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Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard on the ethico-religious

A contribution to the interpretation of the Kierkegaardian
existential philosophy in Wittgenstein's *Denkbewegungen*¹

This article tries to show that in his little-known work *Denkbewegungen* (MS 183), Wittgenstein sketches an existential philosophy that has been influenced by Kierkegaard. While earlier interpretations of *Denkbewegungen* stress that this is a diary and tend to favour a biographical or psychological approach to the diary, I try – with a thematic and historical approach – to show that this book sheds new light upon how Wittgenstein was occupied with Kierkegaard (and Christianity) on the one hand, and ethics, religion, and existential philosophy on the other. Because of this, *Denkbewegungen* can provide us with a better understanding of how Wittgenstein, during an important period in the 1930s, developed his thinking.

The subject that concerns Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein is whether it is possible to always accept existence as it is. This means that they question the presuppositions that make it possible to exist without self-deceptions, contradictions and instability. Both Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein see this as a universal existential and ethico-religious problem.

In order to show how this interpretation of *Denkbewegungen* can contribute to a systematic understanding of Wittgenstein, including the *Philosophical Investigations*, I will draw upon interpretations of Wittgenstein in the tradition of Stanley Cavell. While, to the best of my knowledge, there are

¹ Thanks to Audun Øfsti, Lars Ursin, Ståle Finke, and a referee for having read and commented on an earlier, Norwegian version of this article.

no English or Cavellian interpretations of *Denkbewegungen*, Cavell's perspective provides important tools with which to interpret *Denkbewegungen* and to shed light on the similarities between Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard.

Wittgenstein's relationship to Kierkegaard and Denkbewegungen as a new primary source

The fact that Wittgenstein read and used Kierkegaard makes it reasonable to choose an approach – within the history of philosophy – that is both historical *and* thematic. Such an approach takes Wittgenstein's references to Kierkegaard as the starting point for the philosophical analysis. A purely systematic or thematic presentation and comparison, however, is a historical or anachronistic approach because it abstracts from such references and historical relationships. A purely thematic presentation is more suited to presenting thinkers who do not have any actual relationship to each other (for example, an imaginary dialogue between Heraclitus and Confucius).²

If philosophy cannot include such a historical horizon, then it cannot understand how a philosopher can develop his or her position when s/he meets another thinker; it must rather postulate that the different positions come into being *ex nihilo*, separated both from history and each other. To understand a philosopher, it is not sufficient to understand the philosopher thematically on his/her own; one must understand how s/he in fact relates to other thinkers and how s/he has developed his/her thinking. A philosopher does not first come up with a complete and pure philosophical position that exists independently, with the position's relationship to history and other thinkers as something external, secondary, or inessential. A position can – strictly speaking – only be understood from its development and from its relationship to other positions and established discourses. This means that existing philosophical dialogues are what make purely thematic and imaginary dialogues possible. To understand central concepts (existence, seriousness, despair [Verzweiflung/Fortvivelse], frivolousness,

² Cf. the argumentation in Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 36ff.

patience, and so on) it is also necessary to understand how these concepts have developed in the context of history.

Wittgenstein's knowledge of Kierkegaard can be traced back to the period around World War I, when Wittgenstein subscribed to the periodical *Der Brenner*, from Innsbruck. It was primarily as a result of Theodor Haecker (1879–1945) that this periodical, and Brenner Verlag, introduced Kierkegaard to German-speaking readers. Haecker translated Kierkegaard's writings both as books and essays. He wrote afterwords to the texts, as well as several monographs on Kierkegaard. Of all these texts – which all are marked by polemics against much of the contemporary culture and philosophy – Wittgenstein is said to have read *Søren Kierkegaard und die Philosophie der Innerlichkeit* (1913).³ In this book, Kierkegaard is presented as a critique of language and is compared to Karl Kraus,⁴ one of the thinkers the young Wittgenstein admired the most.⁵

In the summer of 1914, Wittgenstein contacted the publisher of *Der Brenner*, Ludwig von Ficker, to get help in distributing some of the money that Wittgenstein had inherited from his father, who was one of Austria's richest men. The result was that 100,000 Austrian crowns was given to the Brenner Circle, a group of thinkers that included Rilke, Trakl, and Haecker.

After the war, Wittgenstein contacted Ficker again when he had problems finding someone to publish *Tractatus*. To convince

³ See S. Toulmin and A. Janik, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), 177ff. and 191f. This introductory presentation of Wittgenstein's relationship to Kierkegaard is primarily based on the following sources: Paul Engelmann, *Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967); Wittgenstein, "Letters to Ludwig von Ficker", in C.G. Luckhardt (ed.), *Wittgenstein, Sources and Perspectives* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1979), 82–98; Janik, "Wittgenstein, Ficker and *Der Brenner*", in Luckhardt (ed.), *Wittgenstein*, 161–189; Janik, "Haecker, Kierkegaard and the Early Brenner: a Contribution to the History of the Reception of *Two Ages* in the German-speaking World", in D. Conway (ed.), *Søren Kierkegaard* (London: Routledge, 2002,) bd. IV, 123–147; H.C. Malik, *Receiving Søren Kierkegaard: the Early Impact and Transmission of His Thought* (Washington, D.C., The Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 380ff.; Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (London: Vintage, 1991).

⁴ Th. Haecker, *Søren Kierkegaard und die Philosophie der Innerlichkeit* (Munich: J. F. Schreiber, 1913), 28f. and 57 (reprinted Innsbruck, 1914, 1922 and 1934, Brenner Verlag); Toulmin et al., *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, 69 and 178. In Fin-des-Siecle Vienna one spoke of language critique, not language philosophy.

⁵ Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, revised ed., (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) (abbreviated to CV), 16; cf. Toulmin et al., *Wittgenstein's Vienna*, ch. 3.

Ficker that the book ought to be published, he compared it to Theodor Haecker,⁶ and Kierkegaard's *Kritik der Gegenwart*.⁷

We know that Wittgenstein claimed to have little knowledge of other philosophers and that he rarely liked the few things he read. This makes it remarkable that he thought highly of Kierkegaard, according to several sources. For example, he is known to have said: "Kierkegaard was by far the most profound thinker of the last century. Kierkegaard was a saint."⁸ Unlike most German-speaking readers of Kierkegaard – who were very much dependent upon the German translations –,⁹ Wittgenstein learned Danish in order to read Kierkegaard's work

⁶ Wittgenstein, "Letters to Ludwig von Ficker", 96. Even though Wittgenstein probably had little understanding of what the people in the Brenner Circle represented, it is likely that he preferred Trakl, Kierkegaard, and (the young) Rilke over Haecker, Ficker, and Der Brenner more generally. Cf. Engelmann, *Letters*, 42–45, 48f. and 140; Monk, *The Duty of Genius*, 106ff.

⁷ The comparison was about the most fundamental: the relation between speech, silence, and (empty) talk. Wittgenstein later wrote down similar remarks on Kierkegaard [Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein und der Wiener Kreis* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1989), 68]. Cf. Janik, "Haecker, Kierkegaard and the Early Brenner", 141.

⁸ M.O'C. Drury, "Some Notes on Conversations with Wittgenstein", in R. Rhees (ed.), *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1981), 91–111, 102. For more sources, see for instance the references above or Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 71 and 75.

⁹ One example is Adorno's dissertation on Kierkegaard (1931), which was reworked into a book (1933). A Danish translation of Adorno's book on Kierkegaard has documented several passages where the content of the translation differs substantially from the Danish original (one third of Adorno's book on Kierkegaard consists of German Kierkegaard quotations). The translator has made fairly considerable abridgements, very special interpretations, and inserted chance formulations. Under the heading "Barock", for instance, Adorno writes several pages about Kierkegaard and the Baroque. This is based on one place where Kierkegaard describes himself as "*der barocke Denker* [den sære tænder, i.e. the strange thinker]" [Adorno, *Kierkegaard* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1996), 112ff. and 120] The critique that Adorno later directed against Kierkegaard's ethics of neighbourly love is based on the chapter about *The Works of Love* in Chr. Schrempf's biography. Later it was discovered that Schrempf's translations involved censorship in some cases. For example, Schrempf changed Kierkegaard's interpretation of Jesus as the saviour to an interpretation of Jesus as an ethical rebel (see F.J. Billeskov Jansen, *Kierkegaard* (Copenhagen: Rhodos, 1992), 95; Janik, "Haecker, Kierkegaard and the early Brenner", 124).

in its original form.¹⁰ He is also reported to have been dissatisfied with Lowrie's English translations of Kierkegaard.¹¹

Earlier publications on Wittgenstein's relation to Kierkegaard have focused on the similarities in their views on ethics, religion, and communication (primarily based on *Tractatus* or *Culture and Value*).¹² Today, however, it is possible to shed new light on Wittgenstein's relationship to Kierkegaard because of the recent publication of new texts that are relevant to this topic. This is especially the case for *Denkbewegungen*, a text written in Cambridge (26.4.1930–28.1.1932) and Skjolden, Norway (19.11.1936–24.9.1937).¹³ This text was first published in 1997 by the Brenner Archive. The notes from Skjolden are of particular importance because they were written at the same time as the first 188 sections of the *Philosophical Investigations*.¹⁴

¹⁰ See H.D.P. Lee, "Wittgenstein 1929–1931", *Philosophy* 54, 218, now available on www.royalinstituteforphilosophy.org/articles/w_lee.htm. Wittgenstein is supposed to have spoken Norwegian – which is very similar to Danish – reasonably well (see G.H. von Wright, "Biographical Sketch" in Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 1–22, 6).

¹¹ See Drury, "Some Notes on Conversations with Wittgenstein", 103.

¹² See for instance Hannay, "Solitary Souls and Infinite Help: Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein", *History of European Ideas* 12, (1/1990), 41–52; James Conant, "Must We Show What We Cannot Say?", in R. Fleming et al. (ed.), *The Senses of Stanley Cavell* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1989), 242–283; Conant, "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, and Nonsense", in Putnam et al. (ed.), *Pursuits of Reason* (Cubbock, Texas: Texas Tech University Press, 1993), 195–225; Janik, "Haecker, Kierkegaard and the Early Brenner".

¹³ *Denkbewegungen* is abbreviated to D. References are given to the German/English edition first [*Ludwig Wittgenstein: Public and Private Occasions*, edited by J.C. Klagge and A. Nordmann (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), ch. 1] and then to the Norwegian translation [*Den ukjente dagboken* (Oslo: Spartacus, 1998)]. The words Wittgenstein underlined are placed in italics here. Uta Eicher and Werner Stegmaier have previously called our attention to the fact that Kierkegaard had an influence on *Denkbewegungen* [Uta Eichler, "Kierkegaard und Wittgenstein – Über das Ethische", *Wittgenstein Studies* (2/1997), now available on <http://sammelpunkt.philo.at:8080/archive/00000528/01/20-2-97.txt>, 2 and 9f. (of 13); Stegmaier, "Denkprojekte des Glaubens. Zeichen bei Kierkegaard und Wittgenstein", *Wittgenstein Studies* (2/1997), now available on <http://www.phil.uni-passau.de/dlwg/ws08/21-2-97.txt>, 1f., 5 and 9 (of 13)].

¹⁴ These paragraphs – which make up one fourth of the book – were the only part of the book that Wittgenstein didn't need to rewrite (in a way worth mentioning) later on [see Rolf Larsen and Åmås, *Det stille alvor* [*The Quiet Seriousness*] (Oslo, Samlaget, 1994), 142 and 175 (note 182); D, Norwegian ed.16]. Hilary Putnam says that Wittgenstein's view on religion in the "Lectures on Religious Belief" (1938) is important in understanding Wittgenstein's later philosophy more generally [Hilary Putnam, "Wittgenstein on Religious Belief" in his *Renewing Philosophy* (London: Harvard University Press, 1992), 134–157, 142]. Malcolm says something similar about the

Denkbewegungen is not a well-known text, even among academic philosophers. It has only been published in a few editions and only in German, Norwegian, Italian, English, Dutch, and Spanish. In addition, *Denkbewegungen* is primarily referred to as a diary and not as a philosophical text.¹⁵ In both the German reviews (at Amazon.de) and in the Norwegian edition there is, unfortunately, an almost one-sided tendency to favour a psychological or biographical approach. This has probably contributed to the fact that the fields of philosophy and the history of ideas have hardly any interpretations of this text at all.¹⁶

Given this context, I wish to show that *Denkbewegungen* sheds new light upon Wittgenstein's view on existential philosophy, ethics, and religion more generally, and on Kierkegaard and Christianity in particular. *Denkbewegungen* deals with

aphorisms from *Culture and Value* [Malcolm, *Wittgenstein: a Religious Point of View?* (London: Routledge, 1993), 16]. My view is that the analysis of religious, ethical and existential problems in *Denkbewegungen* is of no minor importance. The *Philosophical Investigations* is abbreviated to PI. Modified translations are marked by *.

¹⁵ Olav Gjelsvik, for instance, says: “[N]o – the diary doesn’t shed new light on Wittgenstein’s philosophical development in the central transition period around 1930. Neither does it shed light on the thinking in *Philosophical Investigations*, even though the diary was written at the same time as the first version [of the *Investigations*].” (Translated from <http://www.apollon.uio.no/vis/art/1998/2/wittgenstein>). Gjelsvik presupposes that the central problems [“sentralproblemene”] in Wittgenstein’s philosophy are questions of logic, language and reality. In my view, however, Wittgenstein is concerned with ethical, existential and religious questions. While Gjelsvik claims that what makes the *Tractatus* important is first and foremost the picture theory, I believe that the most important part of the book lies in the last sentences, i.e. the parts that deal with ethics and religion. This claim is supported by Toulmin et al., *Wittgenstein’s Vienna* and a letter Wittgenstein wrote to Schlick 8.8.1932: “[...] I cannot imagine that Carnap should have so completely misunderstood the last sentences of the *Tractatus* – and hence the fundamental idea of the whole book.” [M. Nedo, *Ludwig Wittgenstein* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 1983), 255, quoted from Peter Winch, “Discussion of Malcolm’s Essay”, in Malcolm, *Wittgenstein: a Religious Point of View?*, 95–135, 133] That Wittgenstein concerned himself with mere humanity (or what’s bloß menschliches), rather than logic is also shown in his question to Russell: “How can I be a logician before I am a human being?” [Rhees, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 211].

¹⁶ Even though several essays from Wittgenstein Studies (2/1997) have suggested that *Denkbewegungen* is an important philosophical text, I’ve only found one essay that – from a theological perspective – has used this text to interpret Wittgenstein’s thinking (see Espen Dahl, “Lær deg grammatikken til ordet Gud” – Wittgenstein og den dialektiske teologi [“Learn the Grammar of the Word God” – Wittgenstein and Dialectical Theology]”, in L.Fr.H. Svendsen and Finke (ed.), *Wittgenstein og den europeiske filosofien* [*Wittgenstein and European Philosophy*] (Oslo: Akribe, 2001), 166–189).

universal problems in a personal way. This approach seems to work well in the cases where the book analyses existential, ethical, and religious problems. This kind of personal style doesn't necessarily mean that the content isn't philosophically relevant; it may rather be that the personal form is important in order to understand how the content concerns us.¹⁷ In order for a reader to learn from a text, the reader needs to see that it addresses him or her. Hermeneutically speaking, it would thus be more fruitful to try to understand whether the problems and the reasoning in the text concerns us as individuals rather than to suppose that it just says something about Wittgenstein as a private person.¹⁸ For instance, instead of interpreting the note from 22.2.1937 as a symptom of depression, we must rather ask whether Wittgenstein's writing strikes some more universal chord. This means that, rather than just asking what the author felt when he wrote a note (cf.CV67), we must assess whether the claims and the reasoning in the text resonate with us. That *Denkbewegungen* can be seen as a philosophical work has also been suggested by Wittgenstein himself and by the English edition translators. The translators write:

As opposed to his other notebooks and the so-called secret diaries of 1914–1916 [the *Geheime Tagebücher*], the Koder diaries [*Denkbewegungen*] are unique precisely in that they do not set off the private from the public at all. [D3, English ed., cf.4f.]

Wittgenstein himself suggests that it would be difficult to separate his diaries from his typically philosophical thought: “The movements of thought in my philosophizing should be discernible also in the history of my mind [Geistes], of its moral

¹⁷ Wittgenstein says: “I’ve spoken in the first person at the end of my Lecture on Ethics: I think that this is something quite essential. You can’t describe or ascertain [konstatieren] anything more here; I can only stand forward as personality [nur als Persönlichkeit hervortreten] and speak in the first person.” Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein und der Wiener Kreis* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp 1989), 117.

¹⁸ To use Cavell's terms: the question is whether what Wittgenstein is writing contains something representative or exemplary. Cavell tries to show that without this ability to speak for others it would be impossible to have a shared language. Use of language always implies “claims to community”. See Cavell, *The Claim of Reason* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1994) (*abbreviated to CR*), 20, 28ff. and 207ff.; Espen Hammer, *Stanley Cavell* (Oxford: Polity, 2002) (*abbreviated to SC*), 19 and 36.

concepts and in the understanding of my situation.” [D133/76 quoted from Dviii, English ed.]

If we want to investigate Wittgenstein’s relation to Kierkegaard and his views on ethics, religion, and existential questions, it is not easy to find directly relevant material in the texts that Wittgenstein published (or the texts he wanted to publish). Because of this we must, to a great extent, make do with Wittgenstein’s Nachlaß. The Bergen Electronic edition of Wittgenstein’s Nachlaß shows that most of Wittgenstein’s references to Kierkegaard are found in *Denkbewegungen* (MS 183). Clearly, the thinker who occupies Wittgenstein the most in this little-known text is Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard is mentioned many times both in the notes from Cambridge 1930–32 and Skjolden 1936–37 (D77/55,83/58,111/68,131ff./74f.,145/80,185/95,213/106). For example:

My conscience plagues me & won’t let me work. I have been reading in the works of Kierkegaard & that unsettled [beunruigt] me even more than I already was. (D175/91;13.2.1937)

It is interesting how wrong Spengler, who usually has much judgement, is in his evaluation of Kierkegaard. Here is one who is *too great* for him & stands too close, he only sees ‘the giant’s boots.’ (D219/108;6.3.1937)¹⁹

In my judgement, we can be reasonably sure Wittgenstein read the *Postscript* (541pp.),²⁰ the *Philosophical Fragments*

¹⁹ This probably refers to the following critique that Spengler directs against Kierkegaard: “[I]n the real command of a language there is the danger that the relation between the means and the meaning may be made into a new means. There arises an intellectual art of *playing* with expression, practised by the Alexandrines and the Romantics – by Theocritus and Brentano in lyric poetry, by Reger in music, by Kierkegaard in religion.” Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West* (New York, Knopf, 1939), bd. 2, 136f. The reference to the German edition is given by Eichler: *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (Munich, 1924), bd. 2, 163 [see Eichler, “Kierkegaard und Wittgenstein – Über das Ethische“, note 6].

²⁰ See Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 71. *Denkbewegungen* also indicates that Wittgenstein read the *Postscript*. See Roe Fremstedal, “Wittgenstein som religionsfilosof – og spesielt forholdet til Kierkegaard og kristendommen i *Denkbewegungen* [Wittgenstein as a Philosopher of Religion – and especially about the relationship to Kierkegaard and Christianity in *Denkbewegungen*],” *Norsk filosofisk tidsskrift* [Norwegian Journal for Philosophy], vol. 41 (3/2006), 213–228, esp. 215f and 221. English abstract 266.

(92pp.),²¹ *Kritik der Gegenwart* [*Critique of the Present*] (46pp.),²² and an unidentified upbuilding writing.²³ There are also strong indications that Wittgenstein read *The Sickness unto Death* (113pp.),²⁴ the *Moment* (241pp.),²⁵ *The Concept of Anxiety* [*Angst*] (140pp.),²⁶ *Repetition* (82pp.),²⁷ and *Fear and Trembling* (102pp.).²⁸ Even though there are some suggestions that Wittgenstein also read *Either/Or* (734pp.), this is not clearly

²¹ See Charles L. Creegan, *Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard* (originally London, Routledge, 1989), now available on <http://home.clear.net.nz/pages/ccreegan/wk/chapter1.html>, 4 (of 9); Jens Glebe-Moeller, “Notes on Wittgenstein’s Reading of Kierkegaard”, *Wittgenstein Studies* (2/1997), available on <http://sammelpunkt.philo.at:8080/archive/00000521/01/13-2-97.TXT>, 4 (of 8). See my “Wittgenstein som religionsfilosof”, esp. pp. 219f. and 222.

²² This is part 3 of *En literair Anmeldelse*. The most accurate translation of the Danish title is *A Literary Review*, not *Two Ages*. See the references in note # vii.

²³ O.K. Bouwsma reports that Kierkegaard’s “[...] prayers [...] left him [Wittgenstein] unmoved.” [Bouwsma, *Wittgenstein. Conversations*, edited by Craft and Hustwit (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986), 46]. This at least means that Wittgenstein read some of Kierkegaard’s upbuilding writings. But because these writings consist of many books and speeches, it’s hard to assess exactly what Wittgenstein read. However, it is possible that Wittgenstein read Haecker’s translation of “Vom Tode” [“On Death”/“Ved en Grav” (1845)] or the speech on Job (from *Four Upbuilding Discourses* 1843). Wittgenstein probably knew “Vom Tode” because he subscribed to *Der Brenner*, where this speech was published in a special number dedicated to the memory of Trakl, one of Wittgenstein’s favourite poets who had recently died.

²⁴ See under A in this article; cf. Hannay, “Solitary Souls and Infinite Help”, esp. 42f.

²⁵ This is at least certain in the case of the *Moment* number two. See Glebe-Moeller, “Notes on Wittgenstein’s Reading of Kierkegaard”, esp. the first pages, the middle, and the end.

²⁶ It has been shown that some of the sentences in *Tractatus* and *Notebooks 1914–16* are remarkably similar to what we find in (the German translation of) *The Concept Anxiety*. See Eichler, “Kierkegaard und Wittgenstein – Über das Ethische”, the end of part 1 and note 19.

²⁷ The publishers of *Denkbewegungen* claim that one reference to Kierkegaard probably refers to *Repetition* (D111/68n163,150n163).

²⁸ This article shall try to show this. However, it is possible that, instead of *Fear and Trembling*, Wittgenstein was influenced by *Repetition*, “Ultimatum” from *Either/Or*, or other writings by Kierkegaard. Regardless, *Fear and Trembling* is a very controversial book that has always been among Kierkegaard’s most widely read and known writings.

the case.²⁹ Because of Wittgenstein's generally good knowledge of Kierkegaard, it's also possible that he read the *Works of Love* (367pp.)³⁰ and *On Authority and Revelation* (311pp.).

These 8 to 12 writings (1367-2779pp.) essentially form the core of Kierkegaard's whole work. It seems, however, that Wittgenstein was primarily influenced by *the pseudonymous writings*. It's not clear whether Wittgenstein realised that these writings have another status than the autonomous writings.³¹ Nevertheless, we have at least one note where Wittgenstein explicitly reflects on Kierkegaard's form of communication (D131,133/74f.). This probably means that Wittgenstein also reflected on Kierkegaard's extraordinary use of pseudonyms.

The manner in which my interpretation of *Denkbewegungen* can contribute to the systematic interpretation of Wittgenstein's philosophy is probably most easily understood if we look at the tradition of readings stemming from Stanley Cavell. Here, however, it is striking that to the best of my knowledge, there are not any Cavellian, English, or American interpretations of *Denkbewegungen* at all.

Cavell's main idea – which is based on an interpretation of the *Investigations* – is that there is an inescapable dialectic

²⁹ Creegan has tried to show that one of Wittgenstein's examples in a lecture about religious belief (1938) is from the second part of *Either/Or* (Creegan, *Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard*, 4.) The lecture can be found in *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*. Creegan also says that *Culture and Value* indicates that Wittgenstein knew *Either/Or*, *Stages*, or *Training in Christianity* (Creegan, *Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard*, 5).

³⁰ Despite the fact that Wittgenstein wrote to Malcolm that he hadn't read the *The Works of Love*, Glebe-Moeller is convinced that Wittgenstein had read *The Works of Love*. Because of Wittgenstein's solid knowledge of Kierkegaard, Glebe-Moeller might be correct (see Glebe-Moeller, "Notes on Wittgenstein's Reading of Kierkegaard", 4; Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 75).

³¹ Exactly what role the pseudonymous writings have in Kierkegaard's authorship is controversial. In *The Point of View [Synspunktet]*, and in a great number of secondary sources, it is claimed that the writings do not consist of direct communication, but that they consist of maieutics or indirect communication. However, until someone can support this claim or provide more evidence, it seems to be almost superficial. Newer research, not in the least the research done in connection with the new critical edition of Kierkegaard's work (SKS), suggests that the use of pseudonyms in some cases was an *ad hoc strategy* conceived of at the last minute rather than a well thought through plan underlying the whole authorship [cf. Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relations to Hegel Reconsidered*, 39–43]. My view is that there is both consistency and essential similarities in Kierkegaard's different writings.

between proximity and distance.³² This implies that we (1) have a tendency to transcend and question the ordinary and the given reality and (2) that the task is to retrieve the ordinary. Cavell calls this first tendency scepticism, melancholy, and metaphysics. The second tendency he describes as merriment, correctness and the ordinary;³³ Wittgenstein seems to call the second tendency therapy (PI§133). These tendencies correspond to the voices in *Investigations* that respectively put forward questions (with quotation marks, introduced in §1) and the therapeutic “voice of correction”, which represents the ordinary (without quotation marks). Cavell says that the best, briefest way of describing these conflicting tendencies is to call them respectively the inauthentic and the authentic.³⁴ My claim is that this double structure is akin to what Kierkegaard calls a double movement.³⁵

Starting with our familiarity with the world and how we cope with the world in a pre-reflexive manner, Kierkegaard generally sees the first part of the double movement as the process whereby the subject distances itself from the world. This process makes it possible to reflect and attain some independence. However, Kierkegaard tries to show that it is impossible to adopt this tendency in an absolute manner; the first movement can only be fully carried out if it is re-contextualised (*aufgehoben*) in a new movement towards the world and other persons. In Kierkegaard, this means that the double movement is a movement between three paradigmatic (idealtypische)

³² See SCxii,xiv; Finke, “Wittgenstein i forlengelse av romantikken – Stanley Cavell om skeptisisme, anerkjennelse og det hverdagslige [Wittgenstein in the prolongation of Romanticism – Stanley Cavell on Scepticism, Recognition, and the Ordinary]”, in Svendsen and Finke, *Wittgenstein og den europeiske filosofien*, 237–268, 240ff.

³³ See Cavell, “Notes and Afterthoughts on the Opening of Wittgenstein’s *Investigations*”, in H. Sluga and D.G. Stern (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1999, 261–295, 270 and 283.

³⁴ Cavell, “Existentialism and Analytic Philosophy”, in Cavell, *Themes out of School* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 195–234, 216f.

³⁵ In Kierkegaard there are several dialectical movements of this kind. Here I want to focus on existential philosophy and The double movement of faith. Elsewhere I’ve compared what is called The double movement of irony with Cavell’s interpretation of the later Wittgenstein. See my dissertation, *Væren med den andre [Being with the Other]* (Trondheim: NTNU, Filosofisk institutts publikasjonsserie [The Publication Series from the Philosophy Department] nr. 40, 2002) 9–11, 26–32, 45–58, and 104–107. The dissertation is available through the Philosophy Department Office and through Bibsys. The Hegelian term that corresponds to double movement is probably double negation.

levels: A) immediate existence (unity); B) reflection, unfamiliarity (unheimlichkeit) and distance (otherness); C) a new, higher unity (re-)established through belief and love (in Hegel: recognition and mediation).

A similar double structure is found in Cavell's work. Cavell wants to show that *both* our familiarity with the world *and* our experience of losing the world are essential for human existence. For instance, we are familiar with the meaning of what is said in a language *and* we tend to be suspicious that what is said isn't meant genuinely. This double structure implies a never ending oscillation between our familiarity with the ordinary *and* our inclination to transcend it.³⁶

A) Immediate existence is unstable and implies inauthentic despair

In *Denkbewegungen* Wittgenstein writes:

One could imagine a person [einen Mensch] who from birth to death is always sleeping or lives in a sort of half-sleep or daze. This is how my life compares to one that is really alive [So verhält sich mein Leben zu dem wirklich lebendigen Menschen] (I am thinking of Kierkegaard just now). (D143,145/79f.;11.1.1932)

What Wittgenstein describes here with almost biblical language as sleeping and living in a sort of half-sleep corresponds to what Kierkegaard – with Hegelian language – would have called immediate existence. In Danish (and Norwegian) this is called to be “happily ignorant” (lykkelig uvidende). The note above shows that – just as in Kierkegaard's analysis of the immediate aesthete (Don Juan in *Either/Or*) – Wittgenstein understands this “unconscious” state in a paradigmatic (idealtypisch) way. Wittgenstein doesn't claim that there are in fact human beings who are not at all conscious of their existence or obligations. Rather, he says that it is conceivable that some individuals always exist in a half-sleep. Wittgenstein's reflections concern

³⁶ Regarding Wittgenstein, see CV31; regarding Cavell and Wittgenstein, see Torgeir Nilsen, “Skeptisisme og stil i *Filosofiske undersøkelser* [Scepticism and Style in the *Philosophical Investigations*]”, *Agora. Journal for metafysisk spekulasjon* [Agora. Journal of Metaphysical Speculation] (3–4/1998), 294–317, esp. 301f.; regarding Kierkegaard, see *Væren med den andre*, ch. 1, esp. 20, and 27.

what it means to exist in an immediate manner.³⁷ This reflection, however, can only be conducted in retrospect, when the immediateness has been transcended. The immediate is the concept that the understanding uses to describe what is before, or that which withdraws itself from, reflection, dichotomies, critique and obligations. In a similar way, Cavell says that the ordinary can only know when it is threatened or transcended. And in as much as the ordinary is the facticity (Faktizität), or the historical horizon that is given, the ordinary must have normative validity (gültigkeit) because there are no alternatives; only the parts – and not the totality – can be criticised and changed.³⁸ And if one does not want to accept what is historically given (die Faktizität), then this implies an attempt to rebel against existence as such.

In the field of epistemology, the parallel to this critique of immediate existence is the critique of immediate knowledge. This is often referred to as the myth of the immediately given. Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Wittgenstein can be said to criticise references to absolute, simple entities that are supposed to be immediately given, fully transparent and as something that authorises itself. Attempts to use the immediate as a basis for reasons (and Letztbegründungen) must fail because the immediately given is something indeterminate, obscure, and inexplicable, and of which it is impossible to give both a positive *and* negative description.³⁹

In addition to understanding Kierkegaard's thinking, the note above suggests that Wittgenstein also makes biographical assumptions about the individual, Søren Kierkegaard. This is

³⁷ Something similar is to be found in Wittgenstein's later philosophy: The primitive language in PI§2 implies that the workers lack freedom and understanding.

³⁸ Wittgenstein says: "What has to be accepted, the given, is – so one could say – *forms of life*." (PIp.226). In *On Certainty* he writes: "[...] I did not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness; nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false." (§94) Cf. CV86; SC12f.; *Væren med den andre*, 28f. and 49–55.

³⁹ In Kierkegaard, see SKS2,76;SV2,68; *Væren med den andre*, 42f. In Hegel, see ch. 1 of the *Phenomenology*; Merold Westphal, *History and Truth in Hegel's Phenomenology* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), ix and 66ff.; Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 20ff. In Wittgenstein and Cavell, see Finke, "Wittgenstein i forlængelse av romantikken", 244f.

not surprising given that most interpretations of Kierkegaard, until fairly recently, have been based on biographical evidence. Wittgenstein seems to believe that Kierkegaard is some kind of a saint and he seems to criticise himself for not being a saint.

According to Kierkegaard, immediate existence implies that one “has the conditions for one’s existence outside oneself”. This means that whether or not someone manages to exist immediately depends on things that are contingent and not necessary (for instance, a good upbringing). This dependency, however, is something immediate existence will be unaware of. This is because immediate existence will see itself as more self-sufficient and less fragile than is actually the case, thus it will have a false self-understanding. Kierkegaard (the pseudonym Anti-Climacus) calls this false and unstable self-understanding *inauthentic despair*.⁴⁰

Wittgenstein also concerns himself with these problems. In *Denkbewegungen*, he criticises our tendency to avoid existential questions and to deceive ourselves, i.e. by living in inauthentic despair or bad faith. He writes:

A human being [Der Mensch] lives his ordinary life with the illumination of a light of which he is not aware until it is extinguished. Once it is extinguished, life is suddenly deprived of all value, meaning, or whatever one wants to say. One suddenly becomes aware that mere existence [die bloße Existenz] – as one would like to say – is in itself still completely empty, *bleak*

⁴⁰ This is not a psychological concept that only refers to a state of mind or subjective experiences. In a way reminiscent of antiquity where the concept of happiness was almost objective and where happiness consisted of living well, Kierkegaard’s concept of despair (Fortvivlelse) is objective rather than subjective. In the same way that it is possible to be unhappy even though one believes oneself to be happy, it is also possible to despair (Fortvivle) without being conscious of this. *Inauthentic despair implies self-deception, bad faith* or that one lives in a way that’s *unstable* and dependent upon contingent affairs that cannot be controlled. See Kierkegaard, *Samlede værker* [Collected Works] (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1994) (abbreviated to SV), bd. 15, 99ff. and 80; Arne Grøn, *Subjektivitet og negativitet: Kierkegaard* [Subjectivity and Negativity: Kierkegaard] (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1997), 125–40 and 166–69. *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter* [Søren Kierkegaard’s Writings] (Copenhagen: Gad, 1997ff.), is abbreviated to SKS.

[ganz leer, öde ist⁴¹]. It is as if the sheen was wiped away from all things, everything is dead. This happens sometimes after a sickness, for example – but of course it is not therefore less real or important, that is, not dismissed with a shrug. One has then died alive. Or rather: this is the *real death* that one should fear, for the mere ‘end of life’ one does not experience (as I have written quite correctly). (D207/104;22.2.1937)

In the two notes above, Wittgenstein distinguishes between two different ways of living, one a false way and one where one “really lives”. This can be interpreted as an ethico-religious and existential divide between inauthentic and authentic existence, akin to what we find in Kierkegaard. This means that both Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein distinguish between a stable and an unstable way of life.⁴² In sharp contrast to the unstable way of

⁴¹ Here the Norwegian translation says “åndløs”, literally: “spirit-less” or without Geist. This is misleading because this is a theological concept that is used by Kierkegaard (Anti-Climacus), among others. According to *The Sickness unto Death*, spirit (Danish: Ånd; German: Geist) is the crucial category that separates Christianity from everything else. The first part of *The Sickness unto Death* deals with immediate existence and forms of consciousness do not want to believe in the Christian revelation. But even if these forms of consciousness don’t want to relate to the revelation, the book condemns them as “åndløse”. [See A. Kingo, *Analogiens teologi [The Theology of Analogy]* (Gad: Copenhagen 1995), the introduction (and the whole dissertation); Hannay, “Solitary Souls and Infinite Help”, 41–50; Grøn, *Subjektivitet og Negativitet: Kierkegaard*, 298f.] When one condemns “åndløshet”, this can be interpreted as an external (transcendent) criticism that is based upon Christian theology or as an internal (immanent) criticism of a position (or formation of consciousness) that is unstable or inconsistent. In Kierkegaard religiousness A – or The double movement of faith – needs only to presuppose the latter, while religiousness B – Christianity – presupposes both the former *and* the latter approach. In some cases the concept spirit (ånd/Aand) is used by Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous authors in a sense which is not specifically Christian (see for example SKS4,138,140,204;SV5,41,43,105).

⁴² What I describe as stability here corresponds with what Wittgenstein, in the *Notebooks 1914–16*, describes as an equilibrium (Gleichgewicht) or harmony between the ego and the world. Wittgenstein also says that happiness implies an agreement (Übereinstimmung) between the ego and the world (*Notebooks 1914–16*, Blackwell, Oxford 1969, *abbreviated* to N, 75 and 78, cf. 83). This last claim can be understood in two ways: Either that one is happy if and only if one, by chance, becomes satisfied. Or that one is happy if and only if one has an attitude whereby one always can accept everything that happens. We could call the former *inauthentic happiness* while the latter can be called *authentic happiness* (cf. SV15,99). This article tries to show that the ideal for both Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein is what I here call authentic happiness. When Wittgenstein claims that the

life, the stable life implies that one can always accept existence as it is without self-deception. While the stable way of existence can be universalised without contradictions, the unstable one implies that, if one doesn't always get what one wants, existence will seem to be problematic.⁴³

The excerpt above says that what one should fear is “to die alive”. Wittgenstein's somewhat unusual use of the concept of death in this note – and similar notes – seems quite clearly to be influenced by Kierkegaard – particularly *The Sickness unto Death*.⁴⁴ In this work, Kierkegaard's pseudonym Anti-Climacus claims that *despair* (Danish: *Fortvivelse*; German: *Verzweiflung*) is “the sickness unto death”. This can be illustrated with two passages:

[The sickness unto] Death, this agonizing discord [qualfulde Modsigelse], this sickness in the self, eternally dying, dying and still not dying, to die the death. To die, means that it is over, but to die the death means to experience to die [...] (SV15,77)

[In] Christian terminology [the sickness unto] death is the expression for the greatest spiritual wretchedness [...] (SV15,68)

As early as in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein had written: “Death is not something that happens in life. Death is not experienced.” (6.4311) Wittgenstein's use of the expressions “the real death” and “died alive” in *Denkbewegungen* suggests an unusual use of the concept “death” that seems to be influenced by *The Sickness unto Death*.⁴⁵ Something similar can be found in Wittgenstein's writing, when he says that to be upset because

good life is the world seen sub specie aeternitatis (N83), this can be interpreted as saying that the good life is not fully controlled by contingent things in the world.

⁴³ This existential problem is also important in N73ff.,44, 77f.,91.

⁴⁴ Alastair Hannay has argued that, in *Culture and Value*, religious terms (sickness, wretchedness etc.) are used in a Kierkegaardian way that is influenced by *The Sickness unto Death* [Hannay, “Solitary Souls and Infinite Help”, esp. 42f.] Because Hannay has already written about Kierkegaard's influence on *Culture and Value*, I will not analyse this work thoroughly.

⁴⁵ Wittgenstein's notes on death can also be influenced by what is called the spiritual death or the first death by St. Augustine and in John's revelation [20ff.;2;3;17] (and Epistle [6]) respectively. Kierkegaard's use of the concept death seems to be influenced by the old Danish translation of the Bible where the expression to “døe Døden [die the death]” is used (1. Moseb. [Genesis] 3,4).

one doesn't accept what is happening "is the death [ist der Tod]" (D191*/98). And even if this kind of "death" seems to imply that one is "happily ignorant" (lykkelig uvidende), Wittgenstein condemns it as "empty, *bleak*". This corresponds with Kierkegaard's analysis, but it does not clearly imply a Christian theology, as it does in Kierkegaard.

In the quotations above – as in many other places – Kierkegaard describes man as being sick or as a being that is in a state of spiritual (German: *geistlich*; Danish: *åndelig*) wretchedness. Wittgenstein also speaks of "the spirit's suffering [Leiden des Geistes]" as a religious concept (cf. D199/101). According to Wittgenstein, the characteristic feature of a religious person is that he diagnoses himself as sick and wretched:

People are religious to the extent that they believe themselves to be not so much *imperfect* as *sick*.

Anyone who is half-way decent will think himself utterly imperfect, but the religious person thinks himself *wretched* [*elend*] (CV51; MS 128 46: ca 1944)

Because of its demands – which are hard and go against all compromises – this religiousness is something one avoids:

The one who is pure has a hardness that is tough to bear. This is why one accepts the admonitions of a Dostoevsky more easily than those of a Kierkegaard. One of them is still squeezing while the other is already *cutting*. (D213*/106; 24.2.1937)

B) Despair, Resignation, Pessimism, and Scepticism

Wittgenstein says that a philosophical question takes the following form: "Ich kenne mich nicht aus." (PI§123; cf. CV53,64) This can be translated to: "I don't know my way about"; "I've lost my bearings"; "I can't find myself anymore"; or "I don't know myself anymore".⁴⁶ This note, which was written at same time as *Denkbewegungen* in Skjolden in 1936–37, can be interpreted as saying that I've become someone else or that I've become a

⁴⁶ The standard translation is the first; the other proposals are based on Finke's Norwegian translation ("Wittgenstein i forlengelse av romantikken", 251).

stranger to myself. This implies that I can't accept – or identify myself with – how I in fact am, but that I demand to be different. This means that one does not accept the situation, existence, or oneself the way it is, but that one demands that it be different. If we use Cavell's terms, this means that *the attained self* is different from *the unattained self* (SC136,139).

In Kierkegaard, this discord, or disintegration, is called *Fortvivelse*⁴⁷ or *Verzweiflung*. Because Kierkegaard understands this as desperatio, the best translation is despair or desperation. Despair implies an agonizing discord between what is in fact given (die Faktizität) and our ideals. Despair means that one doesn't manage to make the past and the facts (die Faktizität) compatible or consistent with one's project or future. Thus despair implies that one doesn't accept the situation one finds oneself in *and* that one doesn't believe it is possible to attain a better situation. This radical hopelessness makes existence appear unbearable. The result is that one wants to do away with oneself (“*at ville af med sig selv*”). On the basis of this, Kierkegaard says: “To despair over oneself, to desperately want to do away with oneself [fortvivlet at ville af med sig selv], is the form of all despair [...]” (SV15,79).⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Just like the German word *Verzweiflung* – and the cognate words *tvil* (Danish for doubt) and *zweifel* -, the Danish word *Fortvivelse* consists of the numeral two (Da.: tvi, tve, to; Ge.: zwei). For instance, Kierkegaard says: “[...] is not despair just double-mindedness; or what else does despair consist of than having two wills! [...] everyone that despairs has two wills, one that he futilely wants to follow, and one that he futilely wants to get rid of.” (SV11,35;cf.SKS4,283;SV6,76f.;SKS K4,287;Pap.IVB13,2). This means that despair implies discord and inconsistency and that one does not do what is good for its own sake. The remedy for this is integrity and to be able to concretize, i.e. to grow together and become a unity. Kierkegaard says this requires candour [frimodighet]. Integrity refers to a unity [cf. Grøn, *Subjektivitet og negativitet*, 403f. and 18; Chr. Korsgaard, in O’Neil (ed.), *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 101f.]. To become concrete, means to grow together [see Grøn, *Begrepet angst hos Søren Kierkegaard* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1993), 22; cf. SV15,87f.]. Regarding the cognate words *Fortvivelse* and *Tvil*, H. Falk and A. Torp’s *Etymologisk ordbog [Etymological Dictionary]* (Oslo: Ringstrøms Antikvariat, 1996/1903–06, 931) give several Indo-Germanic languages that form words for doubt out of the numeral “two”, among these Greek and Latin. Concerning the word *Fortvivelse* or *fortvilelse*, Falk and Torp give the Indo-Germanic primary form “dveiplo-, which can rather be juxtaposed” with *diplos*, the Greek word for double.

⁴⁸ Micheal Theussien claims that the most fundamental form of despair is to want to do away with oneself. Marius Mjaaland claims, however, that despair implies *both* that one wants to do away with oneself *and* that one wants to be oneself (in

If one does not accept existence but instead condemns it, then this implies that one despairs over (Fortvivler over) oneself and not the world, according to Kierkegaard.⁴⁹ Kierkegaard's main example here is the attempt to rebel against God. This universal philosophical and existential problem is also described in the same, religious way by Wittgenstein: "(I want to rebel against God [Ich möchte mit Gott rechten].)" (D225*/111)⁵⁰

The philosophy espoused by the later Wittgenstein concerns itself with the discord between what is in fact given and our (partly false) ideals and demands (cf. PI §§ 107, 112, 125, 132). When the ideals cannot be made compatible or consistent with what's given then problems arise, and that is when one is left with emptiness or on slippery ice where there is no friction.

Thus conceived, we can interpret Wittgenstein's description of philosophical questions to mean that philosophy (in a *wide* sense) starts with a loss of the world, or a situation in which one gets lost.⁵¹ Philosophy doesn't start with doubt, but with despair

an authentic way!). Since Kierkegaard (Anti-Climacus) doesn't seem to say clearly whether despair implies that one wants to be oneself in an authentic or inauthentic way, both interpretations are possible. See the discussion in Mjaaland, Marius, *Autopsi. Døden og Synet på Selvet [blant KIERKEGAARDS aporier] [Autopsy. Death and the View of the Self [among Kierkegaard's Apories]]* (Oslo: UniPub, 2005), ch. 3 – esp. pp. 133 and 140–152. In German, in Mjaaland, Marius, "X. Alterität und Textur in Kierkegaards Krankheit zum Tode", *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* (2005), 58–80. It should be stressed that what Kierkegaard calls despair (Fortvivlelse), and what physicians today refers to as "existential distress", "existential suffering", and "the demoralisation syndrome", do not necessarily imply depression or anhedony. Cf. Blinderman and N.I. Cherny, "Existential Issues do not Necessary Result in Existential Suffering: Lessons from Cancer Patients in Israel", *Palliative Medicine* (2005), 19: 1–12, esp. 1.

⁴⁹ See SV11,35, SV15,78; Grøn, "Fortvivlelse som 'Sygdommen til Døden' [Despair as "The Sickness unto Death"]", *Omsorg. Nordisk Tidsskrift for Palliativ medisin* [Care. Nordic Journal of Palliative Medicine], (4/1997), 48–50, 48f.

⁵⁰ This problem is also analysed in Cavell's work. Stephen Mulhall writes: "[T]he whole of the *Investigations* can be thought of as a philosophical response (to a preacher's response) to an infant's first utterances [...]; and the whole of *The Claim of Reason* might be thought of as attempting not to start (or to transcend) a quarrel with God." See Mulhall's interpretation of Cavell, Wittgenstein, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger in Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), here p. 9 is quoted.

⁵¹ Cavell says that PI § 123 "[...] conceives philosophy's beginning for me as one of recognizing that I have lost my way, and in that way am stopped. This way of putting things is meant [...] to associate the project or quest of enlightenment, or coming to oneself, in the *Investigations*, fairly immediately with the projects

and rebellion. Philosophy starts with the attempt to transcend our conditions and our finite nature. Wittgenstein's therapies – which are also called a grammatical investigation – consist of an attempt to overcome despair. Wittgenstein says: "The philosopher's treatment of a question is like the treatment of a sickness [Krankheit]." (PI§255*) This means that philosophy is about self-knowledge (SC56, 174) or the acceptance and acknowledgement of oneself the way one in fact is. This implies a never-ending process of self-overcoming (Selbstüberwindung). The purpose is to enable one to stop philosophising, says Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard (the pseudonym A) (PI§133;SKS2,48;SV2,41). This means that the purpose is to overcome sickness or despair (cf. CV50). Both Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard say that the solution lies in being able to accept the ordinary along with our obligations and commitments.⁵²

This can be understood as an existential philosophy that implies that we are thrown into existence facing backwards. After we've entered the world in this way, we can wake up, turn around and try to control our lives. But *when* we try to do this, we see that we're lost, that we don't know our way about. The individual's existential task is then to retrieve him or herself, the others, and the world. According to §123, philosophy concerns itself with this universal problem.

This implies that it is only after having left immediate existence that we can be conscious of our existence and our commitments. Wittgenstein describes this existential and ethical awakening by saying: "One suddenly becomes aware that mere existence – as one would like to say – is in itself still

portrayed in *The Divine Comedy*, [...] and in Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*. [...] *The progress between beginning and ending is [...] what Wittgenstein means by grammatical investigation, which, since we begin lost, may be thought of as a progress in finding ourselves.*" Cavell, "Notes and Afterthoughts", 287; cf. CR224,418f.; cf. SC139. Regarding Wittgenstein's use of grammar, see under C.
⁵² Cavell says: "Kierkegaard finds us trying to escape our existence and our history; Wittgenstein finds us wishing to escape the limits of human forms of language and forms of life. In Kierkegaard's descriptions, we live in the universal rather than in our particularity; in Wittgenstein's we crave generality instead of accepting the concrete. In both, the cure is for us to return to our everyday existence." ["Existentialism and Analytic Philosophy", 218] In a letter, Wittgenstein himself writes: "The thing now is to live in the world in which you are, not to think or dream about the world you would like to be in." [Rhees, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 109f.; Winch, "Discussion of Malcolm's Essay", 125] I do not take this to imply that Kierkegaard (and Wittgenstein) presuppose particularism.

completely empty, *bleak*.” When one awakes, one sees that one has lived “in a sort of half-sleep or doze”.

According to Kierkegaard, immediate existence implies inauthentic (or not conscious) despair (cf. A). However, it is first possible to realise that one despairs when one is conscious of oneself; Kierkegaard called this authentic despair (Danish: egentlig Fortvivlelse) (cf. B). And it is only after one has realised that one despairs that it is possible to overcome despair thru faith (cf. C). This means that when we become conscious of ourselves, we are then confronted with the task of becoming a self. This task consists of accepting existence unconditionally. According to Kierkegaard, this is an existential and ethico-religious task that is inherent in human selfhood,

Much like Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein describes the task of becoming a self with the cognate – or almost identical – terms *despair* (Verzweiflung), (*spiritual*) *sickness*, and *madness* (D127ff.⁵³/73f.,189ff./97ff.,11/32). Wittgenstein writes:

You shall live so that you can hold your own in the face of madness when it comes [Du sollst so leben, daß Du vor dem Wahnsinn bestehen kannst, wenn er kommt]. *And you shall not flee madness. [...] For madness is the most severe judge (the most severe court) of whether my life is right or wrong [...] (D193/99;20.2.1937)*

This note seems to say that, instead of trying to deny that you are in despair, the task is to acknowledge that you are in despair; for it is only in this way that you can overcome despair, sickness, or “madness”. Wittgenstein stresses that medicine will not solve this universal existential problem:

- One could say, after all: “Take some medicine [...]”

[...] So I could of course look for a remedy for this condition, but as long as I do that I *am* still in the condition (also don't *know* if & when it will cease) & therefore must do the right

⁵³ The translation of “geistig krank” as “sick in the mind” (D127), and “geistiger Bronchitis” as “mental bronchitis” (D11), can be misleading because it can suggest that the sickness is psychological and physical rather than existential and philosophical.

thing, my duty, as it is in my *present* situation. (D189,191*/97;19.2.1937).

Like Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein claims that when one despairs, one is in despair over oneself and not over the world. One lives in bad faith if one believes that one can avoid despair – or put an end to despair – by resorting to external remedies. According to Wittgenstein, not even suicide can put an end to despair:

Despair [Die Verweiflung] has no end & suicide does not end it, unless one puts an end to it by pulling oneself together.

The person who despairs [Der Verzeifelte] is like a wayward [eigensinniges] child who wants to have the apple. But one usually doesn't know what it means to break waywardness [Eigensinn]. It means to break a bone in the body (and make a joint where there wasn't one before). (D127*,129/74;7.11.1931;cf.N91)

In my judgement, the way Wittgenstein uses the concepts despair (Verzweiflung), (spiritual) sickness and madness here is very similar to the way Kierkegaard – in his autonomous and pseudonymous writings – uses the concept despair (Fortvivelse). *The sickness that Wittgenstein's famous therapies direct* (cf.PI§133,255) corresponds to what Kierkegaard calls *despair* (Fortvivelse). Thus, this sickness is not a mental or physical sickness that can be treated by a psychologist or physician; it is an existential “sickness” where one does not accept the situation that one finds oneself in. When Wittgenstein claims, as in the quote above, that the solution is to pull yourself together (i.e. to overcome the discord in the self) this corresponds to what Kierkegaard calls “to will one thing” (“at ville Eet” [SV12,91]).

Just like Kierkegaard and Heidegger, Wittgenstein uses the concept “existence” in its primordial sense when he talks about “mere existence” (see quote above) (D207/104). The concept existence is made up of the Latin *ex* – out of – and *sisto* – stand (SKS K2-3,236). Originally, existence meant “to stand out” or “to stand outside”. The concept thus implies transcendence. This is why Cavell can say that it is not enough to be born to exist; you also have to be reborn. This means that you have to take responsibility for yourself, for others and for the

world (SC81ff.). Existence implies that what is given and what is attained (i.e. the past or ‘die Faktizität’) suggests something unattained. Kierkegaard expresses this by saying that existence is a gift (Danish: Gave) that presents itself as a task (Danish: Opgave) (SKS1,312;SV1,288). Thus, one has to become – and to acknowledge – who one already is.

This implies that the human being is a *decentred or eccentric being*: It is only after having lost himself (as an immediate, inauthentic, and narcissistic self) that the human being can find and choose himself (as a concrete, authentic, and committed self). In order for immediate existence to wake up, it is necessary to experience a *loss* so that one becomes another for oneself (cf. SC173). When one is woken by a sense of alienation, one is exposed to two radically different possibilities: One can *either* try to continue the immediate existence *or* one can identify oneself with what’s new, unfamiliar, and vulnerable.⁵⁴

The aesthete is one who believes, in a somewhat nostalgic way, that it would be best to never have lost anything, but always to be completely happy. The aesthete romanticises the immediate existence and doesn’t want to admit that it is lost. Before he can realise that the task is to get the world back, he has to acknowledge his fragility and the loss of the immediate existence.

The aesthete is in despair because, against his own will, he always already finds himself existing in the world. His project fails because he knowingly and willingly seeks “ignorant happiness” (in Danish: he seeks to be “lykkelig uvidende”). He tries to push away all choices, obligations, and commitments. This fails because he has to despair and use reflection, dichotomies, and what’s unfamiliar (otherness) in order to reach something sensuous, happy, immediate and familiar (unity). Because of this, what he seeks turns out to be completely mute, unclear, and indeterminate.

According to Cavell, the sceptic has the same existential problems as the person who lives in an inauthentic way. Instead of acknowledging the given reality – and choosing to accept it as his own responsibility – the sceptic tries to avoid all choices and commitments (SC47f.,55f.). According to Cavell, scepticism tends to take the form of madness in the *Investi-*

⁵⁴ This disjunction is the main subject in *Either/Or*. See *Væren med den andre*, 122–126, 35–37 and 55–58.

gations (CR242;SC55,63,83). Wittgenstein himself suggests that madness (Wahnsinn) is related to loneliness or isolation (CV61f.). In the *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard stresses that, while love is essentially intersubjective, despair implies isolation. What Cavell calls madness and scepticism corresponds to what, within Kierkegaardian existential philosophy, is often called despair and inauthenticity.

This presupposes that man is a finite and vulnerable being. Even though we are dependent on our surroundings we cannot demand, or get a guarantee, that our most important interests will be realised (cf.D187ff./96ff.,25/37;N74). This is the existential problem that occupies Wittgenstein in the opening of *Denkbewegungen*:

It always strikes me frightfully when I think how entirely my profession depends on a gift that might be withdrawn from me at any moment. I think of that very often, again and again, & generally how everything can be withdrawn from one & one doesn't even know all one *has* & only just then becomes aware of the most essential when one suddenly loses it. And one doesn't notice it precisely because it is so essential, therefore so ordinary. Just as one doesn't notice one's breathing until one has bronchitis & sees that what one considered self-evident [selbstverständlich] is not self-evident at all. And there are many more kinds of mental [geistiger] bronchitis. (D11/31f.;26.4.1930)

Later, Wittgenstein writes in a similar fashion that what is most important is what is before one's eyes all the time, but that this is hidden because it is so ordinary (cf.PI§§129,109). This means that when one is carrying out a project, one is completely dependent upon external, contingent, and uncontrollable factors. One takes these things for granted and does not even recognise that one is lucky (cf. A).

Wittgenstein's claim – that we first become aware of what is most important when we lose it – corresponds to Hegel and Kierkegaard's claim that immediateness doesn't know what it has lost until it has been re-contextualised (*aufgehoben*) through mediation, reflection, and socialisation. Wittgenstein says that to no longer take things for granted, but to resign completely, is horrible:

Really, the horrible that I wanted to describe is that one “doesn’t have a right to anything anymore [auf nichts mehr ein Recht hat].” “There is no blessing with anything [Der Segen ist mit nichts].” That is, this seems to me as if someone on whose friendly regard [Zusehen] everything depends said: “Do as you wish but you don’t have my consent!” [...]

Live so that you can prevail in the face of any situation [vor jenem Zustand bestehen kannst]: for *all your wit, all your intellect won’t do you any good then*. (D207,209*/104; 22.2.1937)

In a pictorial and anthropocentric way, Wittgenstein here says that it is as if he is completely dependent upon a being that won’t give his approval. This is very similar to Peter Wessel Zapffe’s claim that the universe is “*buzzing* of sovereign indifference [suser av suveræn likegyldighet]”.⁵⁵ However, Wittgenstein stresses that whatever happens, one shouldn’t just stand staring at what is lost but be happy in spite of it (D189/97). Wittgenstein thus seems to say that, instead of being a melancholic, one should get on with one’s life.

In *Fear and Trembling*, this problem is explored by the character called “*The knight of infinite resignation*”. The knight of resignation is a *pessimist*, i.e. someone who condemns existence. He claims that he’s unable to realise his most vital interests and commitments. He sees the situation as hopeless and feels that he’s set on an inhuman ordeal. Even though he has done his best, he doesn’t make it.

The knight of resignation has found out what forms the content of his life (SKS4,136;SV5,40f.;FT71⁵⁶). It doesn’t have to be something purely subjective or arbitrary; it rather consists of some universal ethico-religious interests, obligations, or commitments. The problem, however, is that when this character has found out what his most fundamental interest consists of, he becomes infinitely resigned to his fate. This means that

⁵⁵ Zapffe, *Om det tragiske* [*On the Tragic*] (Oslo, Gyldendal, 1941), 112. Zapffe, who was a Norwegian existential philosopher, has been translated into German by the Thomann-Bolz-Verlag. For an English introduction, see <http://www.philosophynow.org/issue45/45tangenes.htm>

⁵⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (London: Penguin, 1985), translated by Alastair Hannay, abbreviated to FT.

he distances or separates himself from all contingent things that he can't control. The result of this is that the most decisive (existential, religious, and ethical) interests cannot be realised. But even though these interests cannot be realised, this pessimist adheres to these interests because they make up "the content of life [Livets Indhold]". To deny this would imply deception (cf. SKS4,144;SV5,47;FT78f.). This means that the knight evaluates the situation – or existence – as hopeless. The knight of resignation ends with an apory. He's a stranger and foreigner in the world (ibid.).

Because one is dependent upon contingent and external circumstances when one is doing one's duty, these existential problems are related to *ethical problems*. Wittgenstein says that the situation can get so difficult that one can't live up to one's demands:

[A] certain demand *which I acknowledge as such* I want to admit to myself again and again as a demand. [...] From that it follows that I will either meet the demand or suffer from not meeting it, for I cannot prescribe it to myself & not suffer from not living up to it. But furthermore: *The demand is high* [alternative: "frightful"]. (D175/92; 9.2.1937)

One way to try to avoid this problem would be to simply stress that "ought" implies "can". However, it is not at all certain that this will solve the problem for the individual, for it is very hard to say *in concreto* whether what's missing is ability or will (cf. SV10,169;CV62). In this case it's not sufficient to be a moral philosopher or a dialectician, says Kierkegaard (Climacus). The conclusion that Wittgenstein draws from this is not comforting:

[E]verything can be demanded from me, & specifically *demanded*, – not just recommended as good or worthwhile. The idea that I might be lost if I don't do it [Die Idee, daß ich verloren sein kann, wenn ich es nicht tue]. – Now one could simply say: "So don't give it [the sweater, etc.] away! what then?" – But what if this goes on to make me unhappy? But what does the outrage [die Empörung] mean after all? Isn't it a rage against *facts*? (D187/96;19.2.1937)

Wittgenstein says that it's possible that everything you take for granted has to be renounced: “*For you can [...] at anytime [...] become unhappy through & through if you don't do something that is demanded of you!*” (D183/94; Wittgenstein's emphasis without the underlining). At first this seems to contradict what Kant says in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (Akademiausgabe V:110,119). When Kant in this work postulates the unity of happiness and virtue (the highest good), one almost gets the impression that a failure only makes one guilty to a certain degree. But just like Kant in the *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*,⁵⁷ Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard claim that one failure is fatal because it makes one infinitely guilty. Even if one postulates the unity of happiness and virtue (cf. *Tractatus* 6.422), one can still claim (without contradicting oneself) that if one doesn't do one's duty completely, then one is completely lost.

When Wittgenstein says that everything can be demanded of you, this can be interpreted to say that the ethical imperative is unconditioned and that it addresses each individual. This is exactly the claim to be found in Kierkegaard's deontological ethics.⁵⁸ Even though Wittgenstein didn't develop a type of deontological ethics as Kierkegaard and Kant did, there is some kind of rudimentary form of ethics in Wittgenstein's work. In the *Notebooks 1914–16*, for example, Wittgenstein claims that all consequences are dependent upon contingent and uncontrollable circumstances in the world. If it's supposed to be possible with any real ethical reward or punishment, then these can't be controlled by coincidence; quite the opposite: they'll have to be involved in the action [Handlung] itself (N78). This seems to say that there has to be an inner and necessary relation between the intention and the reward or punishment.

⁵⁷ See the Akademiausgabe VI:72 and the discussions in Green, R.M., “Kant and Kierkegaard on the Need for a Historical Faith: an Imaginary Dialogue”, in Phillips, D.Z. and Tessin, T. (ed.), *Kant and Kierkegaard on Religion* (London: Macmillian Press, 2000) 131–152, 136 and 144; Phillips, D.Z. (ed.), “Voices in Discussion”, in Phillips and Tessin (ed.), *Kant and Kierkegaard on Religion*, 178–184, 181.

⁵⁸ Regarding Kierkegaard, see my article, “Eksistensfilosofi og pessimisme hos Peter Wessel Zapffe og Søren Kierkegaard [Existential Philosophy and Pessimism in Peter Wessel Zapffe and Søren Kierkegaard]”, *Norsk filosofisk tidsskrift* [Norwegian Journal for Philosophy] 40 (2/2005), 81–98, esp. 83, and 93f.

The best example of this is perhaps someone who is only happy when s/he does her/his duty.

The epistemological parallel to pessimism and resignation is what Cavell describes as *scepticism*. Scepticism consists of an attitude that theorizes and objectifies the world, where the sceptic is a spectator who demands meaning, reasons, rules, certainty, and guarantees. This means that the sceptic questions and problematizes the world as it is immediately given. In the *Investigations* this is expressed by a sceptical, philosophical voice that points to, or stress, problems. In the end, the sceptic wants to own or control something unconditioned or something without presuppositions so that s/he can become invulnerable or – to use Cavell’s term – “undispossessable” (cf. SC81ff.). When this fails, the sceptic tries to become a pure spectator who distances him or herself from the world. Except for his or her own demands, s/he doesn’t find anything that’s sufficiently legitimate or justified. Ultimately, his or her demands are directed towards existence as a whole; they are addressed towards God (cf. CR216).

C) The ethico-existential solution: “The double movement of faith”

Instead of simply resorting to evidence or proofs and trying to refute the sceptic, (cf. PI§47), the voice of correction in the *Investigations* tries to show something familiar, ordinary, and obvious. What’s decisive here is the change in *attitude*, the way of living, so that the same things will appear in new way (cf. CV69f., 72; PIp.178). The voice of correction tries to get the sceptic to realise how hopeless it is to be a spectator who questions and problematizes everything. The voice says: “Just try – in a real case – to doubt someone else’s fear [Angst] or pain.” (PI§303) “[I]f someone has pain [...] one looks into his face.” (PI§286).

This means that the task is to acknowledge what is already known. The sceptic doesn’t want to acknowledge or recognise that s/he already has commitments or obligations to other, concrete persons.⁵⁹ The sceptic wants to be a spectator who denies that there is an internal relation between knowledge and action.

⁵⁹ See SC53ff., 47. Cavell says: “Nothing is more human than the wish to deny one’s humanity, or to assert it at the expense of others.” CR109.

In the passages above, Wittgenstein seems to suggest that it is only meaningful to speak of the other's pain in a social and normative perspective where the situation of the other concerns us. Much of this topic has been covered earlier by Hegel and Kierkegaard: Hegel tries to show that recognition (*Anerkennung*) is real only if it's reciprocal while Kierkegaard tries to show that it is not possible for a spectator to describe love from the outside.⁶⁰ This means that the attempt to describe love, recognition, and pain from the outside have to fail; this attempt doesn't give the spectator knowledge of love, recognition or pain. The result is that the phenomena are objectified (*verdinglicht*) and killed (*ent-lebt*, drained of life). These phenomena can only be experienced from the inside, through participation. In this case, the phenomena are affected by how we look at them. When we are dealing with these social phenomena it is impossible to be neutral or to give a neutral description.

While Kierkegaard's ethic is based on love of thy neighbour, Wittgenstein's therapies are supposed to reconcile us with others and the world. Instead of theoretical propositions about other humans, the aim of Wittgenstein's therapies is, according to Cavell, for people to accept that our knowledge is limited and that we should recognise others and participate in social praxis. That our knowledge is limited does not mean that it fails. Cavell says that our relationship to the world and others is not something that is primarily based on knowledge or certainty.⁶¹ Cavell claims that it is based on the premise that we – to a large degree – agree in responses, judgements, and forms of living. Knowledge presupposes acceptance and acknowledgement. Even though these responses are not based on certainty or proofs, they establish, sustain, and preserve our relation to the world and other human beings.⁶²

In this context, Kierkegaard (under the pseudonym Climacus) stresses that it is not some special, private knowledge but

⁶⁰ See the dialectic of recognition between master and slave in the *Phenomenology* and the beginning of *The Works of Love*. Cf. Grøn, "Kærlighedens gerninger og anerkendelsens dialektik [The Works of Love and the Dialectics of Recognition]", *Dansk Teologisk Tidsskrift* [Danish Journal for Theology] (4/1991), 261–270.

⁶¹ CR241,45; SCxii,32,42. Cavell calls this the truth, or moral, of scepticism. This implies that all explanations have to come to an end.

⁶² In the cases of passion (SKS4,159n,208f.;SV5,62n,) and love (SV12,216), Kierkegaard clearly presupposes an agreement between all human beings.

rather the ability to act that makes the first person perspective special.⁶³ This seems to suggest that epistemology is not autonomous but that it is re-contextualised (*aufgehoben*) so that it becomes social philosophy, existential philosophy, and ethics. One could call this the primacy of practical reason. We find something similar in Hume's *Treatise* (after the apory in Book 1) and in Hegel's *Phenomenology* (ch. 4).⁶⁴

Kierkegaard tries to show that the problems raised by B (despair, pessimism, or resignation) can only be overcome by hope or faith. What Kierkegaard (under the pseudonym *de silentio*) calls the "Double movement of faith" consists of the requirements (1) that one renounces or becomes resigned over one owns ability to realise vital interests and obligations and (2) that at the same time one postulates or believes that it nevertheless is (divinely) possible to realise these interests and obligations. This doesn't mean that the "knight of faith" assumes something that is logically impossible;⁶⁵ it means that, if necessary, the knight of faith has to assume something that seems to be humanly impossible (cf. SKS4,138;SV5,41;FT72f.).

According to Kierkegaard, this belief is at odds with human wisdom – it offends or scandalises the understanding. But instead of being offended over what seems to be humanly impossible, the "knight of faith" has the courage to be certain that things will turn out the way s/he believes. S/he believes that s/he will get back what s/he has resigned him or herself to as a *gift*. The knight of faith is certain that God is love (cf. SKS4,129;SV5,33;FT63) even though that is not how it seems to be according to our understanding.

Even though Kierkegaard – and his pseudonyms – uses several expressions that are connected to the Christian faith, this doesn't have to mean that he is speaking about faith in a Christian sense. The double movement of faith belongs to existential philosophy or a universal type of religiosity that's independent of revelations. Christian beliefs, however, are dependent upon the incarnation

⁶³ See *Væren med den andre*, 85–94.

⁶⁴ Regarding Hume, see Petter Nafstad's dissertation, *Pasjoner og personer* [*Passions and Persons*] (Oslo: Cappelen, 1999), 19f.note, 72f., and 81f. Regarding Hegel, see Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 44f. Pinkard says that "[...] we move away from a picture of ourselves as 'subjects' *representing* the world to an understanding of ourselves as *participants* in various historically determinate social practices."

⁶⁵ Hannay, *Kierkegaard* (London: Routledge, 1993), 74.

as a special historical phenomena. Kierkegaard's pseudonym Climacus calls the first immanent religion (religiousness A) and the latter transcendent religion (religiousness B). Even though The double movement of faith doesn't imply a Christian God, it is, nonetheless, necessary for Christian existence as well (cf. SV10,226,240).

Religiousness A is something universal, because we are all vulnerable and dependent on conditions we can't control. If our projects and ideals are not to be completely dependent upon chance or coincidences, then we must always postulate hope. It is only the knight of faith's way of life that is stable and that can be maintained in the face of any condition [jenem Zustand]. *The double movement of faith shows universal conditions for consequent, stable, and meaningful human existence*, no matter the situation. The double movement of faith describes *conditions* (Möglichkeitsbedingungen) for meaningful human existence. If one wants to interpret this as transcendental philosophy, then one can describe faith or hope as an existential (existenzial), as in Heidegger's sense of the word.

Even if the situation seems to be hopeless (from for instance a medical point of view), it is always necessary to postulate hope in order to live (as a free, rational being). Whether there is meaning or hope is thus conceived not just as an empirical or descriptive question that can be answered by theoretical rationality. Because it is only faith or hope that always opens up the possibilities or the future, it is only faith that always makes it possible to keep on living.

The double movement of faith is not just something we find in Kierkegaard. Wittgenstein writes: "Live so that you can prevail in the face of any condition [jenem Zustand]: *for all your wit, all your intellect won't do you any good [...]*" (D209*/104). Just like Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein speaks of a fully *stable* way of life as the only real alternative. The ideal is that one can live so that one can accept everything that happens: "“You are doing right to be afraid of hopelessness! You must live in such a way that your life can't come to a head in hopelessness, in the feeling: Now it's too late. [Du mußt so leben, daß sich dein Leben nicht am Ende zuspitzen kann zur Hoffnungslosigkeit.]”" (D179,181/94) Elsewhere, Wittgenstein speaks of "an

unshakeable belief”⁶⁶ and about “[...] the experience of feeling absolutely safe. I mean the state in which one says to oneself I am safe, nothing can injure me whatever happens.”⁶⁷

In this context it is clear that both Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein view the acceptance of existence as an ethical task that one can never complete. Paul Engelmann, for example, reports that in 1916 Wittgenstein described life as a task:

He ‘saw life as a task’ [...] Moreover, he looked upon all the features of life as it is [...] as an essential part of the conditions of that task; just as a person presented with a mathematical problem must not try to ease his task by modifying the problem.⁶⁸

In *The Sickness unto Death*, Kierkegaard (Anti-Climacus) tries to show that if one wants to refute faith, the result is that one desperately wants to get rid of oneself. However, when one wants to get rid of oneself, one is – as always – left to oneself. In this case, one will have to *hope* that one can carry through a last project. This implies a paradox or contradiction because one generally denies that there is hope for oneself while at the same time – or in this special case – one presupposes hope in order to realise a last project. If one really believes that the situation is hopeless or unbearable, then it is not possible to rationally and freely choose suicide, assisted suicide, or euthanasia; then one is rather controlled by a situation that seems to make it impossible to choose freely.⁶⁹ In the last analysis, it seems to be impossible to judge or prove when a situation – existentially and ethically speaking – is utterly unbearable and hopeless. Relative to the value of a human life, the judgement seems to be uncertain and insufficient.

According to Kierkegaard, the alternatives to faith are either that one tries immediate existence as long as it is possible or

⁶⁶ *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, 54.

⁶⁷ “Lecture on Ethics”, MS 139a 12; cf. Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein*, 58.

⁶⁸ Engelmann, *Letters*, 79. This also sheds light on the critique of suicide (N91) where Wittgenstein asks if ethics presuppose that we are obligated to exist.

⁶⁹ This last point is indebted to N. Campbell, “A Problem for the Idea of Voluntary Euthanasia”, *Journal of Medical Ethics* 25 (1999), 242–44; L.J. Materstvedt, “Bør man ikke selv få lov til å bestemme hvordan man skal dø? [Shouldn't One be Allowed to Choose How One Wants to Die?]", H. Herrestad and L. Mehlum, *Uutholdelige liv [Unbearable Lives]*, (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2005), 107–131.

live in complete resignation and passivity. But both *the alternatives are ethically impossible*: the latter would make it impossible to act, while the first would – in a way reminiscent of an animal – avoid critique and obligations. Kierkegaard seems to claim that it would be fundamentally unfair if someone was given an essentially better opportunity to exist in a meaningful way than is given to others. Kierkegaard tries to solve this ethical and existential problem by stressing that everyone can believe (SKS4,159;SV5,62;FT95). He (under the pseudonym de silentio) claims “that in which human life is united is passion”. When Kierkegaard says in Danish that faith implies “Menneskelighed”, it means that faith implies both humanity (literally it rather means humanness) and a fundamental similarity between humans (Danish: *lighed*; Norwegian: *likhet*).

The problem, however, is that the more lucky one is with external circumstances, the harder it is to avoid self-deception and to live in inauthentic despair. Kierkegaard therefore stresses that the worst is not to undergo hardship, but to always be lucky. Kierkegaard’s example is the ordeals that Job from The Old Testament goes through: “[L]earn from Job first and foremost to be sincere towards yourself, that you don’t deceive yourself with imaginary power, with which you experience an imaginary victory in an imaginary struggle.” (SKS5,127;SV4,115). Kierkegaard says that it is only the frivolous and selfish [Danish: *selvkjærlige*] person who doesn’t want to appropriate Job’s story. Related to this, all other types of human wisdom or arts are all most inessential (SKS5,116ff.;SV4,104ff.).

Very much like Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein seems to claim that problems and suffering are necessary (CV81;cf.N78). Furthermore, just like Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein claims that it is only belief that can solve our problems:

What must I do so that it [my condition] becomes bearable *as it is*? What attitude do I assume towards it? That of outrage [Die der Empörung]? That is death [Das ist der Tod]! In rage I can only beat up on myself. [...] Therefore I must surrender. Any fight in this is only a fight against myself; & the *harder* I beat, the *harder* I get beaten. [...] Were I a believer [...] *this* suffering would be over. (D191*/98;19.2.1937)

Wittgenstein's point here is that the pessimist's rage or rebellion doesn't help at all; the pessimist only makes his own situation worse. The reason for this is that the pessimist is always already thrown into the world and that he is left to himself as a being in the world. Instead of rebelling against the world or existence (Dasein) as a whole, s/he is simply making his or her own existence problematic. The rebellion thus conceived implies a futile and impossible undertaking. It is a re-action to being thrown (or die Faktizität) and consists in reactive (passive) passions. Instead of accepting the given, the rebel wants revenge against existence (Dasein) or God. Wittgenstein even asks if the rebellion "Isn't it a rage against *facts*?" (D187/96). He claims that when one is angry with destiny, one has a false concept of God:

If you want to quarrel with God [Wenn du mit Gott rechen willst], that means you have a false concept of God. You are superstitious. Your concept is incorrect when you get angry with fate [Wenn Du mit Gott rechten willst, so heißt das, Du hast einen falschen Begriff von Gott, Es ist ein Aberglaube // Du bist in einem Aberglaube]. You should rearrange your concepts. Contentment with your fate ought to [variant: must] be the first command of wisdom. (D225*, 227/111; 17.3.1937)

To throw light on what Wittgenstein means by an incorrect concept of God, consider this later note from Wittgenstein's Nachlaß:

We might speak of a malice of the *world*; easily imagine the devil created the world [...] it is just that the whole plan is directed at evil from the start. But a human being exists in the world in which things break, slide about, cause every possible mischief. And of course he [his body] is one of the things.
– The 'malice' of the object is a stupid anthropomorphism. For the truth is much more serious [ernster] than this fiction. (CV81f.*; MS 137 42a: 30.5.1948 ; cf.CV53)

When the pessimist accuses God and wants to make Him accountable, this can be understood as an attempt to view God as an evil person. The tendency to rebel implies that the pessimist views God as a devil or tyrant. The rebel tries to exact revenge from his Maker. When one wants to deal with something that is not a human (God, the world, existence, etc.)

as if it is a human and then condemn it, this rebellion implies an *anthropomorphic category mistake*.⁷⁰ Wittgenstein seems to criticise the pessimist for making a mistake that implies a “fiction” and “incorrect concept” of God. Wittgenstein’s philosophical therapy is supposed to work against this blasphemous and all-to-human (Allzumenschliches) understanding of God as a devil or tyrant. Because this problem concerns the universal tendency to get angry at destiny, it concerns everybody.

In order to fight this blasphemy or pessimism, Wittgenstein uses *grammar*. What Wittgenstein calls grammar determines the connections between our concepts and constitutes our way of seeing things.⁷¹ In this context, the question is how we see our existence and our obligations. The task of philosophy then is to describe existential, ethical, and religious language games and point out how these discourses differ from other language games. Wittgenstein’s claim that a grammatical investigation is directed toward the possibilities of phenomena (PI§90) can here be interpreted to mean that philosophy investigates the conditions (Möglichkeitsbedingungen) that make our existence and our obligations possible.

According to Wittgenstein, philosophy doesn’t have its own language games (and perhaps it doesn’t have a subject of its own either).⁷² Philosophy doesn’t generate itself or its problems; it is only after the problems have arisen in different discourses and social practices that philosophy can start to reflect on these problems. According to Wittgenstein,

⁷⁰ Cf. my articles, “Tragikk og pessimisme hos Nietzsche og Zapffe [Tragedy and Pessimism in Nietzsche and Zapffe]”, *Parabel. Tidsskrift for filosofi og vitenskapsteori* [Parabel. Journal for Philosophy and the Theory of Science] (1/2001), 25–45, 36f.; “Eksistensfilosofi og pessimisme hos Peter Wessel Zapffe og Søren Kierkegaard”, 81–98. Jon Hellesnes has criticised (Zapffe’s) pessimism for making a category mistake: The pessimist understands the universe as a logical subject that we can ascribe terms such as “just” or “meaningful”; but the universe does belong to another logical category that can’t be ascribed these predicates. This, however, doesn’t imply that life is meaningless. Hellesnes says that, in order to fight pessimism, we need philosophical or Wittgensteinian therapy (Hellesnes, *På grensa [On the Border]* (Oslo: Samlaget, 1995), 110f.).

⁷¹ Cf. H.-J. Glock, “Necessity and Normativity” in H. Sluga and D.G. Stern (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 198–225, 215 and 210f.; N. Garver, “Philosophy as Grammar”, in Sluga and Stern (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion*, 139–170, 148.

⁷² See Cavell, “Notes and Afterthoughts”, 276.

this means that philosophy can only come into being as a dialogical response to something else.⁷³

Wittgenstein's general interest in grammar – the study of how words are used – might be inspired by Luther. Moreover, Wittgenstein seems to have a special interest in the usage of the concept “God”. This is not surprising given that religious or theological concepts don't have meaning in the same way as empirical concepts. Wittgenstein writes:

One kneels & looks up & folds one's hands & speaks, & says one is speaking of God, one says God sees everything I do; one says God speaks to me in my *heart*: one speaks of the eyes, the hand, the mouth of God, but not of the other parts of the body: Learn from this the grammar of the word “God”! [I read somewhere, Luther had written that theology is the “grammar of the word God,” of the holy Scripture [der heiligen Schrift].] (D*211/105;23.2.1937;cf.CV94)

In Wittgenstein's later philosophy it is also clear that the concept of grammar has relevance for theology:

Grammar tells what kind of object anything is. (Theology as grammar.) (PI§373)

“You can't hear God speak to someone else, you can hear him only if you are being addressed”. That is a grammatical remark. (*Zettel*, §717, cf. §144)

From this, the concept of God seems to concern the question of how you should relate to existence; and even though this concerns everybody, you cannot hear what God says to anyone else but yourself (cf.D95,112). Even though this might be based upon Christian presuppositions, it can have philosophical or secular significance as well. The point seems to be that – ethically and religiously speaking – you are the person responsible; one cannot justify oneself by saying that others should be accused or that the responsibility is shared. These were also the fundamental presuppositions in Kierkegaard

⁷³ See Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality*, esp. 29ff.; cf.SC167,177. See also the discussion of PI§123 (B).

and Haecker's critique of culture and society. Kierkegaard and Haecker claimed that the public, crowd, and the press had a demoralising effect.

According to Wittgenstein, the solution to these ethical and existential problems is religious faith:

Believe that at any moment God can demand everything from you! Be truly aware of this! Then ask that he grant you the gift of life! (D183/94;16.2.1937)

Have courage & patience even towards death, then perhaps you will be granted life! (D205/103;22.2.1937)

Wittgenstein's solution here seems *identical* to *The double movement of faith* in *Fear and Trembling*. We find the same double structure in both places: first resignation because everything one is dependent upon can be taken away, then the belief and hope that it will be granted as a gift. The believer resigns and receives what s/he is given as a gift.

According to Wittgenstein, this religiosity implies a new *attitude* toward existence:

“[E]verything happens through the will of God.” And this is no opinion – also not a conviction, but an attitude toward things & what is happening [eine Attitude den Dingen & dem Geschehen gegenüber]. *May I not become frivolous!* (D225*/110;15.3.1937)

Few things are so difficult for me as modesty. Now I am noticing this again as I read in Kierkegaard. Nothing is as difficult for me as to feel inferior; even though it is only a matter of seeing reality as it is.

Would I be able to sacrifice my writing [or: writings] for God? [...]

If you don't do that, your life will be an *illusion* [ein *Schein*], it does not have truth & depth. (D185/95f.;18.2.1937)

In the same way as in *Fear and Trembling* – in the context of the story about Abraham and Isaac – Wittgenstein here describes resignation as a sacrifice. This sacrifice implies acceptance of

our finitude. Without this “your life will be an *illusion*”, says Wittgenstein. The phenomena that Wittgenstein seems to associate with this illusion are conformity (D139/78, cf. 163/87), vanity⁷⁴ (D23/36), frivolousness (D211/105, 225/110), self-righteousness (D73/53), despair [Verzweiflung] (D241/117, 127/74), and waywardness [Eigensinn] (D127/74).

In *Denkbewegungen*, all these phenomena seem to be criticised in a similar fashion. In so far as none of these phenomena are consistent with The double movement of faith, they all imply a tendency towards pessimism. Wittgenstein describes this as “an *illusion* [ein *Schein*]” because all forms of existence that do not undergo The double movement of faith must imply contradictions or instability. The characteristics of a stable way of existence, on the other hand, seem to be: faith or belief (D183/94), hope, love (cf. D79/56), modesty (D61/49, 185/95), seriousness⁷⁵ (D211/105, 175/92), courage and patience (D205/103), humility and self-recognition [Selbsterkenntnis] (D105/66).

We have seen here that Wittgenstein seems to use The double movement of faith to distinguish between two different forms of existence. In a way very reminiscent of existential philosophy,

⁷⁴ In the Norwegian edition the German ‘Eitelkeit’ is translated with ‘forfengelighet’. Today this translation can be misleading because, to the modern Norwegian reader, this word implies that one is almost obsessed with looks and dressing. Unlike the German Eitelkeit and the English vanity, the Norwegian forfengelighet does not (any longer) clearly imply emptiness or that one is conceited. The Norwegian concept ‘forfengelig’ comes from the old Danish word ‘faafængelig’ which means perishable or useless. Just like the English ‘vanity’, this word is influenced by the Latin word ‘vanus’, which means empty or fruitless. This can be used to refer to seeking honour. Often this word was used in religious contexts where one described earthly things as transitory, perishable, and of little value. Wittgenstein himself says for instance: “For only religion could destroy vanity [Eitelkeit] & penetrate every nook & cranny.” [CV54]

The way the word ‘forfengelighet’ is used in K.O. Åmås’s edition of the diary, however, almost loses the old meaning of the word vanity: Åmås tends to stress Wittgenstein’s vanity (forfengelighet D13ff.) in a biographic and psychological way as if the point was that Wittgenstein was obsessed with looks and the way he dressed. What Åmås should have stressed is rather that Wittgenstein’s analysis of vanity is not an unimportant part of his philosophical analysis of central existential, ethical, and religious problems. What is called vanity seems here to imply a superficial and unstable attitude toward existence that cannot be universalised without contradiction.

⁷⁵ Wittgenstein is also supposed to have said: “Kierkegaard is very serious.” See Bouwsma, *Wittgenstein*, 46.

Wittgenstein seems to sketch a distinction between *an authentic and an inauthentic form of existence*. As in Kierkegaard, this is clearly *an ethico-religious distinction*. When Wittgenstein uses more concrete examples – and when he condemns or praises different phenomena – he also does this in a way reminiscent of Kierkegaard. Almost all of the concepts that Wittgenstein uses have been used or analyzed previously in a similar way by Kierkegaard. In this article we have seen that some of these concepts (faith, belief, courage, love, existence [Existenz], frivolousness, and despair [Verzweiflung; Fortvivlelse]) are important concepts in Kierkegaard. Other important concepts in Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard that are not explicitly analysed here are concepts such as seriousness and patience.

Rather than misunderstandings and blunt readings, what Wittgenstein writes suggests a thorough knowledge of Kierkegaard. Wittgenstein was influenced by Kierkegaard throughout his entire authorship, from the period before the *Tractatus* was finished until the late 1940's. This shows continuity in Wittgenstein's interest in existential, ethical, and religious questions, and that Kierkegaard is useful when we want to understand what Wittgenstein thinks about these questions.⁷⁶ My claim is that *Denkbewegungen* sheds new light on how Wittgenstein worked with existential philosophy, ethics, and religion in general, and Kierkegaard and Christianity in particular. Because of this, *Denkbewegungen* gives us a better understanding of how Wittgenstein, during a crucial period in the 1930s, developed his thinking.

⁷⁶ Without knowledge of *Denkbewegungen*, Creegan has tried to show that the relationship between the early and the later Wittgenstein must be interpreted with this continuity in mind. See Creegan's documentation and argumentation [*Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard*, esp. ch. 1, p. 5]. Creegan says that this concerns religion, but this article has tried to show that it also concerns existential philosophy and ethics.

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