

ON KIERKEGAARD'S DISTINCTION BETWEEN CHANGE AND ACTIVITY

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1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout this project I have been developing an account of what I think are the central moments of Kierkegaard's theory of change and motion. In the last chapter I honed in on what I've been calling change at the *horizontal level*—the qualitative “transition” of inwardness initiated by human persons on an immanent plane. It was seen that Kierkegaard understands change already at this level to amount to a discontinuous movement or existential leap, a *metabasis eis allo genos*, between aesthetic and ethical and ethical and ethico-religious forms of life. In chapter two, moreover, I showed that Kierkegaard's account of change is extended to have broadly metaphysical significance. At the *vertical level* (along a transcendent plane of change), whereby God's creative and redemptive activity gives being to and sustains the world and the self by means of a gift of repetition. Both characterizations of vertical and horizontal changes as existence leaps compete with Hegel's conceptualization of the self-development and differentiation of Spirit.

But the vertical and horizontal changes I've detailed in Kierkegaard's ethical and philosophical writings are not the only kinds of changes presented in Kierkegaard's authorship. I've claimed throughout this dissertation that Climacus's definition of *kinēsis* as the transition from possibility to actuality covers *any and every* change, including generic changes of coming into existence. Along with Aristotle, Kierkegaard presents *kinēsis* as difficult to pin down, because it is more than possibility and less than actuality—it obtains between possibility and

actuality. Fundamentally, then, Kierkegaard's definition of *kinēsis* requires that possibility and actuality be separate. Movement is the making actual of what is possible. When actuality is reached, possibility is *spent*.¹

It is easily recognized that this model of change rests primarily on a conception of *transitivity*. The transition from possibility to actuality consists primarily of a process over temporal instants, across the passage of time. There is almost something duplicitous in the way Kierkegaard places so much emphasis on Aristotelian *kinēsis*. The Aristotelian model of *kinēsis* that Climacus employs is ultimately insufficient to explain the complex nature of Kierkegaard's account of change in his authorship—in this way, it can only function as an approximate model for the majority of changes in Kierkegaard. This is for a simple, but paradoxical, reason: unlike generic change—mere transition—vertical and horizontal changes are not strictly speaking transitions. They do not occupy space or time, like ordinary motions do. On the horizontal and immanent plane of existence (ethical and ethico-religious), change is a qualitative (without a hint of the quantitative change of generic transitions) “transition” from possibility to actuality. The vertical change of God's creative and redemptive activity, however, consists of a non-kinetic change. While an actualization of possibility, vertical change does not annihilate possibility but preserves it. By preserving possibility, God sustains the self and the world at each moment. In a word, God's creative and redemptive activity is *intransitive*

So far, then, we have seen three modalities of change in Kierkegaard, two that are transitive and one that is intransitive.²

¹ *PF*, 74; *SUD*, 15. Later in this chapter I will look closely at *SUD*'s account of the annulment of possibility.

² Shortly, I will introduce a fourth kind of change which is the most intensive of the intransitive changes.

Transitive Change

- (1) Generic coming into existence: includes any kind of external change in time.³ This is broadly an aesthetic change.
- (2) Qualitative “transition”: change on a horizontal and immanent plane, consisting of ethical/immanent religious forms of movement inward. This includes the coming into existence of the self through self-motion/choice and the leap into religiousness A

Intransitive Change

- (3) God’s creative activity: divine activity sits on an absolute-vertical axis of the change of coming into existence.

I will treat each change in succession.

(1): External transitive change, for Kierkegaard, takes up and requires time, and, as Climacus states, it is aesthetic. As external and aesthetic, transitive changes, while perhaps the subject of many hopes⁴, political projects, erotic encounters, etc., are not existentially transformative. This does not mean that we should not engage in these actions. Rather, Kierkegaard asks us to prioritize our ends as they ought to be prioritized. As Martin Matušík has shown, transitive hopes are not in themselves problematic, but we should recognize them for what they are: they are directed toward relative and finite ends, and so we ought not think that they have purchase on our absolute search for eternal happiness.⁵ Our actualization of relative and finite hopes has bearing on the external world. For Kierkegaard, a political revolution can, no doubt, transform the contingent way of life of an individual, but political possibilities that are externally actualized do not have essential bearing on the inwardness of one’s individual existence. Thus, as Climacus writes,

³ Cf. *PF*, 74-75.

⁴ For a very helpful and insightful discussion about transitive and intransitive hope, please see Martin Beck Matušík, *Radical Evil and the Scarcity of Hope: Postsecular Mediations* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 3-4, 49-50, 209-210.

⁵ *Ibid.*

Action in the external does transform existence (as when an emperor conquers the whole world and makes the people slaves), but not the individual's own existence; and action in the external does transform the individual's existence (as when a lieutenant becomes emperor or a street peddler becomes a millionaire, or whatever else of that sort can come about), but it does not transform the individual's inner existence...Therefore all such action is only esthetic pathos, and its law is the law for the esthetic relation: the nondialectical individual changes the world but remains himself unchanged, because the esthetic individual never has the dialectical within himself but outside himself, or the individual is changed in the external but inwardly remains himself unchanged.⁶

Notice the way Climacus characterizes aesthetic change: it is *non-dialectical* and *immediate*. In what sense is aesthetic change non-dialectical? A mere change in the external world, the actualization of a possibility, has only external, and thus temporal significance. The change does not have dialectical advantage over inwardness.

The guiding feature of Climacus's account of religious inwardness (on the horizontal and immanent plane of self-movement) is that the condition for the possibility of religious movement is the resignation of one's absolute commitment to relative ends, with the purpose of gaining an absolute commitment to the absolute. Climacus claims that the maximum task of inwardness is "to be able to simultaneously to relate oneself absolutely to the absolute τέλος and relatively to the relative ends, or at all times to have the absolute τέλος with oneself."⁷ Climacus is not saying that we ought to resign relative ends altogether, but that in religious inwardness, relative ends cannot have purchase on our absolute passion for our seeking eternal happiness. This clearly relates to Climacus's argument that mere changes in the world are not causally relevant to

⁶ CUP, 432-433. Climacus can be seen as echoing another one of Kierkegaard's pseudonyms, Frater Taciturnus. In *Stages on Life's Way*, Taciturnus says of aesthetic change that "[t]he esthetic outcome is in the external, and the external is the guarantee that the outcome is there; we see that the hero has triumphed, has conquered that country, and now we are finished. The religious outcome, indifferent toward the external, is assured only in the internal, that is, in faith. Indifferent toward the externality, which the esthetic needs (there must be great men, great subject matter, great events; so it becomes comic if there are small folk or petty cash), the religious is commensurate with the greatest man who has ever lived and with the most wretched, and equally commensurate, commensurate with the prosperity of nations and with a farthing, and equally commensurate. The religious is simply and solely qualitatively dialectic and disdains quantity, in which esthetics has its task. Indifferent toward the externals, which the esthetic needs in the result, the religious disdains anything like that and proclaims, jointly and individually, that the person who believes he has finished (that is, fancies that he has, for such things cannot be believed because faith is expressly the infinite)—has lost" (442-443).

⁷ CUP, 414.

inward transformation, that the individual can be changed in the external realm, but the same individual remains inwardly unchanged. However, should one's commitment to a relative end take on an absolute quality, then one should jettison that relative end. The litmus test for whether to give up a relative end is whether it conflicts with the absolute. As C. Stephen Evans relays, "[r]esignation is described in hypothetical terms; it is a willingness to give up the relative if it should conflict with the absolute. There is no necessity for an actual conflict; but the possibility of such a conflict provides the test of whether an individual's commitment to the absolute is truly absolute."⁸

What is of utmost importance to stress is that Kierkegaard does not denigrate generic transition as such. Indeed, a portion of my argument in chapter two was that Kierkegaard's employment of the Aristotelian category of *kinēsis* was meant to critique the collapse of possibility into actuality by Hegel. For Kierkegaard, if Hegel wants a system that becomes, then possibility and actuality must remain separate. Furthermore, generic coming into existence—mere actualization of possibility—is required to stress that movement in nature, the initiation of human actions, and the coming to be of culture and human institutions ultimately point to an absolutely free cause, and not a ground of existence. That is, they are not themselves absolute, as they are with Hegel, but are relative changes that point to an absolute cause. Kierkegaard doesn't think that Hegel can account for either *generic changes* of coming into existence—that is, mere transitions—nor would he fathom the discontinuous transformation of the self that the leap initiates; further, nor, given his articulation of the ground of existence, would Climacus's absolutely freely acting cause find consolation in Hegel.

In all, I've argued a controversial thesis: Hegel's talk of becoming in his system ultimately faces a deep irony, namely, that the system is totally static. Like Diodorus and

⁸ Evans, *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript*, 165.

Parmenides, Hegel's system does not admit real transition. This was, as we saw, because Hegel collapses possibility in actuality.

(2) and (3): I've treated in detail the qualitative "transition" of horizontal change—the special kind of self-actualization initiated by the leap into the ethical and the immanent religious ("Religiousness A"). If Hegel's system cannot account for generic change in the sense of (1) above, then it definitely cannot accommodate the existential ethical and ethico-religious changes of (2) and God's absolutely free causation in the intransitive change of (3). The changes of (1)-(3) require the separation of possibility and actuality, which Kierkegaard argues Hegel jeopardizes. We see this in the speculative posturing of the aesthete, A. This is why I juxtaposed the qualitative "transition" of the leap with the existential stasis of A. Much like Kierkegaard's treatment of the speculative philosopher, A is "stuck" in an immanent realm of possibility. In resigning to an indifference to the notion of "either/or," A refuses to make the transition from possibility to actuality, to engage in the activity of actualization. If anything, like the speculative philosopher, A makes an opposite movement. Rather than engaging the transition from possibility to actuality, A and the speculative philosopher make the movement from actuality to possibility. Indeed, Kierkegaard argues that to be *sub specie aeterni* is to *annul* actuality for possibility.⁹ According to Kierkegaard's Climacus, however, *kinēsis* consists of an *annulment* of possibility by actuality.¹⁰ As an annulment of possibility, the change of coming into existence is a *break from the immanence of ideality*.

This structure is also clearly seen at the vertical level of change (intransitive change proper in 3), whereby God's creative and redemptive activity brings into existence an order of

⁹ See, for example, *CUP*, 308, 316, 324.

¹⁰ *PF*, 74.

being that transcends God's immanent self-consciousness. Creation, for Kierkegaard, is an act of externalization, whereby God actualizes an idea originally immanent in God's consciousness.

Yet, in the actualization and externalization of possibility (note: not the externalization of God), God sustains the world at every instant by means of repetition (I will elaborate more on this shortly). In this way, the act of divine creation is *not a process*, but is an action that doesn't take up time or occupy space. We can see this by focusing on the term *act*. To talk about divine creation is to talk about the moment—the origination of the action—at which there is a break from the immanence of ideation. Here the leap is present, and we are entitled to talk about the act of creation as a leap, even though my account of the leap in chapter three focused primarily on horizontal change.

However, human activity, notably the kind that pertains to Kierkegaard's vision of inwardness, looks different from divine creation. This is mainly because the specialized kind of change related to inwardness is not an externalization of an idea, but a *movement of interiority*, a change ultimately to a space of what Clare Carlisle calls "the hidden inner sanctum of the self where the truth of Christianity is appropriated."¹¹ In both cases, however, neither God's creative activity nor the existential movements of the self are generic, in the sense of *mere* transitions.

Up to now, then, we have seen three modalities of movement in Kierkegaard. I would like, at this point, to dwell in depth on a fourth, one that goes further beyond the Aristotelian model of *kinēsis* that is employed to explain the transitive changes of (1) and (2) and the intransitive change of (3). Rather than being issued from the aesthetic and philosophical writings of his first authorship, the change I'd like to explore in this chapter is found in his religious authorship, especially in *The Sickness Unto Death* and *Works of Love*.

¹¹ Clare Carlisle, *Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Becoming*, 1.

(4) Activity of Christian transformation of the self: this is an intransitive change, the redemptive possibility for which is both *given and preserved* by God in its actualization. In the activity, the human person is granted the possibility for action, because without it being given the action is impossible.

I argue in this chapter that in exceeding the model of Aristotelian *kinēsis*, the activity of transformation endemic to Kierkegaard's vision of Christian existence appropriates another model from Aristotle, a model that, like *kinēsis*, is ultimately insufficient to explain the activity of the self in Kierkegaard's second authorship. This is the model of what is called a *complete actuality* or *activity* in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Θ.¹² Kierkegaard takes up the Aristotelian notion of complete actuality, but he grafts Christian categories on to it. Without the categories of "spirit," Kierkegaard's urges that Aristotle's notion of complete activity is ultimately *incomplete*, just as changes (1)-(2) are.

In what follows, I first explain why I think Kierkegaard has and needs a fourth notion of movement in his authorship by juxtaposing it with what I've been calling qualitative "transition." Even though the qualitative change of the ethical and the ethical-religious forms of existence are self-transformative motions, they are, nonetheless, only transformations within immanence. Christian activity, on the other hand, is a complete and intransitive movement of inwardness made possible both by a willing *break* from immanence and willing *acceptance* of the vertical activity of divine creation and redemption. Second, I think we can gain further clarity about the nature of Christian activity in Kierkegaard by looking to Aristotle; this is because I believe Aristotle was an important influence on Kierkegaard's fourth modality of change.¹³ I develop Aristotle's distinction between change and activity in section two, highlighting the difference

¹² Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Θ.3, 1048b22.

¹³ In this way, there is almost something Thomistic about Kierkegaard's use of Aristotelian categories for explaining the nature of Christianity.

between *kinēsis* and *energeia* in *Metaphysics* Θ. Lastly, I develop Anti-Climacus's conception of Christian activity along these Aristotelian lines.

2. FROM QUALITATIVE TRANSITION TO ACTIVITY: FROM RELIGIOUSNESS A TO RELIGIOUSNESS B

We can understand the motivating factors surrounding my characterization of (4) by looking at how it differs from (2), the qualitative “transition” effected by the self in the ethical sphere and, especially, in the immanent religious—“religiousness A.” Climacus explains the difference between the ethical and immanent religious movements of inwardness as follows:

If the individual is dialectically turned inward in self-assertion in such a way that the ultimate foundation does not in itself become dialectical, since the underlying self is used to surmount and assert itself, then we have the *ethical*... If the individual is defined as dialectically turned inward in self-annihilation before God, then we have *Religiousness A*.¹⁴

The primary feature of qualitative transition with regard to the ethical sphere is that it's a *self-motion* into inwardness. We saw with Judge William that the apex of the ethical consists in arriving at the realization that to be responsible and dutiful requires arriving at a conception of oneself as an agent who is able to make the choice to be oneself. The possibility to be oneself is *absolutely native* to one's essence. A, the disagreeable aesthete, just needs to change his illegitimate self-conception to realize this and actualize this possibility.¹⁵

Immanent religiousness, on the other hand, distinguishes itself from the ethical in that the *telos* of the transition is *self-annihilation* before God; this is literally becoming nothing before

¹⁴ *CUP*, 572.

¹⁵ As Michelle Kosch remarks in her “Despair in Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*,” “What is at issue in despair is not at all the legitimacy of goals or conceptions of satisfaction of the despairing individual so much as the legitimacy of his conception of an attitude toward his agency (96).”

God, which Climacus explains is a prerequisite for Christian union with God.¹⁶ Thus, the movement of self-annihilation in religiousness A is a “transition” to an initial intimation of a fully developed self intensified in Christian religiousness (what Climacus calls religiousness B), and one that comes to be by means of the activity of transformation in (4) above. Unlike ethical self-motion, then, the religious individual suffers annihilation. Climacus says,

The basis of this suffering is that in immediacy the individual actually is absolutely within relative ends; its meaning is the turning around of the relation, dying to immediacy or existentially expressing that the individual is capable of doing nothing himself but is nothing before God, because here again the relationship with God is distinguishable by the negative, and self-annihilation is the essential form for the relationship with God.¹⁷

We later learn from Climacus that immediacy, much like the aesthetic form of life, wishes “to be capable of everything, and immediacy’s faith, ideally, is in being capable of everything.”¹⁸

Religious existence, however, consists, through self-annihilation, in the comprehension that one is of oneself capable of nothing before God. Indeed, Climacus strongly suggests that the religious person must continually have this incapacity before him, because the disappearance of this incapacity “is the disappearance of religiousness.”¹⁹

Yet, even though religiousness A and B share a striking resemblance to one another as regards their stress on dethroning the self, they are quite different in how they conceive of their incapacity for actualizing union with God. To better understand the distinguishing marks between religiousness A and B, let’s look closely at the moments of each.

Religiousness A: Self-annihilation, Guilt, and the Loss of Possibility

The following account of religiousness A and B will not treat each of their moments in detail. My main concern in this section is to draw out their general outlines, mainly for the

¹⁶ CUP, 556: Climacus writes, “Religiousness A must first be present in the individual before than can be any consideration of becoming aware of the dialectical B.”

¹⁷ CUP, 461.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

purpose of showing how the distinction between “transition” on a kinetic model and activity on a non-kinetic model applies to each respectively. I argue that what makes the change of religiousness A an incomplete form of religious inwardness from the perspective of Kierkegaard’s authorship is that it’s based largely on an Aristotelian model of change. Religiousness B (the paradoxical religiousness of Christian transcendence), however, is seen from the perspective of a non-kinetic model of the change of coming into existence. This is because, as we shall see, the movement from possibility to actuality consists of possibility being given and preserved by God at each moment. (o.k., is this not what you say about motion #3?) It has no presentiment of a process over time, but rather is a synchronic actualization of the possibility for being a self. In transcendent religion, then, the activity of being a self is made possible by a radical passivity—a suffering. As C. Stephen Evans relays, “[r]eligious suffering is the action of becoming passive over against God, of allowing God to direct and govern one’s life.”²⁰ Religiousness A and B diverge at this point. In religiousness A, the process of suffering includes the realization of one’s finite incapacity to actualize the *distinctively human* possibility for moral goodness and the attainment of eternal happiness. For religiousness B, on the other hand, this immanent possibility is relinquished in favor of a transcendent source of possibility.

In mapping out the contours of religiousness A, Climacus suggests that this immanent form of religion annihilates the particularity of existence and sides with “all humankind, because it is related to the eternal, a relation of which every human being is assumed to be essentially capable.”²¹ He also says of religiousness A that it “comprehends contradiction as suffering in self-annihilation, yet within immanence; but ethically accentuating existing, it hinders the

²⁰ Evans, *Kierkegaard’s Fragments and Postscript*, 171.

²¹ *CUP*, 584.

existing person in *abstractly* remaining in immanence.”²² Climacus’s language suggests that religiousness A is a flight from the particularity of existence to the universal and essential elements of human possibility for union with God. This is a possibility that is essential to being human, but which each individual fails to actualize due to finitude. For Climacus, the central expression for an existing individual’s consciousness of his or her failure to gain an eternal happiness is *guilt*.²³ One acquires guilt in virtue of the failings that occur in one’s inability to make the temporal and changing realm of the finite cohere with the eternal. On an existential level, religiousness A is the site of the continual *task* of failing at actualizing what is understood as an essential possibility—the attainment of eternal happiness.

The kinetic model here is glaring, even though the depths of inwardness are not spatial depths. The kinetic model, however, is ultimately insufficient, precisely because it’s grafted on to the level of the dialectic of religious inwardness. It is with the onset of religiousness A that self-motion is thwarted as is evinced from Climacus’s description of the lack of coherence between an essential possibility for existence and the actual incapacity of each individual to realize that possibility on his or her own. Whereas the successful assertion of the will in becoming a self is the apex of the ethical, for the religious individual the will is continually unsuccessful in actualizing possibility. The difference, then, is between an aspiration for the good in a self-sufficient and triumphalist mode of self-motion and the resignation and suffering of the self in the realization that the self is not, on its own, sufficient for attaining and ordering one’s life according to the demands of the good. As Westphal explains, in the ethical movement, “I interpret the moral life in a triumphalist manner as a series of tasks I can (at least in principle)

²² *CUP*, 572. Emphasis mine.

²³ *CUP*, 525-526

accomplish. The thrill of victory prevails over the agony of defeat.”²⁴ The central moment of the ethical consists of winning the self in realizing the implicit and essential possibility for being a self. On the other hand, the guiding model of religiousness A is the repeated failure to live up to the such a possibility. The finite and particular self seeks to relate in an absolute way to the absolute, but suffers the agony of defeat; hence, the continual guilt.

Furthermore, Climacus argues that as a flight from particular existence, religiousness A makes a movement of *abstraction*. As Merold Westphal correctly points out²⁵, it’s curious that a sphere placed steadily in the realm of inwardness is now being accused by Climacus of being abstract, since inwardness is a movement to and of actuality. The fundamental presentiment of religiousness A, though, is that it is not possible for the particular individual to rest in the eternal on one’s own. To make the movement to union with the Good/God, then, the religious individual despairs over the lack of possibility that, qua individual agent, he or she has for such a movement. Religiousness A, then, is fundamentally a form of despair, since it places judgment on individual finitude. Finitude becomes a scar of humanity, and eternal happiness can only be attained in the death of self required for union with God.

Kosch’s gloss on Climacus’s characterization of religiousness A reveals this despair:

The religious views grouped under this category [religiousness A] share an idea of the good as union with God as a philosophically conceived absolute. They also hold that human beings, as finite creatures, are incapable of attaining this good. The ideal of religiousness A, the task it sets for the individual, is to overcome those aspects of being in which finitude consists: not only finite desires and attachment to the world...but also existence as a particular individual, and indeed the will itself in so far as it is the particular will of a particular individual. This is the meaning of the imperative of self-annihilation. In the stage of religiousness A, the individual sets himself aside in order to find God. What is demanded is a strenuous effort to overcome one’s individuality.²⁶

²⁴ Merold Westphal, “Kierkegaard’s Teleological Suspension of Religiousness B,” in *Foundations of Kierkegaard’s Vision of Community: Religion, Ethics, and Politics in Kierkegaard*, ed. George B. Connell and C. Stephen Evans (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1992), 113.

²⁵ Westphal, *Becoming a Self*, 186.

²⁶ Michelle Kosch, *Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling, and Kierkegaard*, 166-167.

The reason to overcome one's finite individuality is that finite existence cannot of itself seek union with the good. Individuals are subject to the passage and movement of time just as nature is. But, from the point of view of the immanently religious, humanity *as such* holds the key to the eternal. Rather than identify oneself with this changing and ultimately decomposing body, the soul makes the movement to the immanently universal and eternal verities and possibilities of human nature. This is the space of what Westphal calls "epistemological immanence"²⁷ and what Climacus deems "recollection." In *Philosophical Fragments*, Climacus sets up the immanent movement to the universal (recollection) as an essentially Socratic task.²⁸ This is because in the Socratic moment, virtue and truth cannot be learned, but only recollected. In short, human beings hold the criterion for attaining them. Thus, what binds the universality of human nature is reason itself. As immanently religious, religiousness A moves in the realm of the philosophical. This is why, no doubt, Climacus says that religiousness A is speculative.²⁹

Now, the speculative/philosophical posture of religiousness A deals a blow to transcendent religion (which we will see Climacus calls the "paradoxical-religious"), because it maintains an *immanent* relation between the self and the Good/God. Even though the particularity of the self is vanquished, the conditions for the attainment of eternal happiness as well as our knowledge of what those conditions are and entail are conceived immanently within thought. Kosch further remarks that

An immanent view is one that posits nothing higher than the 'self' taken in a broad sense: the contents of human subjectivity. In religiousness A, the divine is conceived as a place mapped out within the philosophical system: the first principle required for a unified theory of the world. It's god is a 'god within thought.'³⁰

²⁷ Westphal, "Kierkegaard's Teleological Suspension of Religiousness B," 115-116.

²⁸ *PF*, 9-10.

²⁹ *CUP*, 570.

³⁰ Kosch, *Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling, and Kierkegaard*, 182-183.

Why? Isn't the movement to even the initial levels of inwardness changes of transcendence? How can a 'god within thought' be a proper object of any kind of inwardness for Kierkegaard? Haven't we seen throughout this project his insistence that speculative posturing in its immanent and abstract mode lacks the requisite conditions for genuine movement due to its relinquishment of existence in pure and eternal being? For Kierkegaard, it seems, what distinguishes religiousness A from the Hegelian form of speculation criticized throughout the authorship, is that the former recognizes the contradiction between existence and the eternal, and has the requisite pathos to maintain that contradiction with strenuous effort. We learn from Climacus that

Speculative thought ignores existence; for speculation, "to exist" becomes "to have existed"; existence is a vanishing and annulled element in the pure being of the eternal. Speculation as abstraction can never become contemporary with existence and therefore cannot comprehend existence as existence, but only afterward. This is what explains why speculation wisely abstains from ethics and why it becomes ludicrous when it sets about it.³¹

Speculation abstains from ethics because there is no particular existing subject to initiate ethical tasks. In short, for speculation, there is no existing self to annihilate with pathos. By means of the strenuous and ethical task of self-annihilation, however, the religious individual

[a]ccentuates existing as actuality, and eternity, which in the underlying immanence sustains the whole, vanishes... For speculation, existence has vanished and only pure being is; for Religiousness A, only the actuality of existence is, and yet the eternal is continually hidden by it and in hiddenness is present."³²

Kosch argues that Climacus's characterization of the eternal in religiousness A is not far from Neoplatonic or even Spinozistic conceptions of the One. Religiousness A, under Kosch's reading, has a systematic picture of the world that accommodates a view of the relationship between the finite and the infinite as being continuous. Religiousness A, then, can accommodate

³¹ *CUP*, 570-571.

³² *Ibid.*

either a theory of emanation or pantheism.³³ Without attributing to religiousness A any particular philosophical theory about the cosmos and the relationship that obtains between existence and the eternal, Climacus points out that “In Religiousness A, the eternal is *ubique et nusquam* [everywhere and nowhere] but hidden by the actuality of existence.”³⁴

From the perspective of Kierkegaard’s authorship, religiousness A is necessarily despair. In this religious mode of existence, the individual despairs over the possibility for finite agency. In one way, the individual takes one term constitutive of the self and despairs over it. In despairing over one constitutive element, the immanently religious existing individual lacks wholeness.

We can shed further light on religiousness A’s despair by hermeneutically placing it within the context of Kierkegaard’s “second” authorship, which completes and establishes the religious authorship as a whole. In *The Sickness Unto Death*, Kierkegaard’s pseudonym, Anti-Climacus, asserts that the self is a “relation that relates itself to itself.”³⁵ The initial relation is that of a synthesis of opposing terms: “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.”³⁶ Now, *merely* as a synthesis of these terms, the human being is not a self, because the relation of the synthesis establishes merely a metaphysical-psychological substance comprised of soul (*psyche*) and body, but not yet a spiritual (*pneumatic*) entity. Now, the psycho-somatic entity is a relation between the synthesis. This relation, argues Anti-Climacus, is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for being a self. The self, rather, emerges from this hylomorphic unity’s relating itself to itself.

³³ Kosch, *Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling, and Kierkegaard*, 183.

³⁴ *CUP*, 571.

³⁵ *SUD*, 13.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

We can understand the self, then, as a hylomorphic unity that is conscious of the terms of the synthesis.

Given this picture of the self in *The Sickness Unto Death*, we find that the individual occupying the sphere of religiousness A in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* does not properly relating the finite with the infinite. Further, the individual despairs over the finitude constitutive of the self. In guilt, the individual sets the task to gain eternal happiness, but can only do so by strenuously annihilating the self, by becoming nothing. There is a real sense in which the fate of religiousness A is terrible and absurd. The individual in guilt begins each day anew to attain eternal happiness, to bring about the confluence of finite being and the absolute; rich with human possibility for such attainment, the individual is nevertheless doomed to fail, precisely because it conceives of this trial within mere immanence: if the confluence can happen, then the self is the only one who can bring it about; but the self can't bring it about; therefore, the confluence cannot obtain. The relationship between the finite and the infinite is understood merely in terms of human possibility. Religiousness A, then, is condemned to a terrible repetition of failed realization within immanence, not unlike the strenuous up and down hill climb Sisyphus is eternally condemned to repeat.

Religiousness B: Self-Annihilation, Sin, and the Granting of Possibility

We have thus far seen how religiousness A falls within a broadly *kinetic* model of change. It attempts to repeat the moments of *kinēsis*—the transition or actualization of possibility to actuality—but fails. Religiousness A sees the capacity for the attainment of the good to lie essentially in humanity; however, finite existence presents an obstacle to achieve eternal happiness. This is because, for Climacus, religiousness A conceives of the relationship between the finite and the infinite in terms of immanence. This is the despair of religiousness A,

and in despair, the religious individual reaches a crisis in which the legitimacy of this immanent self-conception is put in question. Along the path to eternal happiness and wholeness, the resolution of this crisis must come from elsewhere.

Religiousness A and what Climacus calls religiousness B share in common the dethroning of the assertive movement of self-actualization in relation to eternal happiness. In religiousness A the particular individual is incapable to actualize the confluence of concrete existence with the absolute. In religiousness B, however, one's consciousness of this comes about through an awareness that the condition for the possibility for cohesion does not rest immanently in the human essence, but in being given by God—in transcendence. In this way, religiousness B is fundamentally related to God in *faith* and not the immanence of recollection.

In faith, the paradoxically religious “moves forward in order to become eternal in time through the relation to the god in time.”³⁷ The issue in *Philosophical Fragments* is repeated here: if the moment in time is going to have any significance, then we must move further than recollection presented in Socratic immanence. As Climacus states,

Viewed Socratically, any point of departure in time is *eo ipso* something accidental, a vanishing point, an occasion...If the situation is to be different, then the moment in time must have decisive significance that for no moment will I be able to forget it, neither in time nor in eternity, because the eternal, previously nonexistence, came into existence in that moment.³⁸

From the Socratic point of view, every human being *qua* human being holds the essential possibility for the attainment of eternal bliss. In other words, the truth is immanent to being human. Religiousness A begins with this assumption, but finds itself guilty for not being able to live up to such a possibility. In awakening to the emptiness of this capacity for realizing the

³⁷ *CUP*, 584.

³⁸ *PF*, 11-13.

essential possibility for the good, the individual is lost. Now, *Philosophical Fragments*, without naming it as such, argues that Christianity is the answer to the Socratic dilemma. Rather than viewing the possibility for the realization of eternal happiness within the sphere of immanence, Christianity takes the individual as bereft of such a possibility. But if the individual lacks the essential possibility for acquiring the good in truth, then the individual essentially lacks this capacity—“[h]e is, then, untruth.”³⁹ However, if the individual is untruth, then the question remains as to how she got herself in this situation. Climacus explains that it came about freely. In the free act of losing the condition for attaining eternal happiness, the individual has fallen from an original union with God, and is now greatly divorced from the absolute. In both *Philosophical Fragments* and in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Climacus calls this great divorce sin.⁴⁰

How to ameliorate the state of untruth as sin? How is the capacity and condition for union with God to be achieved? Strangely, Climacus argues that rather than be ruled by the ignorance of one’s sin in the state of guilt-consciousness, one must become aware that in virtue of having come into existence one has willed this ignorance. For Climacus the individual must be granted the condition for the consciousness that he or she is a sinner by God. How so? In *Postscript*, Climacus writes,

The individual is therefore unable to gain the consciousness of sin by himself, which is the case with guilt-consciousness, because in guilt-consciousness the subject’s self-identity is preserved, and guilt consciousness is a change of the subject himself. The consciousness of sin, however, is change of the subject himself, which shows that outside the individual there must be the power that makes clear to him that he has become a person other than he was by coming into existence, that he has become a sinner. This power is the god in time.⁴¹

³⁹ *PF*, 13

⁴⁰ *PF*, 15; *CUP*, 583-585. It should be noted that Climacus’s conception of sin is merely a *conception*. His discussion of sin is philosophical and is thus not an existentially lived understanding.

⁴¹ *CUP*, 584.

Jack Mulder Jr. provides a helpful gloss on the reason why the individual's transformation from guilt-consciousness to sin-consciousness must be undertaken by the initiation of the god in time:

Sin-consciousness signals an intensification of passion, but it is not just that, it also is a qualitative break with immanence, because guilt is not, strictly speaking, a *moral* failure, though its presence is a manifestation of a moral failure, but a consequence of the temporal individual's trying to relate to an *eternal* happiness. Through heightened passion an individual can come to know that within immanence this is impossible, but cannot come to know that the *reason* it is impossible is a moral failure on her part, and that she must die as a consequence.⁴²

That the religious individual cannot come to know that the reason it is impossible to relate to an eternal happiness on one's own is due to one's own moral failing means that the capacity for such consciousness needs to be given by God in time.

As *Philosophical Fragments* presents the issue, the god in time comes down as a teacher or redeemer to provide the condition for relating to eternity and ultimately for becoming a whole and properly related self, which is fully developed in Anti-Climacus's *The Sickness Unto Death*, *Practice in Christianity*, and in Kierkegaard's *For Self-Examination*, *Judge For Yourself*, and in *Works of Love*. These works emphasize, and Climacus foreshadows this, that in Christian religiousness there is a possibility for the self's union with God, but the possibility is granted to the individual, not in virtue of what rests as an immanent possibility, but in virtue of the absurd: the eternal coming into existence in time. Climacus writes that

The paradoxical-religious breaks with immanence and makes existing the absolute contradiction—not within immanence but in opposition to immanence. There is no immanent underlying kinship between the temporal and the eternal, because the eternal itself has entered into time and wants to establish kinship there.⁴³

For Climacus, the paradoxical-religious rests on the coming into existence of the eternal in time, which is against the very nature of the eternal to do. Yet, the actualization of the self cannot be

⁴² Jack Mulder Jr., "Faith and Nothingness in Kierkegaard: A Mystical Reading of the God-Relationship" (Purdue University, 2004), 111.

⁴³ *CUP*, 573.

complete without this paradox, because it accentuates individual existence by granting possibility for self-actualization.

The foregoing outline of the paradoxical-religious has taken us quite far from the kinetic model that governs the aesthetic, ethical, and the immanently religious spheres of existence and which is detailed in the “Interlude” of *Philosophical Fragments*. Aesthetic change consists of an external, generic transition from possibility to actuality. The ethical and the stage of religiousness A are modeled on a qualitative “transition” from possibility to actuality. As spheres of immanence, the ethical and religiousness A hold that the possibility for attaining the good lies essentially within the nature of humanity. The self-assertive motion of the ethical brings about the actualization of this possibility by fashioning the good merely in terms of choice. Recall that for Judge William the good is conceived and contained within the reality of choosing itself. Religiousness A understands its absolute *telos* to be eternal happiness. The rift between one’s finitude and the absolute good is widened to such a degree that the actualization of the individual’s essential possibility for relating to this good is jettisoned. In self-annihilation, religiousness A despairs over finitude because individually existing human beings are unable to realize this possibility on their own. In this way, immanence has failed to relate the individual self with God. In the aesthetic, then, we have merely generic *kinēsis*, whereas in the ethical sphere, the victory of choice brings into existence a self won through an immanent *kinēsis*. In religiousness A, however, the gap between possibility and the actualization of that possibility is infinitely widened, resulting in a failed *kinēsis*.

Religiousness B, however, conceives of the change of coming into existence of the self as bereft of the transitional quality of *kinēsis*. This is why we must speak of arrival into the religious sphere proper as an *intransitive change* of inwardness, or redemptive self-

transformation. This is because possibility for change is not immanent, but transcendent to the individual, and when it is given, it also *preserved* in the transformation of the annulled self into a new and redeemed self before God. Why is possibility preserved? Must it be preserved? If possibility is preserved in the actualization of it, what does this do the *status of the change of self as it is transformed* from merely being a sinner to the consciousness that one is a sinner? *Kinēsis*, recall, consists of an *annulment* of possibility in its change to actuality. However, self-actualization in religiousness B is not an immanent possibility, but one that is given.

Possibility is preserved in the transformation of the self, because without it the self would be lost in a multiplicity over moments of time. In other words, the continuity of the self at each moment would not obtain. We see this most clearly in Anti-Climacus's complex definition of the self as spirit: the self is the unity of the finite and the infinite, of the temporal and the eternal, and of possibility and necessity.⁴⁴ Indeed, the coming into existence of self as spirit, for Kierkegaard, is not an actualization and annulment of possibility, but is the continual and complete realization of possibility. As continual and complete, we can rest assured that we are no longer talking about mere change but rather activity.

My argument from this point on is that Anti-Climacus and Kierkegaard follow Aristotle in developing an account of selfhood that does not come about by a qualitative "transition" or change, but by means of a transformational activity. The difference can be clearly seen in the way that transitive and intransitive changes have been parsed out in Kierkegaard's writings and in the intensification of religiousness in the paradoxical-religious granting of possibility to the self. We've already seen that the "transition" from possibility to actuality brings about an annulment of possibility. If possibility is annulled, however, then the self is lost. In what

⁴⁴ *SUD*, 13, 36.

follows, then, I will develop Aristotle's distinction between change and activity, and then show how Anti-Climacus engages and employs this distinction.

3. ARISTOTLE ON CHANGE AND ACTIVITY

As we've seen, a generic change is any change that is initiated within the external world. My driving from Chicago to Los Angeles is a generic change in that the movement consists of a process of the actualization and annulment of my capacity to reach Los Angeles. Once I reach Los Angeles, my capacity to move to Los Angeles is annulled. In addition, the drive to Los Angeles has a definite external end—namely, my having reached Los Angeles.

This Aristotelian kinetic model here should not be lost on us. Aristotle's theory of change and causation, especially his account of formal causation in *Physics* II, argues that movement consists of the *process* of bringing into existence an idea or form. An artisan has an idea of a table and brings this idea into existence. The change depicted here is what Aristotle calls incomplete motion.⁴⁵ Motion is incomplete when the possibility (or, in Aristotle's usage, potentiality—*dunamis*) which is to be actualized in the change is itself incomplete—that is, is not, of itself, actual. The nature of motion, as Kierkegaard argues, consists in the separability of possibility and actuality—motion is more than possibility and less than actuality. Because of this, the process of change annihilates possibility as its realized in externalization. An artisan annuls the idea of the table in the externalization and actualization of it. From this account we can devise at least three criteria for something to be an incomplete motion. An incomplete motion (1) annuls possibility; (2) is directed toward externalization in the realization of

⁴⁵ *Physics* III.2, 201b27-33.

possibility; and (3) is a *process* and thus takes up time. Actualization is a *process* and Aristotle's account of change in this regard is *generic*.⁴⁶

Now, Kierkegaard's grafting of Aristotelian *kinēsis* on his existence-categories is ultimately insufficient, because existential change does not take up time (though as a horizontal motion it is a change in the mode of temporality), nor is it directed toward a literal external end (though it has a phenomenologically descriptive telos, e.g., eternal happiness as grasped by a marriage motion or a movement to a philosophically conceived Good). However, it is significant that up to religiousness A, the change of coming into existence is conceived in terms more or less incomplete "transitions" between possibility and actuality, whereas the change of coming into existence of the self in religiousness B consists in the granting of and simultaneous actualization of possibility at every moment. This is what makes Christian activity intransitive--there is neither a *kinēsis* from place to place nor an existential leap from a lower (relative) to higher (absolute) *telos*. In a word, the coming into existence of the paradoxically-religious self consists of a confluence of a finite will and the willing repetition of God as creator and redeemer (the joining of the horizontal and the vertical levels).

To gain better access to the difference between change and transformative activity in Kierkegaard we can do no better than look to Aristotle's metaphysics, particularly his analysis of primary substance and the way that *dunamis* (potentiality) and *energeia* (actuality) are linked up with his claim that primary substances are matter-form unities. This may seem to be a far cry

⁴⁶ I'd like to thank David Kangas who, through a series of correspondence, convinced me of the generic aspect of this type of change, resulting in my rethinking the Aristotelian influence on Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard's account of change is generic only with regard to the coming into existence of nature, including human beings. This is not to say that humans cannot undergo generic changes. Indeed, and as I will argue in this chapter, aesthetic movement/change—especially evinced by the change of erotic love—is generic as well. However, the coming into existence of the self, as a turn inward of human spirit, is not a process of externalization in the least. Inwardness is a special kind of movement that I will term complete motion, or activity.

from the Kierkegaardian issues at hand, but the following aims to show that Kierkegaard gains the distinction between change and activity from Aristotle.

The issues surrounding the interpretation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, especially books Z, H and Θ have focused in various and competing ways on the fundamental role primary substance plays in Aristotle's ontology. Aristotle's establishment of what counts primarily as substance is executed with a host of notions scattered throughout the *Metaphysics*. Potentiality and actuality are two important notions that Aristotle develops in his investigation of primary substance, and are not merely used to explain *kinēsis*.⁴⁷ Taking these categories into account, many interpreters attempt to show that Aristotle's arguments about substance in these three central books of the *Metaphysics* are meant to answer the question: What is substance? We can see Kierkegaardian parallel here: whereas in the "Interlude" of *Philosophical Fragments* Climacus uses possibility and actuality to explain *kinēsis*, Anti-Climacus, employs these modal categories in his definition of the unity of the self.

One important reading of the *Metaphysics* along these lines comes from L. A. Kosman, who argues that Aristotle's development of potentiality and actuality in Θ is meant to complete the investigation of primary substance set out in Z and which continues on into H; in particular, potentiality and actuality are used to account for the *unity* of form and matter in corporeal substances. Kosman states,

The introduction of *energeia* and *energeia* related *dunamis* in Θ.6 is...an important piece in the complex argument concerning *ousia* beginning in Z.1. That argument reaches an impasse at the end of Z; Aristotle is unable to reconcile the conflicting claims of what have slowly emerged as matter and form in the analysis of *ousia*, and in turn unable to account for the unity of matter and form, or of the individual and its being.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ For a helpful and fairly comprehensive discussion of the issues in the *Metaphysics*, see Mary Louise Gill, "Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Reconsidered," in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 43.3 (July 2005), pp. 223-251.

⁴⁸ L. A. Kosman, "Substance, Being, and *Energeia*," in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 2 (1984), p. 122.

For Kosman, appreciating Aristotle's attempt to secure this unity requires an appreciation of the various ways Aristotle utilizes potentiality and actuality, for it is evident from Aristotle's corpus that he puts them to use in different ways. For example, in *Physics* III, Aristotle states that the actuality of what is potential *qua* potential, is motion.⁴⁹ Yet Aristotle makes it clear that this kind of actuality and potentiality is not the most important for the investigations of first philosophy. Instead, in *Metaphysics* Θ 6, he stresses that actuality and potentiality need not merely be applied to motions, *which are always incomplete*; the important account of potentiality and actuality has them unified in a special way such that the activity of X is completed in that very activity. As regards the way in which potentiality and actuality is like or, more strongly, explains a substance's unity of form and matter, Kosman says,

Potentiality and actuality are the same thing, present together in that full activity which is nothing other than the manifestation of the one entity that both are. And it is in this sense that matter is the potentiality of which form, as the being that matter is, is nothing other than the full actuality of that matter, and thus of that very being.⁵⁰

Kosman suggests that just as potentiality and actuality are linked such that actuality is the manifestation (and not a movement) of a potentiality, so substances are unified in such a way that their form is the being of their matter. Providing an account of the unity of substances requires, then, a distinction between the potentiality and actuality involved in motion and the potentiality and actuality endemic to substances.

Incomplete Actuality

Putting the finishing polish on Aristotle's account of substance, *Metaphysics* Θ develops a difficult and obscure definition of potentiality and actuality, the purpose of which is to parse

⁴⁹ Aristotle, *Physics*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, trans. R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), III.1 201a10-14. I will spend more time developing motion as an actuality later in the paper.

⁵⁰ "Substance, Being, and *Energeia*," p. 144.

out the way in which primary substances are said to be a unity of form and matter.⁵¹ However, Aristotle's discussion of potentiality and actuality in Θ takes a tortuous path; indeed, not only does he begin Θ with what was established in the *Categories*, namely, that primary substance is the subject of all the other categories (quality, quantity, place, etc.), he also provides a treatment of potentiality and actuality in reference to motion, distinguishing motion as a sort of actuality from a more *complete* actuality.⁵²

With regard to the former type of actuality, there is no doubt that Aristotle is relying on his arguments from *Physics* III.1 which rest on his claim that motion is the actuality of a potentiality qua potentiality. Aristotle later states this in another way, qualifying the way in which motion is a kind of actuality:

The reason why motion is thought to be indefinite is that it cannot be classed as a potentiality or as an actuality—a thing that is merely *capable* of having a certain size is not necessarily undergoing change, nor yet a thing that is actually a certain size, *and motion is thought to be a sort of actuality, but incomplete, the reason for this view being that the potential whose actuality it is is incomplete.*⁵³

It is here that one finds Aristotle making a distinction between at least two kinds of actuality; although, it unclear what force the distinction has. Aristotle says that motion is a certain sort of actuality, but that it is *incomplete*. Because it is incomplete, Aristotle claims, motion is very “hard to grasp.”⁵⁴ Aristotle nonetheless provides a more robust definition of motion: “Hence motion is the fulfillment of the moveable as moveable.”⁵⁵

From this definition it is still unclear in what ways motion is an incomplete actuality and how it may be distinguished from complete actuality. Not only does Aristotle consider

⁵¹ Aristotle argues for this at the end of *Metaphysics* H.

⁵² The more “complete” actuality is discussed in Θ .6. As Kosman argues, the distinction between motion as one kind of actuality and complete actuality hasn't been appreciated enough.

⁵³ *Physics* III.2, 201b27-33. Emphasis added.

⁵⁴ *Physics* III.2, 201b33.

⁵⁵ *Physics* III.2, 202a8-9.

incomplete actuality in the *Physics*, he also spends time analyzing it in *Metaphysics* Θ. The issue in *Metaphysics* Θ is to investigate, as Kosman notes, “the truly useful sense”⁵⁶ of actuality, the one that I suggest, is primary in just the way that substance is primary—it has an ontological status and, as such, is applicable to Aristotle’s investigation of the being of substances. For reasons that will become clear, primary actuality is complete, unlike motion, because its *telos* is intrinsic to it.

In contrast, motion is incomplete, because, as a kind of actuality, its *telos* is external to it—that is to say, the activity of motion is always directed toward an end point that destroys that activity in rest. Kosman says that motion’s “being is auto-subversive, for its whole purpose and project is one of self-annihilation.”⁵⁷ In other words, the activity of motion is relative to some end and thus is not a complete activity, because, as Aristotle says, “Of the actions which have a limit none is an end but all are relative to the end.”⁵⁸ Aristotle’s examples are instructive: “For every movement is incomplete—making thin, learning, walking, building.”⁵⁹ The end of the activity of learning is having learnt something. When I have committed to the activity of learning something, say the basic rules and principles of deductive logic, and I in fact come to learn those rules and principles, the process of my learning deductive logic is now over. Similarly, the end of the activity of building a house is the built house. When the house is built the activity of building ceases. Aristotle details building-activity, among other kinds of incomplete actualities, in the *Physics*:

The actuality of the buildable as buildable is the process of building. For the actuality must be either this or the house. But when there is a house, the buildable

⁵⁶ “Substance, Being, and *Energeia*,” p. 121.

⁵⁷ L. A. Kosman. “Aristotle’s Definition of Motion,” *Phonesis* 14 (1969), p. 57.

⁵⁸ *Metaphysics* Θ.6, 1048b18.

⁵⁹ *Metaphysics* Θ.6, 1048b28-29.

is no longer there. On the other hand, it is the buildable which is being built. Necessarily, then, the actuality is the process of building.⁶⁰

Aristotle's claim here is that the process or movement of building is the actuality of the potential—the buildable—but that the end of this activity of building the buildable inevitably ceases in the final product—the house. It is easy to miss the importance of what seems here to be a fairly common sense example. There are two central issues that underlie Aristotle's example. First is the issue that for every motion-activity, there is an external "for the sake of" to that motion-activity. That is, the process of building a house is for the sake of a sheltering structure. When the sheltering structure is completed, the process has reached its limit. Activities that are motions—incomplete activities—are not ends in themselves, unlike complete activities.

The second important issue—one, we will see later, further distinguishes itself from complete actuality—in Aristotle's example is that for every motion-activity, the potential (in this case the buildable) is used up in the process of achieving the end product—the house. Kosman says, "The potentiality that we now see a motion in some sense to be, is consumed in the course of the actualization to which the potentiality is ultimately directed."⁶¹ But it is still not clear what it *is* that is being consumed in the motion. We can say the potentiality; but what is the potentiality in this case? It will be helpful to remind ourselves of Aristotle's definition of motion at the beginning of *Physics* III, which says that it is the actualization of a potential *qua* potential. One should notice that it is important that Aristotle *does not* say that motion is the actualization of a potential *qua actual*. The difference between the two is central to determining the meaning of potentiality in the case of motion.

⁶⁰ *Physics* III.1 201b9-14.

⁶¹ "Substance, Being, and *Energeia*," p. 131.

To get clear about this difference we would do well to return to the case at hand. We can say that what is buildable into a house is some kind of matter, and not just any kind of matter. There are specific kinds of matter that properly have the potential to be built into a *sheltering* structure, one that *actually* shelters or one that *could* actually shelter. Such material (while there are others) could be brick, stones, and mortar. These materials are buildable into a sheltering structure like a house. They are themselves potentially a house if they are worked or wrought in a manner proper to house building-activity. If brick, stones, and mortar are potentially a house, then in the process of motion, they are what they are potentially, that is, a house. Thus, when Aristotle applies his definition of motion as an actuality of a potential *qua* potential to cases like the building of a buildable, he is designating the materials in their potential to be something, and not what they are actually, for example bricks, stones, and mortar. In the process of building a house, the bricks, stones, and mortar are what they are *qua* potentially a house.⁶²

Now that it is clearer what kind of potentiality Aristotle is referring to in his definition of motion and in his building example, the issue to be more fully interrogated is how this kind of potentiality is consumed in incomplete activity. The brick, stones, and mortar *qua* potential house are used up when the house is actually completed. As Aristotle says, “When there is a house, the buildable is no longer there.”⁶³ But the buildable particular to the process of building *is* always *qua* buildable. As *qua* buildable, the buildable is no longer buildable when the building-activity reaches its limit in the end—the sheltering structure.

The two issues raised in Aristotle’s example determine how and why motion is an incomplete actuality. On the one hand, the end of a motion is always external to that motion.

⁶² For a very helpful discussion about the distinction between something being potential *qua* potential and something being potential *qua* actual, see L. A. Kosman, “Aristotle’s Definition of Motion,” in *Phronesis* 14 (1969), pp. 40-62.

⁶³ *Physics* III.1, 201b11.

Another way to put this is that the fulfillment is achieved only when a motion has ceased. To call a motion an incomplete actuality in this regard is to stress a central feature about the nature of motion: motions have what Kosman calls “kamikaze natures.”⁶⁴ It is a motion’s nature to realize its nature after the fact, so to speak. A motion most truly *is* when it has sought rest fulfillment in rest. Closely related to this aspect of incomplete actuality is the issue that the potentiality being actualized is used up or annihilated in the end product, since in any given motion-activity the potential *is* always *qua* potential. Therefore, when the end is reached, the potential *is* no longer potential.

Complete Actuality

I have considered so far Aristotle’s account of incomplete actuality, which is ascribed to motions of various kinds. In contrast to incomplete actuality, complete and primary actuality is an action whose end is present in and intrinsic to that activity.⁶⁵ It is this activity which, as Kosman claims, “preserves” potentiality⁶⁶, or makes manifest a given potentiality. Actuality of this kind is what Aristotle thinks is the important sense of actuality as it pertains to the investigation of first philosophy whose objects of inquiry are the primary principles of substance-being, the main object of study in *Metaphysics Z*. The analysis of the actuality endemic to motion is concerned, instead, with various changes across the other categories, for example, changes of place (locomotion), changes in quality (alterations), and changes in time (any kind of change or movement). Since primary actuality belongs to Aristotle’s account of substance-being, it is equally important for understanding the role it plays in the unity of form and matter, since it is corporeal substances which are unified entities and, in a sense, are “composed” of form and matter. In what follows I consider Aristotle’s discussion of complete

⁶⁴ “Substance, Being, and *Energeia*,” p. 131.

⁶⁵ *Metaphysics* Θ.6, 1048b22.

⁶⁶ “Substance, Being, and *Energeia*,” p. 134.

actuality. In the next section I will provide some reasons for thinking that complete actuality is tied to the unity of form and matter.

One of Aristotle's accounts of what can be called complete actuality is found in *Metaphysics* Δ 7, where his main subject is the different senses of being. Two important meanings of being, for Aristotle, are being potentially and being actually.⁶⁷ For Aristotle, there are cases when something is *both* being potentially and being actually at the same time. He says,

For we say both of that which sees potentially and of that which sees actually, that it is seeing, and both of that which can use knowledge and of that which is using it, that it knows, and both of that to which rest is already present and of that which can rest, that it rests. And similarly in the case of substances we say that Hermes is in the stone, and the half of the line is in the line, and we say of that which is not yet ripe that it is corn.⁶⁸

One thing to be gleaned from this passage is that there is, as Charlotte Witt suggests, a contrastive relationship between a thing's *capacity* for something and the *exercise* of that capacity.⁶⁹ As a general account, put in terms of first and second actuality, the capacity for me to see is a first actuality (and thus a second potentiality) in that I actually have the capacity to see X. Let's say that I am asleep or that I have my eyes closed; here I actually have a capacity to see X, but am not actually seeing X. It is when I wake up or open my eyes that I *exercise* the capacity I have to see, which is a second order actuality. To add to my example, by suggesting that when I have my eyes closed I have the capacity to see is different than when a newborn kitten has the capacity to see. The newborn kitten has the capacity to see in the sense of a first potentiality, that is, it is built into the kitten's nature to be a seeing thing, but has not yet first-order actualized that capacity. When, in fact, the kitten has exercised that capacity, the kitten is a

⁶⁷ It is important to note that the issue here is being and not becoming, which is the subject of Aristotle's account of motion as an incomplete actuality. That this influences Kierkegaard's account of motion should be evident here.

⁶⁸ *Metaphysics* Δ 7, 1017b2-8

⁶⁹ See Charlotte Witt, *Substance and Essence in Aristotle: An Interpretation of Metaphysics VII-IX* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 130-133.

seer. In contrast, when I have my eyes closed, then, I am a seer, in the sense of first-actuality, but when I open my eyes and *actually* see I am a seer in terms of second-actuality.

This general account of the relationship between potentially seeing and actually seeing is not the whole story for understanding the nature of a complete actuality, however. Aristotle means to suggest that when I am actually seeing I also simultaneously have the potential to see. Put, again, in terms of first and second actuality, when I am second-order actualizing my first-order actuality to see, this first-order actuality is retained in the action as a genuine capacity for me.

The distinction between an incomplete actuality and a complete actuality is beginning to become clear. Whereas an incomplete actuality uses up potentiality, a complete actuality preserves or retains its potentiality. Here potentiality and actuality play off one another such that, as Kosman suggests, what results between them is a dialectical unity. Furthermore, it is this important feature of complete actuality that does the work of explaining some of the central characteristics of being, instead of becoming. As Kosman thinks, the ontological implication of this dialectical interplay between potentiality and actuality is not merely, as Witt suggests, that between a capacity and its exercise. Instead, it is a “structural propensity [of being] to be now latent and hidden, now active and manifest...[it is]...a dialectical unity of hidden being and emergent appearance.”⁷⁰ Contrasting, further, this dialectical interplay of complete actuality to incomplete actuality, Kosman says, “The relation of potentiality and actuality is a relation of the latent and unmanifest to the manifest actuality of the *same being*, and not of one actuality to a different actuality that it might become.”⁷¹ As Kosman’s interpretation suggests, and the

⁷⁰ “Substance, Being, and *Energeia*,” p. 133.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

passage from Aristotle seems to point out, the complete actuality of a potentiality just *is* that potentiality in a fuller mode of being.

Aristotle returns to this dialectical interplay of potentiality and actuality in *Metaphysics*

Θ.6. However, here his analysis extends to the issue of the ends of complete actualities which, again, are drastically distinct from the ends of incomplete actualities. Aristotle states,

Since of the actions which have a limit none is an end but all are relative to the end, e.g. the process of making thin is of this sort, and the things themselves when one is making them thin are in movement in this way...this is not an action or at least not a complete action (for it is not an end); but that in which the end is present is an action. E.g. at the same time we are seeing and have seen, are understanding and have understood, are thinking and have thought: but it is not true that at the same time we are learning and have learnt, or are being cured and have been cured. At the same time we are living well and have lived well, and are happy and have been happy. If not, the process would have had sometime to cease, as the process of making thin ceases: but, as it is, it does not cease; we are living and have lived. Of these processes, then, we must call the one set movements, and the other actualities.⁷²

It is in this important passage from *Metaphysics* that Aristotle presents a developed account of the distinction between not only complete and incomplete actuality, but also, in more detail, an account of their respective ends. I have already covered the nature of the “for the sake of” for motions in my discussion of incomplete actualities, namely, that every motion has a limit, such that when it reaches that limit, the motion perishes. It is in this sense that the ends of incomplete actualities are not intrinsic but external.

It is evident from Aristotle’s account that what he calls complete actualities have intrinsic ends. But what, precisely, ought this to mean? Aristotle states that complete actions are such that their ends are *present*, and he continues to provide what he takes to be standard examples of when actions of this sort contain their own ends. These examples are not unlike the ones found in *Metaphysics* Δ.7. But, I believe, Aristotle’s examples here in Θ.6 stress and qualify another

⁷² *Metaphysics* Θ.6, 1048b18-28.

feature about complete actualities than those found in $\Delta.7$. Whereas the account in $\Delta.7$ analyzes the way potentiality is preserved in actuality, $\Theta.6$ is committed to showing that complete actualities are ends in themselves. It is this feature of complete actualities, in addition to the unity of potentiality and actuality, that makes such actualities complete. However, this seeming difference ought not lead one astray into thinking that each account is unrelated to the other. This would be far from the truth. Rather, it seems that the account in $\Theta.6$ assumes the unity of potentiality and actuality. This is because every actuality of this kind is, as Kosman has argued, potentiality made manifest. Thus, any discussion of complete actuality must assume this essential feature.

In any case, Aristotle's discussion of complete actuality in $\Theta.6$ puts stress on the intrinsic end of actualities. Aristotle states that at the same time we are understanding and have understood. He also claims that understanding and having understood are the same action. One may object here that understanding X is for the sake of the end of having understood X , and that once this end is reached the process of understanding has ceased. This would certainly be the case if understanding were a motion, whose end would be extrinsic to it. However, this objection rests on a fundamental misunderstanding of Aristotle's position. Aristotle claims that the end—having understood—is present in the action of understanding. My understanding, for Aristotle, does not cease when I have understood because both are the same thing. In other words, understanding just is its own end, just as the end of my sight is seeing.

4. KIERKEGAARD ON THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN CHANGE AND ACTIVITY

In the foregoing I presented Aristotle's distinction between change and activity. Change is the actualization or realization of a potentiality qua potentiality, whereas activity is the manifestation

and active completion of a potentiality. Throughout this dissertation I've argued that Kierkegaard's definition of change is presented in an Aristotelian manner and that his definition of the paradoxically-religious self jettisons the kinetic model for an activity model, one that shows that the self in relation to God is complete. I've also argued that what makes the activity of the self complete is that the possibility is not used up in its actualization; rather God preserves it at each moment.

Up to now, however, I have not presented any significant evidence that Kierkegaard means for us to see this distinction in his thought. I've pointed out how religiousness B completes religiousness A in that the immanently religious individual understands possibility to be essentially human and not divine, and that religiousness A is ultimately a failed *kinēsis*. But nothing as of yet definitively links Kierkegaard's notion of religiousness B and the paradoxically-religious self to Aristotle's view of primary substance and the relationship that obtains between potentiality and actuality.

There exists textual evidence, however, that Kierkegaard grasped the distinction between incomplete movement and activity at least by 1843, a year before the publication of *Philosophical Fragments*, and a time of intense engagement with the primary works of Aristotle as well as close study of F. A. Trendelenburg's writings on Aristotle.⁷³ Ironically, in a journal entry from this period, Kierkegaard argues that Aristotle's distinction between incomplete and complete movement is problematic, because Aristotle places *nous* as the highest and most complete form of activity that the self can engage. For Kierkegaard, this can only be a sign that

⁷³ Trendelenburg is most known in contemporary Kantian circles as a neo-Kantian philosopher and as a central player in a debate with Kuno Fischer about the theory of space in Kant's critical philosophy. For an informed discussion of this debate, see Klaus Christian Köhnke, *The Rise of Neo-Kantianism: German Academic Philosophy Between Idealism and Positivism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Trendelenburg is also known as an influence on Frege's adoption of Leibniz's universal system of logic (see Hans Sluga, *Gottlob Frege* (London: Routledge, 1980), 2.4. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, philosophers engaged in Hegel's logical system treated Trendelenburg's writings on Hegel logic. One such treatment can be found in E.B. McGilvery, "The Presupposition Question in Hegel's Logic," *The Philosophical Review* 6:5 (Sep. 1897): 497-520.

Aristotle's theory of activity remains aesthetic, and thus essentially lacks the category of spirit.

He writes,

Aristotle also represents self-love as the highest, that is, in the good sense: 'Every man's true self resides in this part, namely, the thinking part.' Therefore he recommends the contemplative life as the highest happiness, but happiness, again, is the goal of everything and [he] defines happiness as an intrinsically desirable *activity* (see [*Nichomachean Ethics*] 10:6). See 10:8 about the felicity of the gods. It is readily seen here that Aristotle has not understood this self deeply enough, for only in the esthetic sense does contemplative thought have an *entelechy* [activity], and the felicity of the gods does not reside in contemplation but in eternal communication.—*Aristotle has not perceived the specification of spirit*. Therefore he recommends even external goods, although only as an accompaniment, a draper, but at this point *he lacks the category for making a consummating movement*.⁷⁴

This is an extremely telling journal entry, since Kierkegaard associates incomplete motion with the aesthetic sphere. It is also important that he associates the doctrine of incomplete motion with Aristotle; yet he argues that as much as Aristotle argued for the difference between incomplete and complete motion, he did not conceive of spirit. Of course, this is hardly Aristotle's fault, since spirit is a Christian category and not a pagan one.⁷⁵ We find in this journal entry, moreover, that Kierkegaard envisions Aristotle's account of change to be merely generic. Thus, under the rubric that I drew up in the introduction to this chapter, Aristotle's notion of change only covers change in sense (1). Naturally, then, Aristotle's philosophical system does not nor can it accommodate changes (2)-(4). However, that Kierkegaard identifies spirit as the category needed for a consummating movement means that we should be able to find

⁷⁴ JP, 3892. Emphasis mine.

⁷⁵ Aristotle is not the only pagan source for Kierkegaard's understanding of Christian activity as an intransitive movement. In *CA*, Vigilius Haufniensis takes significant helpings from Plato's conception of the instant-- *to exaiφhnēs*—in *Parmenides* 156c-d. Platonically understood, Kierkegaard's moment explains (1) that point of time where the existing individual makes a decisive leap or choice; in order for it to be decisive it must be filled with the eternal in time, otherwise, the movement from the previous state to the next will be lost—it will vanish in the multiplicity of temporal succession (the vanishing of existence, without the eternal determines aesthetic existence); (2) the fullness of time which is in the present, accompanying the internal-choice states of the existing individual's temporal history of countless moments. The second determination of the moment—of the coincidence of the temporal and the eternal—is the necessary condition of temporality.

some discussion of complete actuality in Anti-Climacus's definition of the self as spirit in *The Sickness Unto Death*.

Indeed we do. There Anti-Climacus draws a distinction between a “consummated actuality” and an actuality which is an “annihilated possibility.” He arrives at this distinction through a psychological, yet winding dialectical, phenomenology of the self in despair. Anti-Climacus claims that having the capacity to be in despair is an “infinite advantage” over actually being in despair, and that this is normally “not the case with the relation between possibility and actuality,”⁷⁶ since actuality is generally considered an excellence over possibility; that is, whereas, normally, being X is better than having the capacity to be X, Anti-Climacus says that in the case of despair the situation is inverted—not to be in despair is better than being in despair. In the case that despair obtains, however, Anti-Climacus argues that being in despair, the actuality of despair, is a *consummated* actuality.⁷⁷ He contrasts an actuality that is consummated with actuality that is a result of an *annihilation* of possibility. He writes, “Admittedly, thinkers say that actuality is annihilated possibility [*tilintetgjorte Mulighed*], but that is not entirely true; it is the consummated [*udfyldte*], the active [*virksomme*] possibility.”⁷⁸

Here Anti-Climacus raises for consideration two kinds of actuality: (1) annihilated possibility and (2) active possibility. One central difference between these two forms of actuality concerns their role as ends in relation to their opposite, possibility. Actuality as annihilated possibility, which is the more common notion of actuality, the one the “thinkers” have in mind, is the *end* of a process of becoming, or a state when the process has reached completion. This is surely the case in the aesthetic sense of change. We've seen throughout that

⁷⁶ *SUD*, 15.

⁷⁷ As I argue in the fourth chapter, for Kierkegaard despair is an act of a fully fledged self. It is a manifestation of a basic potential for being. As such, despair requires a unified self before God to which and about which one is defiant.

⁷⁸ *SUD*, 15.

generic change is directed toward ends in the external realm, and when those ends are reached, the capacity for them is annihilated. Aesthetic change, in other words, is result oriented, and thus transitive. In his “Letter to the Reader” found in *Stages on Life’s Way*, Frater Taciturnus describes the difference between external outcomes and religious ones in the following way:

The esthetic outcome is in the external, and the external is the guarantee that the outcome is there; we see that the hero has triumphed, has conquered that country, and *now we are finished*. The religious outcome, indifferent toward the external, is *assured only in the internal, that is, in faith*. Indifferent toward the externality, which the esthetic needs (there must be great men, great subject matter, great events; so it becomes comic if there are small folk or petty cash), the religious is commensurate with the greatest man who has ever lived and with the most wretched, and equally commensurate, commensurate with the prosperity of nations and with a farthing, and equally commensurate. *The religious is simply and solely qualitatively dialectic and disdains quantity, in which esthetics has its task. Indifferent toward the externals, which the esthetic needs in the result, the religious disdains anything like that and proclaims, jointly and individually, that the person who believes he has finished (that is, fancies that he has, for such things cannot be believed because faith is expressly the infinite)—has lost.*⁷⁹

Frater Taciturnus argues that aesthetic ends are external. In the movement from one to the other, the movement is finished. All aesthetic movement, then, is directed toward a resting place. However, religious movement is, as we’ve seen claimed by Climacus, internal. But Taciturnus adds to this: he claims that the outcome—the end itself—is internal as well, and is assured only in this. As an internal movement, religious inwardness—expressly, *faith and unconditional love*—never is finished in the external sense. This is because, as Taciturnus urges, these modes of activity are infinite. It is here that we find Taciturnus presenting a picture of the religious self as an activity, the condition of the possibility for which is the infinite.

How does Taciturnus’s description of aesthetic, external ends of change figure into Anti-Climacus’s mention of annihilated possibility? Possibility is annihilated when a transition from possibility to actuality is complete. My desire to complete the book that has been gathering dust on my bookshelf, for example, is actualized when I read the last sentence, or my walking to the

⁷⁹ *SLW*, 442-443. Emphasis mine.

store is complete when I arrive. The possibility of my completing the book is annihilated when I in fact complete it and the possibility of my walking to the store is destroyed when I reach my destination.

Now, I've argued in this chapter that the transitive changes of (1) and (2) are modeled on Aristotelian *kinēsis*. As such, there is a sense in which ethical and immanently religious forms of change are "transitions" from possibility to actuality. When their ends are reached, the capacity to reach them is annihilated. As we saw Climacus argue, the transition from not-being to being a self is a transition from a self that exists as a possibility to one existing in actuality. However, I've also pointed out that this kinetic model is insufficient in explaining ethical and religious movement. In the case of religiousness A, the movement to guilt-consciousness consists in becoming aware that the self's essential capacities are unrealizable. For Kierkegaard, the change of coming into existence of the self cannot be initiated on a purely horizontal axis; the transcendent gift of redemption through the consciousness of sin, faith, and unconditional love offer intransitive kinds of motion.

Yet, the self, in its constant attempts to find a stable footing on which to breath comfortably and rest, still seeks an end point. For Climacus, this internal end can only be given by God. It is important to realize, however, that the rest to which the movement of becoming a self is directed is not a cessation of movement or existence. Actuality is not lifeless. On the contrary, the rest, to which motion is directed is, dialectically, an *intensification* and a more *complete* form of movement. The movement to actuality has a dialectically accentuated *telos* in a more complete form of motion, *activity*.

Kierkegaard's conception of becoming a self does not include a simple picture of the self as static. Rather, his is a dynamic notion of selfhood, which is nonetheless, paradoxically,

constituted and tempered by the eternal. In becoming oneself, one is moving to a point where the additional tasks that are relevant to *being* a genuine religious self are not mere motions, in the sense already defined, but are activities which authentically manifest the state the self is already in. In this way, becoming a self is directed toward a state in which the self no longer is in a mere process of becoming, but is in a dynamic state of “self-manifestation.” It is this self-manifestation, that I argue is key to the notion of activity that preoccupies the religious authorship as a whole, and which announces a departure from the Aristotelian model of *kinēsis*.