to ignore what one is. I take it that Heidegger feels that the repulsiveness (or at least the peculiarity) of contradictorily not being what one is offers compulsion enough.

16. Heidegger makes it quite clear that the "Situation" discussed here is not simply the "present-at-hand mixture of circumstances and accidents which we encounter," but rather the very "there" that Dasein puts itself in by resolutely taking responsibility for itself (BT 300).

17. He will distinguish this from the irresolute “making present” that corresponds to the everyday temporality of “within-time-ness” (BT 338).

18. The Danish cognate *Øjeblik* has the same connotation.

19. Although it will be worthwhile to pursue the obvious connections with Kierkegaard on this concept, there seems to be no obvious etymological connection between the German *Wiederholung* and the Danish *Gjentagelsen*. However, both terms literally mean something like “taking again.” Caputo (1993, 214–16) emphasizes this literal understanding in discussing Job as a helpful indication of repetition, but he does not explicitly connect the German and the Danish in this way.

20. Perhaps the following schema will be helpful for understanding the relationships between Heidegger’s various technical terms:

| | | | | | |
|-----------|-----------------------|-------|--------------|---------|------------------|
| existence | ahead-of-itself | death | anticipation | future | fate |
| falling | Being-with/alongside | life | moment | present | repetition |
| facticity | thrownness/already in | birth | resoluteness | past | heritage (guilt) |

21. Thus, authentic Dasein is not susceptible to a foolish rigidity, but instead always remains open to abandoning a particular “repeated” course of action “in accordance with the demands of some possible Situation or other” (BT 391).

Chapter 6

1. Schrempf is notable for his questionable translations and interpretation (Malik 1997, 336–39, 377).

2. To be precise, the passage he quotes from the *Attack in Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity* is from an 1896 translation of Kierkegaard’s *The Point of View* by Dorner and Schrempf. Heidegger’s “Foreword” to this lecture course from the summer of 1923 also acknowledges that for the ideas it contains, “impulses were given by Kierkegaard” (OHF 4). Kisiel (1993, 452) calls attention to a similar statement by Heidegger more than a year after *Being and Time*.

3. Schrempf’s edition had mostly ignored these works due to their blatantly Christian content, but he did attempt to address this lacuna with a partially completed series of new translations in the 1920s.

4. In the appendix to *Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity* Heidegger acknowledges Kierkegaard’s significance for his understanding of death with the cryptic statement, “The *death* of Christ—the problem! Experience of death in any sense, death—life—Dasein (Kierkegaard)” (OHF 86).

5. With its translation of Kierkegaard’s death discourse, this volume of the journal was dedicated to a favorite poet of Heidegger’s, the recently deceased Georg Trakl. This was the last volume of *Der Brenner* (due to the war) until 1919. See Malik (1997, 381, 391).

6. Also see Pattison (2007, 181–82) and Schulz (2009, 331, 357). Schulz mentions “At a Graveside” along with “‘Lilies in the field’ from 1847.”

7. Jaspers’s quotations are from the Schrempf edition.

8. In his comments on Jaspers’s discussion of limit-situations from the early

1920s, Heidegger even acknowledges Kierkegaard's influence on Jaspers on the topic of death ("KJ" 9–10, 22–23). Although van Buren (1994, 150) acknowledges Heidegger's independent reading of Kierkegaard from as early as 1911, he claims that it was not until the encounter with Jaspers's book that Heidegger engaged in "his first intensive reading of Kierkegaard's works." I am not sure that this is entirely fair given Heidegger's own claims (e.g., "I was already confronting the works of Kierkegaard when there was as yet no dialectical literature" [MF 141]) and all of the Kierkegaard that was available to Heidegger between 1910 and 1915. Van Buren is certainly right, however, if he simply means to point out that Heidegger's comments on Jaspers were his first attempt at commenting on obviously Kierkegaardian themes. Also see van Buren (1994, 170). On the differences between Jaspers and Kierkegaard when it comes to death-related issues, and for a sense of what Heidegger takes from Jaspers himself on this topic, see Schulz (2009, 354) and Blattner (1994), respectively.

9. Heidegger's note also mentions Jaspers's (1922, 108–17) discussion of "the moment," which refers to *Anxiety* several times.

10. A simple perusal of the increasingly influential *Der Brenner* between 1919 and 1923 suggests just how much Kierkegaard must have been "in the air" at this time among educated German-speakers. Also see Malik (1997, 371ff.).

11. My point is not that Heidegger is in any way opposed to the historical tracing, or "destruction," of an idea's development (in fact, this is often what occupies Heidegger, particularly in the various courses surrounding the publication of *Being and Time*), but that he believes it is a mere trivial pursuit to read a text with the goal of naming each thinker that seems to be responsible for the original expression of every passing thought. Nonetheless, it should be mentioned that in some of his very recently published "Black Notebooks" from the late 1930s and early 1940s, Heidegger has a great deal more to say about his relationship to Kierkegaard in general (but not so much on the topic of death). I am grateful to Gerhard Thonhauser for bringing this to my attention.

12. Heidegger speaks of *Unbestimmtheit* in *Sein und Zeit*, while death as "indefinable" in "At a Graveside" comes from the Danish word *ubestemmelig*—translated *unbestimmbar* in *Der Brenner*'s "Vom Tode."

13. On the death of the other in the light of the Kierkegaardian / Heideggerian view, see Llevadot (2011).

14. When Climacus considers "whether death can be anticipated" (CUP 1: 168 / SKS 7: 155), the Danish is *anticiperes* (translated in the Schrempf edition as *antizipiert*). Despite the possible connection suggested by the common English translation of Heidegger's *vorlaufen*, it seems that there is no etymological reason to think that he gets his formulation from Kierkegaard's pseudonym.

15. In *Der Brenner*'s "Vom Tode," Kierkegaard's *Vished* and *Visse* become *Gewisheit* and *Gewisse* (the opposite being *Uvished* etc. in Danish and *Ungewissheit* etc. in German), which are the terms used in *Sein und Zeit*.

16. See, however, my previous discussion of *Anxiety* where Haufniensis briefly considers the more complicated impact of death on humans in comparison with its impact on simpler organisms. Might this brief digression have some influence on Heidegger's technical differentiation of death terminology?

After all, a note just before his death chapter mentions *Anxiety*. Also see Theunissen's (2006, 343–44) brief account of the various senses of death found in Christianity, which includes the bodily, the spiritual (sinfulness), and the mystical (dying to).

17. Kiesel (1993, 339) briefly notes the implicit anti-Epicureanism in Heidegger that Kierkegaard openly expresses. Theunissen (2006, 340–41) discusses the influence of the Hegelian Ludwig Feuerbach's work on death and immortality upon Kierkegaard and Heidegger, and suggests that Feuerbach's unwitting "variation upon" the Epicurean mantra he means to reject might be a precursor to Heidegger's views. The most detailed account to date of Heidegger's rebuttal of the Epicurean position comes from Mark Wrathall (2005, 66–68), whose assessment largely coincides with mine despite some disagreement on other aspects of our respective readings of Heidegger on death.

18. Heidegger also speaks about the power that comes from approaching death in a certain way (*BT* 384), but while both Kierkegaard's Danish expression and its translation as *rückwirkende Kraft* in *Der Brenner's* "Vom Tode" use the word *Kraft*, Heidegger's expressions involve the word *Macht* (e.g., *Übermacht* and *Ohnmacht*) instead (there is a common Danish equivalent: *Magt*). If there is any significance to this difference between them, perhaps it is that Heidegger means to exploit *Macht's* connotation of political power that is not present in *Kraft*. Given Heidegger's interest in authenticity, or "owning oneself," it may be that he wants to suggest that the anticipation of death leads to a sort of ruling over oneself (compare *BT* 310).

19. Theunissen (2006, 341–43, 347) makes a similar connection on their eschewal of matters of the afterlife in focusing on "At a Graveside." His discussion includes a helpful description of the discourse's willful refusal to give the afterlife a prominent role in determining the appropriate way to relate to death, but on this topic, as on others, there are significant limitations to the approach of Theunissen's paper. While the main point that Kierkegaard refrains from abstract speculation about the afterlife holds throughout Kierkegaard's works, his overall treatment of the afterlife is significantly more complicated than it is in "At a Graveside" (which Theunissen certainly acknowledges). The problem is that Heidegger seems to rely on more than just this discourse in appropriating Kierkegaard's views on death and the afterlife. Thus, Theunissen can hardly provide a complete assessment of what Heidegger borrows and leaves behind from the thought of Kierkegaard on the afterlife. Given that such a complete assessment is not the goal of Theunissen's essay, the purpose of making these comments is not so much to criticize Theunissen as it is to suggest the importance of further work that considers the range of Kierkegaard's dealings with the afterlife (and death-related issues in general) when comparing him with Heidegger on this topic.

20. During his brief discussion of death as a way of life in his chapter on what Heidegger inherits from "primal Christianity," van Buren (1994, 174–76) describes Heidegger's debt to Paul's letters, Luther's "Heidelberg Disputation" and commentaries on Genesis (which Heidegger actually quotes from at one point just after quoting Kierkegaard [*PI* 137]), Pascal's reflections, and Kierkegaard's *Postscript* (via Jaspers). Van Buren (1994, 158–67, 186–89) also describes

Heidegger's reliance upon the sense of dying to the world and its wisdom found in the "*theologia crucis*" of Paul, Augustine (when not corrupted by a Greek "*theologia gloriae*" that comes to dominate the medieval tradition), Luther (but not necessarily Lutherans), and Kierkegaard. This description reads much like Kierkegaard's account of the problematic back and forth of dying to the world in Christian history (a dialectic often seen in terms of rigor and mercy, or suffering and glory), which was discussed in the fourth chapter. Theunissen (2006, 338–39, 343–46) briefly notes the debts that both Kierkegaard and Heidegger owe to Tertullian, Ambrose, Augustine, and Luther on the topic of death. For Heidegger's own acknowledgment of similar debts, see his note on page 249 of *Being and Time*.

21. While Dreyfus is right to notice the similar interest in a sort of "dying to" in Heidegger, he overemphasizes Climacus's formulation from the *Postscript* (certainly not Kierkegaard's final and most considered view) where one trades a lower immediacy (the common worldly way of understanding oneself and one's place) for a higher one (that resembles the Christian relationship with God) in "Religiousness B." Since Heidegger abandons the lower and also avoids the faithful acceptance of the higher, Dreyfus sees him—but not Kierkegaard—as a proponent of dying to "all" immediacy. It seems to me that Dreyfus sells his insightful connection of Kierkegaard and Heidegger a bit short. Rather than making the hasty jump to arguing for a key difference between Kierkegaard's theological account and Heidegger's non-theological account (which I will discuss in the next chapter), he could have made more out of the fact that for both Kierkegaard and Heidegger the purpose of dying to the world (Kierkegaard's more common formulation) is to find a "new life" or new way of viewing existence.

22. I do have some reservations about Thomson's (2004, 453) description of the anticipation of death in terms of an "actual experience of complete world-collapse." The trouble is that Heidegger never really suggests such a particular experience that one returns from better for having gone through it. While Heidegger's account of grasping the essential structure of authentic Dasein does indeed bear a striking resemblance to the Christian notion of dying to live (compare van Buren 1994, 186), it is not necessary to overdramatize what Heidegger is saying by portraying death as something like an emotional breakdown. It is important to keep in mind that for both Kierkegaard and Heidegger the moment of vision is not some particular chronological moment, but a constant struggle, from birth to death, to take responsibility for oneself. Although it may not be Thomson's intention, his formulation gives the impression that one might pass through and be finished with death at some point, whereas both Kierkegaard and Heidegger believe that death, or "dying to," is a task for a lifetime, a possibility to exist in but not to be actualized (see my discussions of *Postscript* and section 50 of *Being and Time* in previous chapters).

23. Although Heidegger makes it clear that everyday falling into an inauthentic grasp of one's place in the world (like sin on Kierkegaard's view) is a common and unavoidable aspect of Dasein (*BT*, section 51), many commentators argue that Heidegger is not offering a merely neutral description. The struggle for authenticity (like Kierkegaard's faithful striving) is somehow a "bet-

ter” way of existence than inauthentic complacency (see, e.g., Hoberman 1984, 228; Berthold-Bond 1991, 119, 125; Quist 2002, 91).

24. Heidegger speaks of becoming “free from the entertaining ‘incidental’ [*Zufälligkeiten*] with which busy curiosity keeps providing itself” (*BT* 310). See also pages 383–84 and 388 of *Being and Time* where he continues to rely on the same Kierkegaardian language of the accidental and “trivial” what-concerns about “output” (compare Magurshak 1985, 177).

25. Besides touching on Heidegger’s obvious links to Kierkegaard’s consideration of *Øjeblikket*, both Dreyfus (1991, 321–22) and Kisiel (1993, 437–38) offer brief, but helpful connections to the Greek and Christian roots of this kairological sense of time (compare *BP* 288). The best source for these sorts of connections is van Buren’s discussion of what Heidegger borrows from Paul, Augustine, Luther, and Kierkegaard. Just as he does with the closely related issue of the aforementioned Pauline theology of the cross, van Buren (1994, 190–202) describes Heidegger’s “destruction” of the Christian understanding of time in his lecture courses from the early 1920s. It is in these courses that Heidegger explains how the Pauline innovation with respect to time (a lived synthesis of past, present, and future) was initially grasped and later botched by Augustine, paving the way for the medieval Scholastic mistake of treating time as an infinite series of now-moments. The account goes on to explain how Luther and then Kierkegaard (who Heidegger will eventually say “has seen the *existentiell* phenomenon of the moment of vision with the most penetration” [*BT* 338n3]) contribute to the recovery of the primal Christian kairological sense of time.

26. Of course, as I have suggested and will discuss in greater detail shortly, this relationship will take on a different shape for Kierkegaard than for Heidegger given that “future” possibility for the former is the eternal significance of the divine, while for the latter it is one’s own projection into whatever is available to it. For Kierkegaard there is one foundational *what* issue, but for Heidegger this is not the case.

27. Van Buren also offers a helpful account of what Heidegger derives from certain Christian thinkers on the issues of care, conscience, and guilt (with the now familiar trope about the medieval misunderstanding that is instigated by Augustine’s infusion of Greek thought). For example, in reading Kierkegaard’s discussion of the lilies and birds, among other texts, Heidegger develops the notion of conscience as “the call and ‘renewal’ of anxious care” from one’s “authentic self” to one’s inauthentic or fallen self—a call of essential guilt, which must be “chosen and taken up into one’s futural possibility” (van Buren 1994, 185). Also see where Heidegger himself acknowledges his debt to the New Testament and the Augustinian tradition on the topic of care (*BT* 199n7).

28. This is the sense of wakefulness engendered by the thought of death in *Works of Love* and “At a Graveside.” In his early lectures, Heidegger traces this sort of wakefulness from the New Testament notion that one must always be prepared (even in the metaphorical darkness of worldly night, when it would just be easier to “fall asleep” and get lost in distraction) to offer an account of oneself because there is no telling when Christ will return (compare Matt. 25:13, 26:40–45). Thus,

wakefulness is closely bound not only with the uncertainty of death, but also with the kairological moment of ever-present vigilance. See van Buren (1994, 175, 178, 188–91, 193, 195, 202).

29. Of course, Heidegger does not explicitly criticize the views on death or the afterlife of any of these thinkers in *Being and Time*. Like Kierkegaard, he would no doubt also be unimpressed by their metaphysical arguments in support of less personal notions of posthumous existence, but what really binds Heidegger to Kierkegaard at this point is how readily applicable the former's criticisms of everyday views on death are to Epicureans, Stoics, moderns, and certain nineteenth-century thinkers, even if he does not mention them by name in this regard.

30. Thomson (2004, 466) states that some might accuse Heidegger of using his discussion of anxiety and Being-towards-death to avoid or repress his fear of demise (compare Mjaaland 2006, 372). Thomson also points out that Heidegger seems to anticipate and briefly respond to such a charge (*BT* 309). Given the important lessons that both Kierkegaard and Heidegger learn from physical death, it seems doubtful that either of them is guilty of such repression. Emphasizing what ordinary notions concerning demise suggest (or indicate) about the structure (or form) of human existence, which is Heidegger's primary task when discussing it in *Being and Time*, need not diminish the significance of demise or its fearful character.

31. This is another point where Heidegger might borrow something from *Anxiety*, which also connects some kind of death-awareness with a fundamental anxiety about existence (*CA* 45/*SKS* 4: 350). Van Buren (1994, 172–75) traces this connection from Gen. 2:17 (which Haufniensis quotes) through Paul, Augustine, Luther, Pascal, and Kierkegaard to Heidegger. Van Buren, Vincent McCarthy (2011, 109), and others also point out that Kierkegaard (especially Haufniensis) and Heidegger share the distinction between fear, which is always about something specific, and anxiety, which is directed toward nothing—that is, the essential indefiniteness of existence (*CA* 42/*SKS* 4: 348; *BT* 185–87, 265–66).

32. There have up to this point, however, been some exceptions. Heidegger himself mentions Calvin, Dilthey, and Tolstoy (*BT* 249n6, 254n12). Also, just a few pages before concluding his death chapter, Heidegger somewhat mysteriously incorporates a passage about becoming too old for one's victories that he parenthetically attributes to Nietzsche (*BT* 264). Given the discussion surrounding this passage, Heidegger is likely referring to "On Free Death" from *Zarathustra*, where Nietzsche (2006, 54) states, "Some become too old even for their truths and victories; a toothless mouth no longer has the right to every truth." Besides the actual content of Heidegger's quotation, what is most interesting about its inclusion is that it signals Heidegger's reliance on Nietzsche at the very moment that he is laying out one of the key aspects of his understanding of death—the freedom it brings. Specifically, it seems that Heidegger might have found inspiration for his ideas in Nietzsche's (2006, 53–55) claims about both the appropriation of one's own death—without developing either a morbid longing for escape or a cowardly clinging to life—and the celebration (and liberation) of life that such appropriation engenders. For more on what Heidegger borrows from Nietz-

sche on the topic of death (in particular, on issues such as the certainty of death and “the moment”), see Parkes (1998).

Chapter 7

1. I have concerns about Mjaaland’s article that are similar to my reservations about Theunissen’s. Mjaaland (2006, 375–77) claims that Heidegger’s ontologization of one’s own death closes off other ways of allowing oneself to be affected by death, and suggests that “At a Graveside” offers a more flexible treatment of death than *Being and Time* (compare Hoberman 1984, 225). Whether or not he is right, insofar as “At a Graveside” might be understood as one instant in a larger, more obviously Christian, account of dying to the world, which actually maps quite nicely onto Heidegger’s sense of authentic Being-towards-death, Mjaaland seems to lack the proper perspective for a comparison of Kierkegaard and Heidegger on death.

2. Furthermore, Sartre actually seems to confuse Heidegger’s *vorlaufen* with waiting for biological death. In criticizing Heidegger, he argues, “Sudden death is undetermined and by definition can not be waited for at any date; it always, in fact, includes the possibility that we shall die in surprise before the awaited date and consequently that our waiting may be, *qua waiting*, a deception or that we shall survive beyond this date; in the latter case since we were only waiting, we shall outlive ourselves” (Sartre 1956, 536). Hoffman (1983, 82, 107–8) suggests that perhaps Sartre “has missed Heidegger’s point” given that Heidegger’s notion of death is part of an account that shows how one can derive meaning from existence despite its indefiniteness without ever claiming that one should wait for an event at an uncertain time. What I find fascinating about Sartre’s inability to see that Heidegger’s discussion is not really about biological demise is that his criticism leads him to revert to something of an Epicurean position. For example, Sartre states, “Thus death haunts me at the very heart of each of my projects as their inevitable reverse side. But precisely because this ‘reverse’ is to be assumed not as *my* possibility but as the possibility that there are for me no longer any possibilities, it does not penetrate me. . . . Death is not an obstacle to my projects . . . and this is not because death does not limit my freedom but because freedom never encounters this limit. . . . Since death escapes my projects because it is unrealizable, I escape death in my very project. Since death is always beyond my subjectivity, there is no place for it in my subjectivity” (Sartre 1956, 547–48). On the issue of the event of physical passing away, we have seen that both Kierkegaard and Heidegger grant the Epicurean point that Sartre is making. However, Sartre seems blind to the fact that they are onto another sense in which death *can* come to interpenetrate life (compare Malpas 1998, 130). Unlike Sartre, Levinas (1987, 71) explicitly acknowledges the Epicurean mistake when he affirms a similar sort of interpenetration and “relationship with death.”

3. To return briefly to the roots of Heidegger’s Nazism, it is no secret that one might find an inclination toward certain aspects of what would come to characterize National Socialism in his discussion of something like an authentic

community in the penultimate chapter of *Being and Time* (compare Huntington 1995, 57–58). Given that much of the second division follows closely the model of genuine Christian death and rebirth, one might also see his notion of authentic community as based on the early Christian church. Although I am in no position to develop this idea at present, I have begun to wonder if there is not an important difference between the ways Kierkegaard and Heidegger understand the primordial Christian community. Specifically, if Heidegger (the Catholic) makes more out of this community than Kierkegaard (the Protestant), who argues for only the loosest of human bonds, then perhaps one could suggest that had Heidegger followed Kierkegaard as closely on this issue as he clearly does elsewhere he might have been somewhat less enthusiastic about the new regime and the community that it advocated based on blood and soil. Thus, the idea that I would tentatively like to put forth (in possible opposition to Levinas) is that Heidegger's political shortcomings may be partially the result of too much emphasis on community (albeit of a certain kind) rather than the lack of such emphasis.

4. Not long after *Being and Time* Heidegger states that “etymologically regarded, theology means: the science of God,” but actually, “*what is given for theology (its positum) is Christianness*”; “theology is the science of faith” (“PT” 43, 45, 48). Here are some of his views on faith: “Luther said, ‘Faith is permitting ourselves to be seized by the things we do not see.’ . . . Faith is an appropriation of revelation that co-constitutes the Christian occurrence. . . . *Faith is the believing-understanding mode of existing in the history revealed, i.e., occurring, with the Crucified*” (“PT” 44–45).

5. Heidegger expresses his view of Kierkegaard's theological tendencies in several places (e.g., *BT* 190n4; *OBT* 186; *PtT* 195–96). Interestingly, in 1921, just after distinguishing himself from Kierkegaard, Heidegger actually refers to himself as a “Christian theologian” (“LL” 100). On the significance of this early self-description, and especially his bizarre mid-word use of emphasis, see Kiesel (1993, 78) and van Buren (1994, 154). It seems doubtful that Heidegger would have described himself in this way by the time he writes *Being and Time*.

6. Theunissen (2006, 347) actually suggests that the intentionally limited reliance upon theological matters in “At a Graveside” might have set a precedent for Heidegger's methodological exclusion of such matters from his own death chapter.

7. Although acknowledging that Heidegger's “existential ‘solipsism’” (*BT* 188) certainly does not pose the same sorts of problems that plague early modern philosophy, Berthold-Bond (1991, 126–27) notes the parallel here with the Cartesian project of getting a world back after doubting it. While the issue for Heidegger is self-understanding and taking on responsibility for the meaning of one's own existence, Descartes's concern was of a more metaphysical-epistemological nature.

8. Compare Merold Westphal's (1987, 98) claim that “the need to flee from an inauthentic being-with-others does not deny the possibility of an authentic form of relatedness nor imply that existential loneliness is the highest human achievement. It may be that existential loneliness is but the half-way house required on the path from everyday loneliness to genuine togetherness.” Guignon

(2011b, 97–99) provides an excellent account of how Heidegger maintains the bonds of normativity, even if it is not the neat and unyielding sort of normative compulsion that Huntington and Berthold-Bond seem interested in.

9. Huntington (1995, 51) argues, “To recover an ethical capacity by no means necessitates the rejection of the very norms that the crowd I resist embraces.” Although she takes herself to represent Kierkegaard’s stance in saying this, such a statement seems just as representative of Heidegger’s position. The latter’s point is not necessarily to dismiss any particular norms, but to avoid taking them on uncritically as the “they” does.

10. McCarthy (2011, 108) notes the “structural joke” in two of Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous works where the objective issue (the *what*) is given a comically disproportionate amount of attention as compared to the subjective issue (the *how*). For example, the objective issue of Christianity in *Postscript* is dealt with in roughly 50 pages while the subjective issue takes up the remaining 550 or so pages. Still, while it might not take much, there must be at least some minimal grasp of *what* subjective Christian existence is based on (compare *PF* 104/*SKS* 4: 300). What leads Kierkegaard to downplay the importance of the objective issue is, of course, that he sees a world that focuses almost entirely on this Christian *what* (whether in support or criticism) and forgets the importance of subjective appropriation.

11. There are two important points that must be addressed with respect to this preface. The first concerns the meaning of the latter part of this quoted passage. Because grace is “a kind of indulgence from the actual imitation of Christ and the actual strenuousness of being Christian” (*NA* 69/*SKS* 14: 213), one must also rely on Christ’s merciful redemptive act in order to gain forgiveness for even needing to rely on grace and be indulged in this way in the first place. The second point concerns the nature of my use of this preface. It must be noted that Kierkegaard has a specific target audience for *Practice*—the established church and its leader on the Danish isle of Zealand, the bishop Mynster (*NA* 69–70/*SKS* 14: 213). While he is therefore calling for a very specific confession of inadequacy in attaching his preface to Anti-Climacus’s discussion of the rigorous requirement, I believe that Kierkegaard also intends his appeal to be applicable to anyone who associates with Christianity. It is this broader application of the need for grace that I focus on here.

12. I certainly do not mean to suggest that Heidegger sees his *Being and Time* project in precisely these terms, but I do find this description to be both accurate and helpful for understanding his relationship with Kierkegaard.

13. It is perhaps not so surprising to find such a parallel, as Jean Wahl (1888–1974) (1969, 103) points out that “it has even been suggested that Heidegger frequents the world of Nietzsche with the feelings of Kierkegaard and the world of Kierkegaard with the feelings of Nietzsche.” Just before making this comment, Wahl seems to hint at an interesting question about Heidegger’s *Being and Time* project: why would he want to rely so heavily on the language and structure of Christianity when he is explicitly not engaged in a religious endeavor? The answer to this question seems to be that even though his intended audience may not consist in large part of striving Christians, this is the structure

of existence that would surely resonate with his predominantly Western, culturally Christian readers.

14. Kierkegaard's discussion of removing the preface and its allowance for grace is one instance that is particularly focused on the situation of Mynster. Nonetheless, I once again see a broader application for such statements given the parallel between Kierkegaard's critique of Danish Christianity and his concern about Luther's overemphasis on grace.

15. See, for example, where Anti-Climacus speaks about relying on grace and says, "From any other perspective Christianity must and will appear as madness or horror" (*PC* 68/*SKS* 12: 80). Of course, Kierkegaard makes even stronger claims along these lines in *For Self-Examination* and other places.

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