

Excerpts from Søren Kierkegaard
for History of Christian Ethics
Spring 2014, Brite Divinity School
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The Sickness unto Death (1849) [Hong translation]

A human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation's relating itself to itself in the relation; the self is not the relation but is the relation's relating itself to itself. A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short, a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between two. Considered in this way, a human being is still not a self.

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

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

If the relation that relates itself to itself has been established by another, then the relation is indeed the third, but this relation, the third, is yet again a relation and relates itself to that which established the entire relation.

The human self is such a derived, established relation, a relation that relates itself to itself and in relating itself to itself relates itself to another. This is why there can be two forms of despair in the strict sense. If a human self had itself established itself, then there could only be one form: not to will to be oneself, to will to do away with oneself, but there could not be the form: in despair to will to be oneself. This second formulation is specifically the expression for the complete dependence of the relation (of the self), the expression for the inability of the self to arrive at or to be in equilibrium and rest by itself, but only, in relating itself to itself, by relating itself to that which has established the entire relation. Yes, this second form of despair (in despair to will to be oneself) is so far from designating merely a distinctive kind of despair that, on the contrary, all despair ultimately can be traced back to and be resolved in it. If the despairing person is aware of his despair, as he thinks he is, and does not speak meaninglessly of it as of something that is happening to him . . . and now with all his power seeks to break the despair by himself and by himself alone—he is still in despair and with all his presumed effort only works himself all the deeper into deeper despair. The misrelation of despair is not a simple misrelation but a misrelation in a relation that relates itself to itself and has been established by another, so that the misrelation in that relation which is for itself also reflects itself infinitely in the relation to the power that established it.

The formula that describes the state of the self when despair is completely rooted out is this: in relating itself to itself and in willing to be oneself, the self rests transparently in the power that established it. (SUD, 13-14)

. . . we say that someone catches a sickness, perhaps through carelessness. The sickness sets in and from then on is in force and is an *actuality* whose origin recedes more and more into the *past*. It would be both cruel and inhuman to go on saying, “You, the sick person, are in the process of catching the sickness right now.” That would be the same as perpetually wanting to dissolve the actuality of the sickness into its possibility. It is true that he was responsible for catching the sickness, but he did that only once; the continuation of the sickness is a simple result of his catching it that one time, and its progress cannot be traced at every moment to him as the cause; he brought it upon himself, but it cannot be said that he *is bringing* it upon himself. To despair, however, is a different matter. Every actual moment of despair is traceable to possibility; every moment he is in despair he *is bringing* it upon himself. It is always the present tense; in relation to the actuality there is no pastness of the past: in every actual moment of despair the person in despair bears all the past as a present in possibility. The reason for this is that to despair is a qualification of spirit and relates to the eternal in man. But he cannot rid himself of the eternal—no, never in all eternity. (SUD, 16-17)

To despair over oneself, in despair to will to be rid of oneself—this is the formula for all despair. Therefore the other form of despair, in despair to will to be oneself, can be traced back to the first, in despair not to will to be oneself, just as we previously resolved the form, in despair not to be oneself, into the form, in despair to will to be oneself. A person in despair despairingly wills to be himself, he certainly does not want to be rid of himself. Well, so it seems, but upon closer examination it is clear that the contradiction is the same. The self that he despairingly wants to be is a self that he is not (for to will to be the self that he is in truth is the very opposite of despair), that is, he wants to tear his self away from the power that established it. In spite of all his despair, however, he cannot manage to do it; in spite of all his despairing efforts, that power is the stronger and forces him to be the self he does not want to be. But this is his way of willing to get rid of himself, to rid himself of the self that he is in order to be the self that he has dreamed up. He would be in seventh heaven to be the self he wants to be (although in another sense he would be just as despairing), but to be forced to be the self he does not want to be, that is his torment—that he cannot get rid of himself. (SUD, 20)

There is much talk about human distress and wretchedness—I try to understand it and have also had some intimate acquaintance with it—there is so much talk about wasting a life, but only that person’s life was wasted who went on living so deceived by life’s joys or its sorrows that he never became decisively and eternally conscious as spirit, as self, or, what amounts to the same thing, never became aware and in the deepest sense never gained the impression that there is a God and “he,” he himself, his self, exists before this God—an infinite benefaction that is never gained except through despair. (SUD, 26-27)

But to become fantastic in this way, and thus to be in despair, does not mean, although it usually becomes apparent, that a person cannot go on living fairly well, seem to be a man, be occupied with temporal matters, marry, have children, be honored and esteemed—and it may not be detected that in a deeper sense he lacks a self. Such things do not create much of a stir in the world, for a self is the last thing the world cares about and the most dangerous thing of all for a person to show signs of having. The greatest hazard of all,

losing the self, can occur very quietly in the world, as if it were nothing at all. No other loss can occur so quietly; any other loss—an arm, a leg, five dollars, a wife, etc.—is sure to be noticed. (SUD, 32-33)

Whereas one kind of despair plunges wildly into the infinite and loses itself, another kind of despair seems to permit itself to be tricked out of its self by “the others.” Surrounded by hordes of men, absorbed in all sorts of secular matters, more and more shrewd about the ways of the world—such a person forgets himself, forgets his name divinely understood, does not dare to believe in himself, finds it too hazardous to be himself and far easier and safer to be like the others, to become a copy, a number, a mass man. (SUD, 33-34)

So it is with finitude’s despair. Because a man is in this kind of despair, he can very well live on in temporality, indeed, actually all the better, can appear to be a man, be publicly acclaimed, honored, and esteemed, be absorbed in all the temporal goals. In fact, what is called the secular mentality consists simply of such men who, so to speak, mortgage themselves to the world. They use their capacities, amass money, carry on secular enterprises, calculate shrewdly, etc., perhaps make a name in history, but themselves they are not; spiritually speaking, they have no self, no self for whose sake they could venture everything, no self before God—however self-seeking they are otherwise. (SUD, 35)

Every human existence that is not conscious of itself as spirit or conscious of itself before God as spirit, every human existence that does not rest transparently in God but vaguely rests in and merges in some abstract universality (state, nation, etc.) or, in the dark about his self, regards his capacities merely as powers to produce without becoming deeply aware of their source, regards his self, if it is to have intrinsic meaning, as an indefinable something—every such existence, whatever it achieves, be it most amazing, whatever it explains, be it the whole of existence, however intensively it enjoys life aesthetically—every such existence is nevertheless despair. (SUD, 46)

He [the person in despair] now acquires a little understanding of life, he learns to copy others, how they manage their lives—and he now proceeds to live the same way. In Christendom he is also a Christian, goes to church every Sunday, listens to and understands the pastor, indeed they have a mutual understanding; he dies, the pastor ushers him into eternity for ten rix-dollars—but a self he was not, and a self he did not become. (SUD, 52)

In Christendom he is a Christian (in the very same sense as in paganism he would be a pagan and in Holland a Hollander), one of the cultured Christians. The question of immortality has often occupied him, and more than once he has asked the pastor whether there is such an immortality, whether one would actually recognize himself again—something that certainly must be of very particular interest to him, since he has no self. (SUD, 56)

In order in despair to will to be oneself, there must be consciousness of an infinite self. This infinite self, however, is really only the most abstract form, the most abstract possibility of the self. And this is the self that a person in despair wills to be, severing the self from any relation to a power that has established it, or severing it from

the idea that there is such a power. With the help of this infinite form, the self in despair wants to be master of itself or to create itself, to make his self into the self he wants to be, to determine what he will have or not have in his concrete self. His concrete self or his concretion certainly has necessity and limitations, is this very specific being with these natural capacities, predispositions, etc. in this specific concretion of relations, etc. But with the help of the infinite form, the negative self, he wants first of all to take upon himself the transformation of all this in order to fashion out of it a self such as he wants, produced with the help of the infinite form of the negative self—and in this way he wills to be himself. In other words, he wants to begin a little earlier than do other men, not at and with the beginning, but “in the beginning”; he does not want to put on his own self, does not want to see his given self as his task—he himself wants to compose his self by means of being the infinite form. (SUD, 67-68)

The self is its own master, absolutely its own master, so-called; and precisely this is the despair, but also what it regards as its pleasure and delight In despair the self wants to enjoy the total satisfaction of making itself into itself, of developing itself, of being itself; it wants to have the honor of this poetic, masterly construction, the way it has understood itself. And yet, in the final analysis, what it understands by itself is a riddle; in the very moment when it seems that the self is closest to having the building completed, it can arbitrarily dissolve the whole thing into nothing. (SUD, 69-70)

The more consciousness there is in such a sufferer who in despair wills to be himself, the more his despair intensifies and becomes demonic. It usually originates as follows. A self that in despair wills to be itself is pained in some distress or other that does not allow itself to be taken away from or separated from his concrete self. So now he makes precisely this torment the object of all his passion, and finally it becomes a demonic rage. By now, even if God in heaven and all the angels offered to help him out of it—no, he does not want that, now it is too late. Once he would gladly have given everything to be rid of this agony, but he was kept waiting; now it is too late, now he would rather rage against everything and be the wronged victim of the whole world and of all life, and it is of particular significance to him to make sure that he has his torment on hand and that no one takes it away from him—for then he would not be able to demonstrate and prove to himself that he is right. This eventually becomes such a fixation that for an extremely strange reason he is afraid of eternity, afraid that it will separate him from his, demonically understood, infinite superiority over other men, his justification, demonically understood, for being what he is. (SUD, 72)

Rebelling against all existence, [the self] feels that it has obtained evidence against it, against its goodness. The person in despair believes that he himself is the evidence, and that is what he wants to be, and therefore he wants to be himself, himself in his torment, in order to protest against all existence with his torment. Just as the weak, despairing person is unwilling to hear anything about any consolation eternity has for him, so a person in such despair does not want to hear anything about it, either, but for a different reason: this very consolation would be his undoing—as a denunciation of all existence. Figuratively speaking, it is as if an error slipped into an author’s writing and the error became conscious of its self as an error—perhaps it actually was not a mistake but in a much higher sense an essential

part of the whole production—and now this error wants to mutiny against the author, out of hatred toward him, forbidding him to correct it and in maniacal defiance saying to him: No, I refuse to be erased; I will stand as a witness against you, a witness that you are a second-rate author. (SUD, 73-74)

God is not some externality in the sense that a policeman is. The point that must be observed is that the self has a conception of God and yet does not will as he wills, and thus is disobedient. Nor does one only occasionally sin before God, or, more correctly, what really makes human guilt into sin is that the guilty one has the consciousness of existing before God.

Despair is intensified in relation to the consciousness of the self, but the self is intensified in relation to the criterion for the self, infinitely when God is the criterion. In fact, the greater the conception of God, the more self there is; the more self, the greater the conception of God. Not until a self as this specific individual is conscious of existing before God, not until then is it the infinite self, and this self sins before God. (SUD, 80)

There is so much talk about being offended by Christianity because it is so dark and gloomy, offended because it is so rigorous etc., but it would be best of all to explain for once that the real reason that men are offended by Christianity is that it is too high, because its goal is not man's goal, because it wants to make man into something so extraordinary that he cannot grasp the thought. (SUD, 83)

Therefore, interpreted Christianly, sin has its roots in willing, not in knowing, and this corruption of willing embraces the individual's consciousness. . . . Therefore the definition of sin given in the previous section still needs to be completed as follows: sin is—after being taught by a revelation from God what sin is—before God in despair not to will to be oneself or in despair to will to be oneself. (SUD 95-96)

It is certainly true that there is no merit in being a sinner in the strictest sense of the word. But, on the other hand, how in the world can an essential sin-consciousness be found in a life that is so immersed in triviality and silly aping of “the others” that it can hardly be called sin, a life that is too spiritless to be called sin and is worthy only, as Scripture says, of being “spewed out.” (SUD, 101)

Most men probably live with all too little consciousness of themselves to have any idea of what consistency is; that is, they do not exist *qua* spirit. Their lives—either in a certain childish naiveté or in shallow triviality—are made up of some action of sorts, some incidents, of this and that: now they do something good, and then something stupid, and then they begin all over again; now they are in despair for an afternoon, perhaps for three weeks, but then they are jolly fellows again, and then once again in despair for a day. They play along in life, so to speak, but they never experience putting everything together on one thing, never achieve the idea of an infinite self-consistency. That is why they are always talking among themselves about the particular, particular good deeds, particular sins. (SUD, 107)

In other words, in despair he has abandoned the good; it cannot help him anyway, but it certainly could disturb him, could make it impossible for him ever again to achieve the full momentum of consistency, could make him weak. Only in the continuance of sin is he himself, only in that does he love and have an impression of himself. But what does this mean? It means that the state of sin is what holds him together deep down where he has sunk, profanely strengthening him with its consistency. (SUD, 108)

To despair over one's sin indicates that sin has become or wants to be internally consistent. It wants nothing to do with the good, does not want to be so weak as to listen occasionally to other talk. No, it insists on listening only to itself, on having dealings only with itself; it closes itself up within itself, indeed, locks itself inside one more inclosure, and protects itself against every attack or pursuit by the good by despairing over sin. It is aware of having burned the bridge behind it and of thereby being inaccessible to it, so that if in a weak moment it should itself will the good, that would still be impossible. Sin itself is severance from the good, but despair over sin is the second severance. This, of course, squeezes the uttermost demonic powers out of sin, gives it the profane toughness or perverseness that must consistently regard everything called repentance and grace not only as empty and meaningless but also as its enemy, as something against which a defense must be made most of all, just as the good defends itself against temptation. (SUD, 109)

A self directly before Christ is a self intensified by the inordinate concession from God, intensified by the inordinate accent that falls upon it because God allowed himself to be born, become man, suffer, and die also for the sake of this self. As stated previously, the greater the conception of God, the more self; so it holds true here: the greater the conception of Christ, the more self. Qualitatively a self is what its criterion is. That Christ is the criterion is the expression, attested by God, for the staggering reality that a self has, for only in Christ is it true that God is man's goal and criterion, or the criterion and goal.—But the more self there is, the more intense is sin. (SUD, 113-14)

A judgment! Of course, we men have learned, and experience teaches us, that when there is a mutiny on a ship or in an army there are so many who are guilty that punishment has to be abandoned, and when it is the public, the esteemed, cultured public, or a people, then there is not only no crime, then, according to the newspapers (upon which we can depend as upon the gospel and revelation), then it is God's will. How can this be? It follows from the fact that the concept "judgment" corresponds to the single individual; judgment is not made *en masse*. People can be put to death *en masse*, can be sprayed *en masse*, can be flattered *en masse*—in short, in many ways they can be treated as cattle, but they cannot be judged as cattle, for cattle cannot come under judgment. No matter how many are judged, if the judging is to have any earnestness and truth, then each individual is judged. (This is why God is "the judge," because for him there is no crowd, only single individuals.) Now when so many are guilty, it is humanly impossible to do it—that is why the whole thing is abandoned. It is obvious that there can be no judgment: there are too many to be judged; it is impossible to get hold of them as single individuals, and therefore *judging* has to be abandoned.

And now in our enlightened age, when all anthropomorphic and anthropopathic conceptions of God are inappropriate, it is still not inappropriate to think of God as a judge

comparable to an ordinary district judge or judge advocate who cannot get through such a complicated and protracted case—and the conclusion is that it will be exactly like this in eternity. Therefore, let us just stick together and make sure that the clergy preach in this way. And should there happen to be an individual who dares to speak otherwise, an individual foolish enough to make his own life concerned and accountable in fear and trembling, and then in addition makes himself a nuisance to others—then let us protect ourselves by regarding him as mad or, if necessary, by putting him to death. If many of us do it, then there is no wrong. It is nonsense, an antiquated notion, that the many can do wrong. What many do is God's will It is just a matter of continuing to be many, a good majority who stick together; if we do that, then we are protected against the judgment of eternity. (SUD, 122-24)

The intensification of sin appears clearly if it is conceived as being a war between man and God in which the tactics are changed; the intensification is an ascent from the defensive to the offensive. Sin is despair; here the battle is by way of evasion. Then comes despair over one's sin; here again the battle is by way of evasion or a strengthening of one's retreating position, but always *pedem referens* [in retreat]. Now the tactic is changed; although sin digs down ever more deeply into itself, thus moving further away, yet in another sense it comes closer, becoming more and more decisively itself. Despair of the forgiveness of sins is a definite position over against an offer of God's mercy; sin is not solely retreat, not merely defensive action. But the sin of renouncing Christianity as untruth and a lie is offensive war. In a way, all the previous forms make the admission that the adversary is the stronger. But now sin is attacking. (SUD, 125)

The existence of an infinite qualitative difference between God and man constitutes the possibility of offense, which cannot be removed. Out of love, God becomes man. He says: Here you see what it is to be a human being; but he adds: Take care, for I am also God—blessed is he who takes no offense at me. As man he takes the form of a lowly servant; he shows what it is to be an unimportant man so that no man will feel himself excluded or think that it is human status and popularity with men that bring a person closer to God. No, he is the insignificant man. Look this way, he says, and know for certain what it is to be a human being, but take care, for I am also God—blessed is he who takes no offense at me. Or the reverse: The Father and I are one; yet I am this simple, insignificant man, poor, forsaken, surrendered to man's violence—blessed is he who takes no offense at me. (SUD, 127-28)

Journals and Papers

Love to God and love to neighbor are like two doors that open simultaneously, so that it is impossible to open the one without opening the other, and impossible to shut one without also shutting the other. (JP, 3: 2434 [1851])

How Did It Happen That Christ Was Put to Death?

I can answer this in such a way that with the same answer I show what Christianity is.

What is “spirit”? (And Christ is indeed spirit, his religion is of the spirit.) Spirit is: to live as if dead (to die to the world).

So far removed is this mode of existence from the natural man that it is quite literally worse for him than simply dying.

The natural man can tolerate it for an hour when it is introduced very guardedly at the distance of the imagination—yes, then it even pleases him. But if it is moved any closer to him, so close that it is presented in dead earnestness as a demand upon him, then the self-preservation instinct of the natural life is aroused to such an extent that it becomes a regular fury, as happens through drinking, or as they say, a *furor uterinus*. In this state of derangement he demands the death of the man of spirit or rushes upon him to slay him. (JP, 4: 4360 [1854])

Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits (1847)

So the discourse now asks you: *Are you living in such a way that you are conscious of being a single individual?* The question is not the inquisitive kind such as one asks about the individual with regard to distinction, the person whom admiration and envy are united in singling out. No, it is the earnest question about what each person is according to his eternal destiny, about what he is to be conscious of being, and when is this question more earnest than when before God he considers his life? This consciousness is the fundamental condition for willing one thing in truth, because the person who even to himself is not a unity, is even to himself not something altogether definite, the person who exists only in an external sense—as long as he lives a number in the crowd, a fraction in a worldly complex—indeed, how would it even occur to such a person to occupy himself with the thought: to will one thing in truth! . . .

Each human being, as a single individual, must account for himself to God; and while no third person dares to intrude into this settling of accounts between God and the single individual, the speaker dares to and ought to remind us with his question that this is not forgotten, remind us that the most pernicious of all evasions is—hidden in the crowd, to want, as it were, to avoid God’s inspection of oneself as a single individual, avoid hearing God’s voice as a single individual, as Adam once did when his bad conscience fooled him into thinking that he could hide among the trees. It may be more comfortable and more convenient and more cowardly to hide in the crowd this way in the hope that God would not be able to tell one from another. But in eternity everyone as a single individual must make an accounting to God, that is, eternity requires of him that he must have lived as a single individual. (UDVS, 127-28)

Here in temporality the conscience already wants to make each one separately into the single individual, but here in temporality, in the restlessness, in the noise, in the crush, in the crowd, in the jungle of evasions, alas, yes, here even the terrible thing happens that someone completely deafens his conscience—*his* conscience, since he does not get rid of it; it still is his or, rather, he belongs to it. At this point, however, we are not discussing this terrible matter, but even in the better person it all too easily happens that the voice of conscience becomes merely one voice among many others, and then the solitary voice of the conscience, as is usual with the solitary voice, is so easily outvoted—by the majority. But in

eternity the conscience is the only voice heard. It must be heard; there is no place to escape it, because in the infinite there is no place; the individual himself is the place. It must be heard; the individual looks around in vain for the crowd. . . .

Are you now living in such a way that you are aware as a single individual, that in every relationship in which you relate yourself outwardly you are aware that you are also relating yourself to yourself as a single individual, that even in the relationships we human beings so beautifully call the most intimate you recollect that you have an even more intimate relationship, the relationship in which you as a single individual relate yourself to yourself before God? (UDVS, 128-29)

The royal psalmist declares that while the heathen make a big noise God is in heaven and laughs at them. I dare not believe this. One might rather say: While the crowd makes a big noise and uproar and triumphs and jubilates; while one individual after the other hurries to the crowd's arena, where it is said to be good to be if one is seeking oblivion and indulgence from the eternal; while the crowd seems to be shouting mockingly at God, "All right, see if you can get hold of us!" since in a throng it is of course always difficult to see the individual, difficult to see the trees if one is looking at the forest—then the earnestness of eternity calmly waits. And if all the generations that have lived on earth rose up and united into one crowd in order to charge against eternity and to coerce it also with their enormous majority, eternity splits them up as easily as the imperturbability of the cliff that, without moving from the spot, disperses the foaming surf, as easily as a storm wind in its advance scatters the chaff. Just as easily, but not in the same way, because the wind blows away the chaff only to pile it in drifts again; eternity disperses the crowd by giving each person separately an infinite weight by making him heavy—as the single individual. (UDVS, 133-34)

And now the means you use. What means do you use to perform your work; is the means just as important to you as the end, just exactly as important? If not, you cannot possibly will one thing; in that case the indefensible, the irresponsible, the self-serving, the heterogeneous means enters in, disturbing and defiling. Eternally understood, the means is one thing, the end is one thing, the means and the end are one and the same. There is only one end: the good in truth, and only one means: to will to use only the means that in truth is the good means—but the good in truth is indeed the end. (UDVS, 141)

And what is your frame of mind toward others? Are you in harmony with everyone—by willing one thing? Or are you divisively in a faction, or are you at loggerheads with everyone and everyone with you? Do you want for everyone what you want for yourself, or do you want the highest for yourself, for yourself and for yours, or that you and yours shall be highest? Do you do to others what you want others to do to you—by willing one thing? This willing is the eternal order that orders everything, that brings you into harmony with the dead and with the people you never saw, with strange people whose language and customs you do not know, with all the people on the whole earth, who are blood relatives and eternally related to divinity by eternity's task to will one thing. . . .

Alas, there is something in the world called an alliance; it is a dangerous thing, because all alliances are divisiveness. It is divisive when the alliance excludes the commoner, and when it excludes the nobleman, and when it excludes the government

worker, and when it excludes the king, and when it excludes the beggar, and when it excludes the wise, and when it excludes the simple soul—because all alliances are divisiveness in opposition to the universally human. But to will one thing, to will the good in truth, to will as a single individual to be allied with God—something unconditionally everyone can do—that is harmony. If you sat in solitary confinement, removed from all human beings, or if you were banished to a desert island with animals for company—if you will the good in truth, if you are allied with God, then you are in concordance with all people. (UDVS, 144)

Works of Love (1847) [2nd Hong translation]

. . . after having told the parable of the merciful Samaritan, Christ says to the Pharisee (Luke 10:36), “Which of these three seems to you to have been the neighbor to the man who had fallen among robbers?” and the Pharisee answers *correctly*, “The one who showed mercy on him”—that is, by acknowledging your duty you easily discover who your neighbor is. The Pharisee’s answer is contained in Christ’s question, which by its form compelled the Pharisee to answer in that way. The one to whom I have a duty is my neighbor, and when I fulfill my duty I show that I am a neighbor. Christ does not speak about knowing the neighbor but about becoming a neighbor oneself, about showing oneself to be a neighbor just as the Samaritan showed it by his mercy. By this he did not show that the assaulted man was his neighbor but that he was a neighbor of the one assaulted. The Levite and the priest were in a stricter sense the victim’s neighbor, but they wished to ignore it. The Samaritan, on the other hand, who because of prejudice was predisposed to misunderstanding, nevertheless correctly understood that he was a neighbor of the assaulted man. (WL, 22)

You *shall* love—this, then, is the word of the *royal Law*. And truly, my listener, if you are capable of forming a conception of the state of the world before this word was spoken, or if you are trying to understand yourself and are paying attention to the lives and minds of those who, although they call themselves Christians, actually live within pagan conceptions, then in relation to this Christian imperative, as in relation to everything Christian, you will humbly confess with the wonder of faith that such a thing did not arise in any human being’s heart. (WL, 24)

By this *shall* love is also eternally secured *against every change*. The love that only has existence can be changed; it can be changed *within itself* and it can be changed *from itself*.

Spontaneous love can be changed within itself; it can be changed into its opposite, into *hate*. Hate is a love that has become its opposite, a love that has perished. Down in the ground the love is continually aflame, but it is the flame of hate; not until the love has burned out is the flame of hate also put out. Just as it is said of the tongue that “it is the same tongue with which we bless and curse,” so it may also be said that it is the same love that loves and hates. But just because it is the same love, for that very reason it is not in the eternal sense the true love, which remains, *unchanged, the same*, whereas that spontaneous love, when it *is changed*, is still basically *the same*. True love, which has undergone the change of eternity by becoming duty, is never changed; it is simple, it loves and never hates,

never hates—the beloved. It might seem as if that spontaneous love were the stronger because it can do two things, because it can *both* love and hate. It might seem as if it had an entirely different power over its object when it says, “If you will not love me, then I will hate you”—but this is only an illusion. Is changingness indeed a stronger power than changelessness, and who is the stronger, the one who says, “If you will not love me, then I will hate you,” or the one who says, “If you hate me, I will still continue to love you”? Certainly it is terrifying and terrible when love is changed into hate, but for whom is it actually terrible? I wonder if it is not for the one involved, the person to whom it happened that his love changed into hate! (WL, 34-35)

Only when it is a duty to love, only then is love eternally and happily secured against despair. Spontaneous love can become unhappy, can reach the point of despair. Again it might seem to be an expression of the strength of this love that it has the power of despair, but this is mere appearance, since the power of despair, however much it is praised, is actually powerlessness; its peak is precisely its downfall. Yet this, that spontaneous love can reach the point of despair, shows that it is in despair, that even when it is happy it loves with the power of despair—loves another person “more than itself, more than God.” Of despair it must be said: Only that person can despair who is in despair. When spontaneous love despairs over misfortune, it only becomes manifest that it was in despair, that in its happiness it had also been in despair.

The despair is due to relating oneself with infinite passion to a particular something, for one can relate oneself with infinite passion—unless one is in despair—only to the eternal. Spontaneous love *is* in despair in this way, but when it becomes happy, as it is called, its being in despair is hidden from it; when it becomes unhappy, it becomes manifest that it was in despair. In contrast, the love that has undergone the change of eternity by becoming duty can never despair, simply because it *is* not in despair. That is to say, despair is not something that can happen to a person, an event such as good fortune and misfortune. Despair is a misrelation in a person’s innermost being—no fate or event can penetrate so far and so deep; it can only make manifest that the misrelation—was there. For this reason there is only one security against despair: to undergo the change of eternity through duty’s *shall*. Anyone who has not undergone this change *is* in despair. Good fortune and prosperity can hide it, but misfortune and adversity do not, as he thinks, make him despair but make it manifest that he—was in despair. If one speaks differently, it is because one frivolously confuses the highest concepts. In other words, what makes a person despair is not misfortune but his lack of the eternal. Despair is to lack the eternal; despair is not to have undergone the change of eternity through duty’s *shall*. Despair is not, therefore, the loss of the beloved—that is unhappiness, pain, suffering—but despair is the lack of the eternal. (WL, 40-41)

If anyone thinks that by falling in love or by finding a friend a person has learned Christian love, he is in profound error. No, if someone is in love and in such a way that the poet would say of him, “He is really in love,” well, then the love commandment, when it is said to him, can be changed a bit and yet say the same thing. The love commandment can say to him: Love your neighbor as you love the beloved. But does he not love the beloved *as himself*, as the commandment that speaks of the neighbor commands? Certainly he does, but the beloved he loves *as himself* is not the neighbor; the beloved is the *other I*. Whether we

speak of the *first I* or of the *other I*, we do not come a step closer to the neighbor, because the neighbor is the *first you*. The one whom self-love, in the strictest sense, loves is basically the *other I*, because the *other I* is he himself. Yet this certainly is still self-love. But in the same sense it is self-love to love the *other I*, who is the beloved or the friend.

Moreover, just as self-love in the strictest sense has been designated as self-deification, so also erotic love and friendship (as the poet understands it, and with his understanding this love stands or falls) are idol-worship. Ultimately, love for God is the decisive factor; from this originates love for the neighbor—but paganism had no inkling of this. It left out God, made erotic love and friendship into love, and abhorred self-love. But the Christian love commandment commands loving God above all else, and then loving the neighbor. In erotic love and friendship, preferential love is the middle term; in love for the neighbor, God is the middle term. Love God above all else; then you also love the neighbor and in the neighbor every human being. Only by loving God above all else can one love the neighbor in the other human being. The other human being, this is the neighbor who is the other human being in the sense that the other human being is every other human being. Understood in that way, the discourse was therefore right when it stated at the beginning that if a person loves the neighbor in one single other human being, he then loves all people. (WL, 57-58)

The neighbor is one who is equal. The neighbor is neither the beloved, for whom you have passion's preference, nor your friend, for whom you have passion's preference. Nor is your neighbor, if you are a cultured person, the cultured individual with whom you have a similarity of culture—since with your neighbor you have the equality of a human being before God. Nor is your neighbor someone who is more distinguished than you—that is, he is not the neighbor insofar as he is more distinguished than you, since to love him because he is more distinguished can very easily be preferential love and to that extent self-love. Nor is the neighbor someone who is more lowly than you, that is, insofar as he is more lowly than you he is not the neighbor, since to love someone because he is more lowly than you can so easily be the condescension of preferential love and to that extent self-love. No, to love the neighbor is equality. In your relation to the person of distinction, it is encouraging that in him you *shall* love your neighbor. In relation to the more lowly person, it is humbling that in him you are not to love the more lowly person but *shall* love the neighbor. It is redeeming if you do this, because you *shall* do it. The neighbor is every person, since on the basis of dissimilarity he is not your neighbor, nor on the basis of similarity to you in your dissimilarity from other people. He is your neighbor on the basis of equality with you before God, but unconditionally every person has this equality and has it unconditionally. (WL, 60)

Just as Christianity's joyful message is contained in the doctrine of humanity's inherent kinship with God, so is Christianity's task humanity's likeness to God. But God is love, and therefore we can be like God only in loving, just as we also, according to the words of the apostle, can only be *God's co-workers—in love*. Insofar as you love the beloved, you are not like God, because for God there is no preference, something you have reflected on many times to your humiliation, but also many times to your rehabilitation. Insofar as you love your friend, you are not like God, because for God there is no distinction. But when you love the neighbor, then you are like God. (WL, 62-63)

Love is a need, the deepest need, in the person in whom there is love for the neighbor; he does not need people just to have someone to love, but he needs to love people. Yet there is no pride or haughtiness in this wealth, because God is the middle term, and eternity's *shall* binds and guides this great need so that it does not go astray and turn into pride. But there are no limits to the objects, because the neighbor is all human beings, unconditionally every human being.

Therefore the one who truly loves the neighbor loves also his enemy. The distinction *friend* or *enemy* is a difference in the object of love, but love for the neighbor has the object that is without difference. The neighbor is the utterly unrecognizable dissimilarity between persons or is the eternal equality before God—the enemy, too, has this equality. People think that it is impossible for a human being to love his enemy, because, alas, enemies are hardly able to endure the sight of one another. Well, then, shut your eyes—then the enemy looks just like the neighbor. Shut your eyes and remember the commandment that *you* shall love; then you love—your enemy—no, then you love the neighbor, because you do not see the dissimilarities of earthly life, but enmity is also one of the dissimilarities of earthly life. Moreover, when you shut your eyes, your mind is not distracted and confused just when you are supposed to listen to the words of the commandment. When your mind is not confused and distracted by looking at the object of your love and the dissimilarity of the object, you become all ears for the words of the commandment, as if it spoke only to you, that *you* shall love the neighbor. See, when your eyes are closed and you have become all ears to the commandment, then you are on the way of perfection to loving the neighbor. (WL, 67-68)

Even the one who ordinarily is not inclined to praise God and Christianity does so when with a shudder he considers that depravity, how in paganism people are inhumanly separated one from another by the dissimilarities of earthly life or by the caste system, how this ungodliness inhumanly teaches one human being to disclaim kinship with another, teaches him presumptuously and insanely to say of another human being that he does not exist, is “not born.” Then even he praises Christianity, which has saved human beings from this evil by deeply and forever memorably imprinting the kinship of all human beings—because the kinship is secured by each individual's equal kinship with and relationship to God in Christ; because the Christian doctrine addresses itself equally to each individual, teaches him that God has created him and Christ has redeemed him . . . (WL, 69)

Everyone who in despair has clung to one or another of the dissimilarities of earthly life so that he centers his life in it, not in God, also demands that everyone who belongs to the same dissimilarity must hold together with him—not in the good (because the good forms no alliance, does not unite two nor hundreds nor all people in an alliance), but in an ungodly alliance against the universally human. The one in despair calls it treason to want to have fellowship with others, with all people. . . . Whoever then will love the neighbor, whoever thus does not concern himself with removing this or that dissimilarity, or with eliminating all of them in a worldly way, but devoutly concerns himself with permeating his dissimilarity with the sanctifying thought of Christian equality—that person easily becomes like one who does not fit into earthly life here, not even with so-called Christendom; he is easily exposed to attacks from all sides; he easily becomes like a lost sheep among ravenous wolves. Everywhere he looks, he naturally sees the dissimilarities (as stated, no human being is pure humanity, but the Christian lifts himself up above the dissimilarities); and

those who in a worldly way have clung firmly to a temporal dissimilarity, whatever it may be, are like ravenous wolves. (WL, 73)

From the beginning of the world, no human being exists or has existed who is the neighbor in the sense that the king is the king, the scholar the scholar, your relative your relative—that is, in the sense of exceptionality or, what amounts to the same thing, in the sense of dissimilarity—no, every human being is the neighbor. In being king, beggar, rich man, poor man, male, female, etc., we are not like each other—therein we are indeed different. But in being the neighbor we are all unconditionally like each other. Dissimilarity is temporality's method of confusing that marks every human being differently, but the neighbor is eternity's mark—on every human being. Take many sheets of paper, write something different on each one; then no one will be like another. But then again take each single sheet; do not let yourself be confused by the diverse inscriptions, hold it up to the light, and you will see a common watermark on all of them. In the same way the neighbor is the common watermark, but you see it only by means of eternity's light when it shines through the dissimilarity. (WL, 89)

A life of a human being begins with the illusion that a long, long time and a whole world lie before him in the distance, begins with the foolhardy delusion that he has such ample time for his many claims. The poet is the eloquent and enthusiastic confidant of this foolhardy but beautiful delusion. But when a person in the infinite transformation discovers the eternal itself so close to life that there is not the distance of one single claim, of one single evasion, of one single excuse, of one single moment of time from what *he* in this instant, in this second, in this holy moment *shall* do—then he is one the way to becoming a Christian. It is a mark of childishness to say: *Me wants, me—me*; a mark of adolescence to say: *I—and I—and I*; the sign of maturity and the devotion of the eternal is to will to understand that this *I* has no significance unless it becomes the *you* to whom eternity incessantly speaks and says: *You shall, you shall, you shall*. Youthfulness wants to be the only *I* in the whole world; maturity is to understand this *you* personally, even if it were not even addressed to a single other person. *You shall, you shall love the neighbor*. O my listener, it is not *you* to whom *I* am speaking; it is *I* to whom eternity says: *You shall*. (WL, 90)

Just as nowadays attempts are made in so many ways to emancipate people from all bonds, also beneficial ones, so also attempts are made to emancipate the emotional relationships between people from the bond that binds one to God and binds one in everything, in every expression of life. In connection with love, there is the desire to teach people something totally new, something for which the now old-fashioned Holy Scripture already has the characteristic expression—there is the desire to teach people the freedom that is “without God in the world.” The abominable era of bond service is past, and so there is the aim of going further—by means of the abomination of abolishing the person's bond service in relation to God, to whom every human being, not by birth but by creation from nothing, belongs as a bond servant, and in such a way as no bond servant has ever belonged to an earthly master, who at least admits that thoughts and feelings are free; but he belongs to God in every thought, the most hidden; in every feeling, the most secret; in every movement, the most inward. Yet this bond service is found to be a burdensome encumbrance and therefore there is a more or less open intent to depose God in order to install human beings—in the

rights of humanity? No, that is not needed; God has already done that—in the rights of God. If God is dismissed the place will indeed be vacant.

As a reward for such presumption, all existence will in that way probably come closer and closer to being transformed into doubt or into a vortex. What, after all, is the Law, what is the Law's requirement of a person? Well, that is for people to decide. Which people? Here doubt begins. . . . In order to have to begin to act, the individual must first find out from "the others" what the Law's requirement is, but each one of these others must in turn as an individual find this out from "the others." In this way all human life transforms itself into one big excuse—is this perhaps the great, matchless common enterprise, the great achievement of the human race? The category "the others" becomes fanciful, and the fancifully sought determination of what constitutes the Law's requirement is a false alarm.

. . . But to what can we compare that confused state just described? Is it not a mutiny? Or should we hesitate to call it that if at a given time the whole human race was guilty of it and we then add, note well, that it is a mutiny against God? Or is morality subordinated to coincidence in this way: when a great number do what is wrong, or we all do it, then this wrong is the right? This explanation would in turn be nothing more than a repetition of the thinking of the mutiny or its thoughtlessness, because then it ultimately is people who determine the Law's requirement instead of God. Therefore the one who forgets this not only becomes personally guilty of rebellion against God but also contributes his share to the mutiny's gaining the upper hand. Who would stop such a mutiny, if there is one? Should we perhaps repeat the fallacy of the mutiny, but in a new pattern, and each one separately say: I cannot stop it; "the others must"? Is not each individual under an obligation to God to stop the mutiny, not, of course, by loud noise or fancied importance, not by domineeringly wanting to compel others to obey God, but by being unconditionally obedient oneself, by unconditionally holding to the God-relationship and to God's requirement, and thereby expressing that as far as he is concerned God exists and is the only sovereign, whereas he is an unconditionally obedient subject?

Only when all of us, each one separately, receive our orders at one place, if I may put it this way, and then each one separately unconditionally obeys the same orders, only then are there substance and purpose and truth and actuality in existence. . . . God wants each individual, for the sake of certainty and of equality and of responsibility, to learn for himself the Law's requirement. When this is the case, there is durability in existence, because God has a firm hold on it. There is no vortex, because each individual begins, not with "the others" and therefore not with evasions and excuses, but begins with the God-relationship and therefore stands firm and thereby also stops, as far as he reaches, the dizziness that is the beginning of mutiny. (*Works of Love*, 114-18)

There is some talk of making a bargain with the evil one, and if one asks what advantages are offered in compensation, mention is made of power, honor, the gratification of desires, and the like. But what people forget to talk about and think about is that by such a bargain one can also manage to be loved by people and to be praised for one's love. Yet this is the case— since the opposite certainly is and was the case, that those who in love to God loved people became hated in the world. Just as the world has wanted to tempt a person to forget God by offering him power and dominion and then in turn treated the same person as the scum of the earth because he withstood the temptation, so also has the world temptingly offered a person its friendship and in turn

hated him because he would not be its friend. The world prefers not to hear anything about the eternal, God's requirement of love, and likes even less to see it expressed in life. But does the world therefore call itself self-loving? By no means. What, then, does the world do? Then the world says of the person who wants to hold to God that he is self-loving. The expedient is an old one: to sacrifice one person when all the others can profit from it. (WL, 127-128)

Suppose there are two artists and one of them says, "I have traveled much and seen much in the world, but I have sought in vain for a person worth painting. I have found no face that was the perfect image of beauty to such a degree that I could decide to sketch it; in every face I have seen one or another little defect, and therefore I seek in vain." Would this be a sign that this artist is a great artist? The other artist, however, says, "Well, I do not actually profess to be an artist; I have not traveled abroad either but stay at home with the little circle of people who are closest to me, since I have not found one single face to be so insignificant or so faulted that I still could not discern a more beautiful side and discover something transfigured in it. That is why, without claiming to be an artist, I am happy in the art I practice and find it satisfying." Would this not be a sign that he is indeed the artist, he who by bringing a certain something with him found right on the spot what the well-traveled artist did not find anywhere in the world--perhaps because he did not bring a certain something with him! Therefore the second of the two would be the artist. Would it not really be sad if what is intended to beautify life could only be like a curse upon it, so that, instead of making life beautiful for us, "art" only fastidiously discovered that none of us is beautiful. (WL, 158)

When it is a duty to love the men we see, *then one must first and foremost give up all fanciful and extravagant ideas about a dream-world where the object of love is to be sought and found; that is, one must become sober, win actuality and truth by finding and continuing in the world of actuality as the task assigned to one. . . .* When it is a duty in loving to love the people we see, *then in loving the actual individual person it is important that one does not substitute an imaginary idea of how we think or could wish that this person should be.* (WL, 161, 164)

If your life had been brought to the most crucial decision and you had a friend who on his own initiative loudly and solemnly swore loyalty to you, yes, that he was willing to risk his life for you, and then in the moment of danger he did not stay away (that would have been almost forgivable)—no, he came, he was present, but he did not lift a finger; he calmly stood there and looked on—yet, no, he did not stand calmly; his one and only thought was to save himself and on any condition; he did not even take flight (that would have been almost forgivable); no, he remained standing there as a spectator, which he made sure he could be, by denying you—what then? We shall not even trace the consequences; let us only describe the situation rather vividly and speak quite humanly about it.

So, then, you stood there accused by your enemies, condemned by your enemies; it was literally true that you stood surrounded on every side by enemies. The mighty, who perhaps could have understood you, had hardened themselves against you; they hated you. Therefore you now stood accused and condemned, while a blinded, raging

crowd howled insults at you, even rejoicing insanely at the thought that your blood would be upon them and upon their children. And this pleased the mighty, who themselves usually held the crowd in deep contempt; it pleased them because it gratified their hatred that it was brute savagery and the lowest meanness that had found in you its quarry and its prey. You had reconciled yourself to your fate, were conscious of the impossibility of saying one single word, since derision was merely seeking an opportunity. Thus a magnanimous word about your innocence, as if it were defiance, would give derision a new occasion; thus the clearest proof of your integrity would make derision even more indignant and furious; thus a cry of pain, as if it were cowardliness, would give derision a new occasion.

In this way you stood cast out of human society and yet not cast out; after all, you stood there surrounded by human beings, but not one of them all saw in you a human being, although in another sense they did see in you a human being, because they would not have treated an animal as inhumanly. What horror, more terrible than if you had fallen among wild beasts, for I wonder if even the wild, nocturnal howling of bloodthirsty beasts of prey is as horrible as the inhumanity of a raging crowd. I wonder if one beast of prey in a pack can incite another to greater savagery than is natural for each one separately in the way that one human being in the impenitent crowd can incite another to even more than animal bloodthirstiness and savagery. I wonder if the spiteful or flashing eyes of the most bloodthirsty beast of prey have the fire of evil that is ignited in the individual's eyes when he, incited and inciting, rages with the wild crowd!

In this way you stood—accused, condemned, insulted; you sought in vain to discover a form that still resembled a human being, to say nothing of a kind face upon which your eyes could rest—and then you saw him, your friend, but he denied you. And the derision, which had been strident enough, now sounded as if echo had amplified it a hundred times! (WL, 168-69)

Therefore when the discourse is about the work of love in building up, *either* this must mean that the one who loves implants love in another person's heart, *or* it must mean that the one who loves presupposes that love is in the other person's heart, and by this very presupposition he builds up love in him—from the ground up, provided, of course, that in love he indeed presupposes its presence in the ground. To build up must be one of the two. But can one human being implant love in another human being's heart? No, this is a suprahuman relationship, an inconceivable relationship between human beings; in this sense human love cannot build up. It is God, the Creator, who must implant love in each human being, he who himself is Love. . . . *The one who loves presupposes that love is in the other person's heart and by this very presupposition builds up love in him—from the ground up, provided, of course, that in love he presupposes its presence in the ground.* . . . In this way he draws out the good, he loves forth love, he builds up. Love can and will be treated in only one way, by being loved forth; to love it forth is to build up. But to love it forth is indeed to presuppose that it is present in the ground. (WL, 216-17)

. . . to give up on another as hopelessly lost, as if there were no hope for him, is evidence that one is not oneself a loving person and thus is the one who despairs, who gives up possibility. No one can hope unless he is also loving; he cannot *hope for himself* without also being loving, because the good has an infinite connectedness; but if he is loving, he also

hopes for others. In the same degree to which he hopes for others, he hopes for himself, because in the very same degree to which he hopes for others, he is one who loves. And in the very same degree to which he hopes for others, he hopes for himself, because this is the infinitely accurate, the eternal like for like that is in everything eternal. (WL, 255)

But is there not something obscure, something unclear, in this entire deliberation, so that one cannot grasp what the subject is, since “Love hopes all things” can mean that the loving one hopes all things for himself, and it can mean that the loving one lovingly hopes all things for others? But these are indeed one and the same; and this obscurity is the clarity of the eternal, if someone fully understands that they are altogether one and the same. If love hopes all things (and Paul does not say that hope hopes all things but that love hopes all things, simply because, as he says, love is greater than hope), then it follows (from its being love and from what love is) that the one who loves hopes all things for others, since his love indeed conditions his hope for himself. Only earthly understanding (and its clarity is certainly not to be recommended), only earthly understanding, which is no judge of what either love or hope is, thinks that they are two entirely different things, to hope for oneself and to hope for others, and that in turn love is a third thing by itself. Earthly understanding thinks that one can very well hope for oneself without hoping for others and that one does not need love in order to hope for oneself, whereas one certainly needs love in order to hope for others, for the people one loves—and why should one hope for others than these. Earthly understanding does not perceive that love is by no means a separate third thing but is the middle term: without love, no hope for oneself; with love, hope for all others—and to the same degree one hopes for oneself, to the same degree one hopes for others, since to the same degree one is loving. (WL, 259-60)

The vindictive person sometimes says that he hopes to God that vengeance will fall upon the hated one. But truly this is not hoping, this is hating, and it is brazen to call it a hope and blasphemous to want to make God one’s collaborator in hating. (WL, 262)

To have distinctiveness is to believe in the distinctiveness of everyone else, because distinctiveness is not mine but is God’s gift by which he gives being to me, and he indeed gives to all, gives being to all. This is the unfathomable fountain of goodness in God’s goodness that he, the *Omnipotent One*, yet gives in such a way that the receiver acquires distinctiveness, that he who creates out of nothing yet creates distinctiveness, so that the creature in relation to God does not become nothing even though it is taken from nothing and is nothing but becomes a distinctive individuality. (WL, 271-72)