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The Pervasive Emptiness: Acedia, Modernity, and the Boredom of Secularity

By  
Samuel Welbaum

Claremont Graduate University  
2020



### **Approval of the Dissertation Committee**

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Samuel Welbaum as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Religion with a concentration in Philosophy of Religion and Theology.

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## **Abstract**

The Pervasive Emptiness: Acedia, Modernity, and the Boredom of Secularity

By  
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Claremont Graduate University: 2020

A case can be made that the greatest fear of our time is the fear of boredom. We live in an age in which things change daily. New technologies are developed, old inventions are reconceived, the entertainment industry churns out movies, shows, and music constantly, and yet, people still experience boredom. Some have even said that it's the defining experience of our day. Where does this boredom come from? Why has it become prominent? What is causing it to gain power so rapidly? And how might it be stopped? Those questions are the driving force behind his work.

This dissertation presents to problem of profound boredom as a secular problem with spiritual roots. The argument is structured to first consider the concept of acedia in the works of Evagrius of Pontus, and Thomas Aquinas; establishing it as sorrow at the divine good, which leads to a rejection of the divine, or the transcendent. This rejection serves as the spiritual root for the epidemic of profound boredom. This root took hold of the western world as an unintended consequence of the work of Rene Descartes. Descartes' reframing of philosophy entailed shifting the central philosophic discipline from metaphysics to epistemology. This shift resulted in a never ending quest for certitude, and a disenchanting, or secularizing of the world, inherent to modernity.

It is not until after the start of modernity that the word "boredom" appears in any meaningful way. Within modernity however, what we see is an expansive use of the term, which gains prominence and depth the further into modernity one goes. This matter is

explored throughout this dissertation by means of three thinkers, each positioned at a different point within modernity. The argument begins by looking at Descartes' contemporary, Blaise Pascal, who rejects Descartes' entire philosophical framework, and makes initial arguments against the rise of boredom, particularly seeing it as connected to identity and distraction.

The argument then moves forward 200 years to modernity as an established framework in the critique of Søren Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard understands boredom to be deeply connected to the sickness unto death and to the despair/emptiness that comes from living a life that is empty of both faith and love, and therefore, devoid of meaning. People are fearful of boredom, and approach it either by seeking diversion, or enduring it, because the actual cure is untenable.

The argument then proceeds to the end of modernity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the work of Martin Heidegger. Heidegger presents boredom as a fundamental mood that initially a person, late an epoch, has toward the world. In boredom we find a way to learn more about ourselves as that which we use to form our identity begins to melt away. Heidegger presents three depths of boredom, all of which are inherently temporal, revealing that at least part of what is empty in boredom is time. In the most profound form of boredom, the one experiencing it sees the entirety of time, space, and existence as empty, and lacking meaning. Heidegger sees this as a way for a person to attune themselves to the world in a more authentic fashion; however, this dissertation argues that Heidegger's way forward can only truly be successful when put in conversation with Pascal, and Kierkegaard, to understand profound boredom as a secular problem that is

only cured by returning to Aquinas' understanding of acedia, and combating that sin with faith and love, and therefore, filling the emptiness of modernity with profound meaning.

## Table of Contents

<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<i>TOPIC AND THESIS</i>	<b>1</b>
<i>SIGNIFICANCE</i>	<b>3</b>
<i>RELATED LITERATURE</i>	<b>6</b>
<i>FLOW OF THE ARGUMENT</i>	<b>10</b>
<i>THE ROOTS OF THE PROBLEM: EVAGRIUS AND AQUINAS</i>	<b>11</b>
<i>PASCAL'S RESPONSE TO THE PROBLEM OF BOREDOM IN EARLY MODERNITY</i>	<b>11</b>
<i>KIERKEGAARD'S RESPONSE TO THE PROBLEM OF BOREDOM IN LATE MODERNITY</i>	<b>12</b>
<i>HEIDEGGER'S RESPONSE TO THE PROBLEM AT THE COLLAPSE OF MODERNITY</i>	<b>12</b>
<b><i>THE HORIZON OF THE DISCUSSION: BOREDOM, MODERNITY, AND SECULARITY</i></b>	<b>13</b>
<i>BOREDOM</i>	<b>14</b>
<i>MODERNITY</i>	<b>17</b>
<i>SECULAR/SECULARISM/SECULARITY</i>	<b>22</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO: THE SPIRITUAL ROOTS OF THE PROBLEM IN EVAGRIUS AND AQUINAS</b>	<b>27</b>
<i>INTRODUCTION</i>	<b>27</b>
<i>EVAGRIUS' ANCHORITE THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT</i>	<b>28</b>
<i>EVAGRIUS' DEVELOPMENT OF THE EIGHT THOUGHTS/LOGISMOI</i>	<b>37</b>
<i>ACEDIA IN EVAGRIUS</i>	<b>41</b>
<i>ACEDIA FROM EVAGRIUS TO AQUINAS</i>	<b>52</b>
<i>AQUINAS ON THE VIRTUES</i>	<b>54</b>
<i>LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP IN AQUINAS</i>	<b>66</b>
<i>CHARITY AS FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD</i>	<b>75</b>
<i>ACEDIA: SORROW AT DIVINE FRIENDSHIP</i>	<b>80</b>
<i>CONCLUSION</i>	<b>87</b>
<b>CHAPTER THREE: PASCAL'S RESPONSE TO THE PROBLEM IN EARLY MODERNITY</b>	<b>89</b>
<i>PASCAL IN THE SHADOW OF DESCARTES</i>	<b>90</b>
<i>THE MOI</i>	<b>95</b>
<i>SIN AS THE BARRIER TO TRUE SUBJECTIVITY</i>	<b>99</b>
<i>THE SUPERIORITY OF IMAGINATION OVER REASON</i>	<b>104</b>
<i>HAPPINESS AND DIVERSION</i>	<b>108</b>
<i>ENNUI: THE GREAT CAUSE OF DREAD</i>	<b>119</b>
<i>THE POSSIBILITY OF DIVINE ENNUI?</i>	<b>127</b>
<i>CONCLUSION</i>	<b>129</b>
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: KIERKEGAARD'S RESPONSE TO THE PROBLEM IN LATE MODERNITY</b>	<b>132</b>
<i>INTRODUCTION</i>	<b>132</b>
<i>THE GOAL OF KIERKEGAARD'S AUTHORSHIP</i>	<b>133</b>
<i>OBJECTIVITY AND SUBJECTIVITY</i>	<b>139</b>
<i>DESPAIR: THE DEATH OF THE POSSIBLE</i>	<b>144</b>
<i>SPHERES OF EXISTENCE</i>	<b>151</b>



<i>BOREDOM AND THE AESTHETIC SPHERE: PRELIMINARY ISSUES</i>	156
<i>BOREDOM AND THE AESTHETIC SPHERE: THE ROTATION OF CROPS</i>	160
<i>BOREDOM AND THE ETHICAL SPHERE</i>	171
<i>BOREDOM AND THE RELIGIOUS SPHERE: FAITH</i>	178
<i>BOREDOM AND THE RELIGIOUS SPHERE: LOVE</i>	182
<i>CONCLUSION</i>	188
<b><u>CHAPTER FIVE: HEIDEGGER'S RESPONSE TO THE PROBLEM AT THE COLLAPSE OF MODERNITY</u></b>	<b>190</b>
<hr/>	
<i>INTRODUCTION</i>	190
<i>DASEIN, BEING, AND WORLD</i>	191
<i>MOOD AND ATTUNEMENT</i>	201
<i>TEMPORALITY, THROWNNESS AND DEATH</i>	204
<i>HOMESICKNESS, GOD, AND BOREDOM</i>	210
<i>BORED-BY</i>	217
<i>BORED-WITH</i>	222
<i>IT-IS-BORING-FOR-ONESELF</i>	225
<i>THE LATER HEIDEGGER, TECHNOLOGY, AND THE FOURFOLD</i>	234
<i>THE REFILLING OF THE PERVASIVE EMPTINESS WITH MEANING, FAITH, AND LOVE</i>	243
<b><u>CHAPTER SIX: CLOSING THOUGHTS</u></b>	<b>249</b>
<hr/>	
<b><u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u></b>	<b>254</b>

## Chapter One: Introduction

### *Topic and Thesis*

I remember lying on my bed in my dormitory one autumn afternoon my sophomore year in college and thinking to myself that I was quite bored. I was so bored in fact that I asked myself what I meant by “bored” and concluded that I was bored because there was nothing to do. Instantly I dismissed this answer. I was in Southern California, less than an hour away from the beach, the mountains, the desert and rather close to a myriad of museums, parks, trails and any other number of activities. None of them sounded appealing at the time though. I concluded then that by “bored” I must mean that at present there is nothing that I find appealing. Based upon the growing number of books published on the topic of boredom in the past 50 years, and the studies coming out of the behavioral sciences related to boredom, distraction, shrinking attention spans, meaning, etc., it would seem that my experience was not isolated, and that perhaps we are living in a culture plagued by, terrified of, and attempting to escape boredom.

Approaching the topic from an historical and literary perspective, Elizabeth Goodstein notes, “Some scholars have suggested that boredom and ennui are the defining experiences of modernity.”<sup>1</sup> In this dissertation I aim to explain from where this epidemic of profound boredom has come, and what has given rise to it. By “profound boredom” I am joining others (see the following literature review) in making the assertion that the term “boredom” is applied to multiple experiences and moods, and currently can mean a verity of things. Later in this chapter we will give a more full discussion on the nature of

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth S. Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities: Boredom and Modernity* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005), 1

boredom; however, at this point, an initial cursory definition would be helpful in understanding the way forward.

While some have divided boredom into as many as four categories, in this dissertation we will divide it primarily into two: “trivial boredom” and “profound boredom.” What unites both understandings of boredom is dissatisfaction, or perhaps better stated, a feeling of emptiness. When I’m bored, the thing presenting itself to me, or in which I am engaged, is one that seems empty, or does not satisfy in some way. It is not that I find it scornful (though I may scorn it for being boring), because in that situation it would have filled me with anger or rage. However, the boring “thing” does not fill me at all, nor does it point beyond itself, or satisfy a curiosity or interest. It seems empty, and meaningless. It does not, or it no longer, elicits a response from me.

In trivial boredom, this lack is hardly an issue. It may be that I don’t understand math, or the rules of the game being played and therefore the assignment or the sporting event holds no interest for me. Or, perhaps there is a story that I had a passing interest in but after repetition I no longer have any response to it. In these trivial matters, boredom seems to be a lack of interest either due to inclination, understanding, over exposure, or familiarity. However, the issue of profound boredom is deeper (Heidegger in fact calls it deep boredom). The issue this dissertation is addressing is not merely finding something boring (perhaps in a situational manner), but rather finding life in and of itself boring. Profound boredom in effect is the perpetual dissatisfaction and emptiness one feels by a life that seems ungrounded by something beyond, or greater than, itself. The one experiencing profound boredom therefore finds the world as a whole boring. The world seems meaningless, ungrounded, devoid of anything that might elicit a response, and

therefore, anything that I might do, or find to fill my time, ultimately reveals itself to be empty as well. It would seem based upon an increase in scholarly attention in a plurality of fields, as well as the focus on entertainment and amusement in our society, that if profound boredom is not yet an epidemic, it is well on its way. However, as we shall see, it is most definitely an epidemic.

This dissertation will present the idea that the problem of profound boredom should be understood as a secular problem with spiritual roots. This problem manifested during modernity, due to individual and collective acedia, which fostered various conditions inherent to boredom. Kierkegaard and Pascal understand the issue of boredom to be one that stems from a lack of contentment, love, and faith. Heidegger posits boredom to be an issue related to the emptiness of time, and the flattening of possibilities. My contention is that Aquinas' understanding of acedia as "sorrow at the divine good," when put in conversation with Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger, reveals a path toward the refilling of time with contentment, faith, and love, and therefore, with meaning.

### *Significance*

There are multiple reasons why this study is significant, but I will focus presently on the four most notable. First, there is a growing body of literature addressing the topic of boredom. The topic is broad and has drawn the attention of philosophers (Svensden, Boss, Pezze, McDonald and Raposa), historians (Phillips), cultural and literary critics (Kuhn, Goodstein, and Toohey), behavioral scientists (Boden) and theologians (Peterson), among others. It is also a prominent feature in novels and other literature as well (Sartre and Camus). This growing body indicates that while much of the "evidence" regarding

boredom in western civilization can be dismissed as anecdotal, there apparently is enough of a felt need for the phenomenon to be discussed.

Second, and connected to the first point, while there is a growing body of literature on boredom, there remains a relative dearth of contemporary work done on the sin of sloth. Contemporary depictions of the sin seem to present it as a person who won't get out of bed, whereas Evagrius' "Noonday Demon" is something far different. There has been some increased interest in acedia of late, Hutter's recent paper is a fine example, but much of the work discussing acedia makes it very similar, if not a synonym for boredom. This study will help show that, while these two concepts are indeed closely related, the relationship between them is causal, not synonymous. Given that so little has been done on this sin, which the early and medieval church included on its list of capital vices, even going so far at times to name it the most dangerous of the sins, it seems that scholarship in this area is a hole that has need to be filled.

The third reason to justify this topic's significance is the thinkers whose voices speak to the matter. The four tent pole thinkers considered in this work will be Aquinas, Pascal, Kierkegaard and Heidegger, all four of which remain relevant and crucial to contemporary discourse. These men all see the need for a deity (or something higher) in some form, and are all vitally concerned with our being in the world. Of note, and why I think these thinkers will provide answers to the issue of boredom, is that two of these tent poles, Aquinas and Pascal, are seated either prior to, or at the nascent of modernity, while the other two, Kierkegaard and Heidegger, are seated at its collapse. If Goodstein is correct that boredom is the defining experience of modernity, then these four men standing on either side of that epoch are four voices who have a solid vantage point to

critique it. Thomas' thought being the quintessential classicalist approach to the world, Pascal being the Christian initial rejection of modernity before it takes shape, Kierkegaard being the Christian rejection of modernist thought after its been fully developed, and Heidegger the secular rejection of modernity at its collapse and at the start of the postmodern world.

Heidegger, finding modernism unsatisfying, makes moves that put him closer to classicalism in many ways, meaning that he and Thomas would have some areas of agreement against Kant, Hume, Descartes, etc. However, boredom has not disappeared under a postmodern framework. In our contemporary world, it seems to have actually increased. As I see it, the reason for this increase is not a full failure on the part of the Heideggerian system, but the need for a completion of it. The Heidegger's insights related to projection, possibility, and conditioning, resonate with and are completed by Thomas' assertion that acedia is the sorrow one feels at the divine good, or sorrow at the demands placed on us by friendship with God, and with Kierkegaard's emphasis on love bringing forth the singular individual. Seen through this lens, Thomas and Kierkegaard are acknowledging the conditioning and the demands that one relating to God experiences, a concern that Heidegger notes and bemoans is lost in the modern world. However, Thomas and Kierkegaard hold that this conditioning only occurs in one direction, i.e. we do not condition God. It is possible that our desire to condition God and yet the traditional understanding of God as unconditioned has played into the rise of acedia and the eventual birth of boredom.

This line of argumentation leads us to the fourth reason such a study is significant: the increased interest in secular studies. Charles Taylor's work *The Secular Age* does an

excellent job discussing disenchantment, and the move away from the transcendent. His work has launched others like it, and they are all (Taylor's included) being written in the midst of a constant stream of New Atheist and secularist works, promising a superior world if only religion, and in many cases the transcendent in general was removed. While this dissertation is not intent in joining this conversation directly, it does address related issues that could help inform part of the discussion moving forward. This work will provide an analysis of how profound boredom arises, and will situate it firmly within a secular framework, challenging the assumption that the removal of the transcendent is a societal good.

These four reasons provide a solid rationale for why this dissertation's argument. It will add to a growing but not overwhelming body of literature, it will work to fill a hole in the church's theology/philosophy of sin, it will attempt to wed the thought of four influential thinkers as a means of critiquing a mood that develops based on what they would consider a faulty worldview, and in so doing speak to the increased interest in the area of secularism, while not being a carbon copy of the existing work in that heavily saturated area.

### ***Related Literature***

Throughout this chapter I have been using the term profound boredom as a distinct experience of boredom. Subdividing the phenomenon of boredom into multiple parts is found in Kierkegaard, Heidegger and the other existentialists, but the term as used here is found in the more particularized works of Svendsen, Toohey, Pezze and Kuhn. Svendsen provides four different schemes of dividing boredom, but they all involve a "profound" or "existential" category in which boredom is not a passing state of being, but

rather a persistent mood. This terminology is rooted in Svendsen's heavy focus on Heidegger's work (indeed an analysis of Heidegger on the subject comprises the last third of his work *A Philosophy of Boredom*). Svendsen understands trivial boredom to be of little consequence, but believes that understanding profound boredom is a key to understanding contemporary society. The basis for his argument is that profound or existential boredom manifests when there is a lack of meaning. In a world in which much meaning has been lost, much distraction must take its place. This position is echoed by Gibbs.

Standing in stark contrast to Svendsen is Toohey. In his work, *Boredom: A Lively History*, Toohey suggests that there is in fact only one type of boredom: trivial boredom. As Toohey traces boredom throughout history, he asserts that *tedium de vita*, *acedia*, *ennui*, *melenchlia*, *spleen*, and the like are all period specific synonyms of boredom. He does suggest that we cannot fully experience these types of boredoms in our present world, but by and large they are the same phenomenon. Toohey ardently argues that such phenomenon is always what Svendsen refers to as trivial boredom. Toohey's rationale for denying the concept of "profound boredom" is his understanding that profound boredom and depression would be one and the same thing; therefore, anyone suffering from profound boredom is not bored so much as she is depressed. While depression might entail boredom, boredom is a far lesser charge in Toohey's system.

Raposa attempts a middle ground in his *Boredom and the Religious Imagination*. In Raposa's system, finding oneself bored is not anything to be concerned with, but finding oneself bored with something that one loves is the concern. To be bored by something, to lack interest in it, is a normal and expected way of being attuned toward



some things; but to claim to love something and then experience it as boring is of grave concern. Raposa sees this ability, our ability to mutually love and be bored by the same thing, as proof that love cannot cast out boredom. However, one wonders if this means that Raposa's understanding of love is perhaps too weak.

An interesting note on Raposa's system; Raposa agrees with Toohey that boredom is acedia. However, he argues that acedia in many ways is good for religion, and by extension that boredom is a good thing for religion and individuals at times in that it is a motivating force. If a person finds himself bored, either trivially or profoundly, this person will want to escape boredom and by doing so will develop something new. This understanding of boredom as a motivating force puts Raposa in dialogue with Svendsen given that the latter sees the same thing as the former, but sees it as producing distraction and a lack of meaning as opposed to creating new avenues of meaning.

Whereas the literature discussed thus far focuses on boredom as a lack, Klapp's work, *Overload and Boredom*, suggests that boredom in many ways originates not from lack, but from abundance. In scarcity there is interest, in abundance we are overloaded with possibilities. This book was written in 1986 and is similar to Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death* in that Klapp takes aim at technology as a source for humanity's growing relational and existential issues. While over 30 years old, Klapp has his finger on issues related to meaning, social placebos, and distraction. Klapp does not address the issue of profound boredom explicitly, but he does seem to imply that boredom goes far beyond the trivial in many instances. Whereas Raposa sees boredom as a potential motivator for change but nevertheless a constant reality, Klapp is much more optimistic

about the abolishment of boredom, or at least mankind's overly optimistic approaches to attempting to abolish it. These views are also explored by Gehring.

Klapp, Svendsen and Raposa see boredom as related to a loss of meaning, which ties into the idea that modernity was/is structured in such a way as to foster boredom. A collection of essays published in 2009 called *Essays on Boredom and Modernity* edited by Pezze and Salzani speak to the issue in particular. There isn't one unified argument presented throughout the essays, but the authors in question, coming from the realms of psychology, philosophy, sociology and various other disciplines all affirm that there is a category like profound or existential boredom and that said category seems to entail the inherent loss of meaning that modernity thrust upon society. Many of the essays in the book, McDonald's essay on Kierkegaard in particular, make arguments similar to Charles Taylor's *The Secular Age* in that atheistic secularism developed in part due to the disenchantment with the world that is part and parcel of modernity.

In the same collection of essays, Leslie notes that acedia and boredom are not the same. Acedia is a spiritual struggle, whereas boredom is a concept constructed in a secularized world. This line of thinking finds sympathy with Kuhn, who in many ways was the forerunner to all the works listed here and by some standards remain the most thorough. Kuhn precedes Toohey, and Toohey does not address Kuhn as completely as he ought. Kuhn traces the historical development of boredom, but shows how the preceding word families (spleen, melancholia) were distinct phenomena, which can still be experienced today, and are very often mistakenly called "boredom." In this same manner, Kuhn gives ample attention to the noontide demon, acedia, and draws the distinctions between it and boredom, profound boredom in particular. Kuhn, along with

the majority of the literature, would take issue with Toohey's analysis of the history of boredom.

The topic of boredom has also generated interest in literary circles as well. Salazani, Torbett and Spacks have addressed the issue at length. Spacks in particular traces the topics of boredom and ennui throughout 18<sup>th</sup> century literature, particularly in the depiction of female characters who lack purpose or meaning. A similar work is done by Bruss in ancient Geek literature.

Related to the issue of acedia in particular, Bunge's *Despondency* addresses Evagrius' understanding of the sin and falls in line with Wenzel's *The Sin of Sloth: Acedia in Medieval Thought and Literature* which traces the vice through the ancient world into the present. Wenzel pays particular attention to how the sin of acedia has undergone significant changes and how it could be seen as similar to boredom. It's in this line of reasoning that DeYoung's work is insightful as she analyzes acedia in Aquinas. From what is presented in these works, plus Kuhn, it seems an argument can be made that acedia precedes profound boredom, which is not synonymous with depression. Of note is that DeYoung's work focuses on the seven deadly sins and is helped by Huetter's essay setting lust and acedia in conversation as a means of understanding our present society.

### ***Flow of the Argument***

This work's argument considers the nature and development of a phenomenon. In this first chapter we are addressing some preliminary concerns that will serve as the launch pad for our journey, and set the dissertation's trajectory. These concerns include the foregoing, as well as further discussion on the definition of boredom, and discussions related to the interrelatedness of modernity and secularity. These factors will allow us to

proceed to the argument proper, first, with a sense of clarity related to terminology, and second, with an understanding of the shift that occurs in the wake of modernity. Chapters Three through five will address modernity directly, or rather, boredom in the wake of modernity.

### ***The Roots of the Problem: Evagrius and Aquinas***

This chapter will undertake an historical discussion of the development of the concept of the sin of acedia. This discussion will look at the earliest appearances of the sin in the Desert Fathers, in particular Evagrius and his treatment of “the demon of noonday.” The discussion will then transition to the establishment of the Capital Vices and acedia’s cementing its spot among their number.

This chapter will then analyze acedia in the work of Thomas Aquinas. In order to understand Thomas’ argument we will discuss his understand of virtue in general, and charity, the highest virtue, in particular. This discussion will consider the assertion that acedia is sorrow at the divine good, sorrow at the requirements that friendship with God places on the individual. This sorrow bemoans the transformation that relationship with God requires. In effect, acedia is sorrow at having to change due to God’s existence.

### ***Pascal’s Response to the Problem of Boredom in Early Modernity***

This chapter discusses Pascal’s thought at length, and establishes his importance in defining the concept of profound boredom, but also his rejection of Cartesian thought as inherently problematic. Special attention is placed on the manner in which the new modernistic philosophy over values the power of reason, and makes easy the construction of false, or inauthentic selves. Pascal is the only thinker to reject the new modernistic

Cartesian paradigm for 200 years, and this chapter discusses the issues that he had already noted at the very birth of modernity. This chapter will also briefly address the inability of divine boredom.

### ***Kierkegaard's Response to the Problem of Boredom in Late Modernity***

Building off of Pascal's critique in the previous chapter, this chapter focuses on Kierkegaard's philosophic system, and his rejection of the mechanistic, and self-focused features of Modernity. Here boredom is seen as a plague, as demonic, and as something that must be rectified by embracing one's intended goal of becoming the singular individual. Kierkegaard, like Pascal before him, sees boredom as an emptiness, one that comes from emptying the world of meaning, the removal of the transcendent, and which can only be resolved through properly relating to God, and embracing faith, and love.

### ***Heidegger's Response to the Problem at the Collapse of Modernity***

This chapter will consider boredom as it is understood by Heidegger. Heidegger's thorough treatment of the topic from *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* will be central to this discussion. This is the longest prolonged philosophical investigation of the concept, or mood, of boredom, and as such bears much attention. This chapter will look at Heidegger's three types of boredom: the bored-by, the bored-with, and it-is-boring-for-oneself. All three of these categories can be seen as profound boredom. Whereas the previous thinkers have seen boredom primarily as an emptiness of content, Heidegger sees boredom as an emptiness, and an elongating of time. In each of these three different boredoms a different aspect of temporality is emptied or flattened. In the bored-by, the

present is emptied, in the bored-with, the past and future are emptied, and in the it-is-boring-for-oneself, all three are flattened and emptied.

After discussing Heidegger's understanding of boredom at length, this chapter will draw a connection between boredom, and the later Heidegger's concept of the fourfold, in particular the flattening and resourcing of things. This connection will be used not only show a consistency in Heidegger's thought on the issue of boredom, but more importantly, to open the door to a resolution. This resolution brings the argument full circle as the fourfold conditioning of the later Heidegger is put into conversation with the Thomistic understanding of the demands that are placed on us by friendship with God, in a manner that infuses life with identity, faith, and love, and therefore with the meaning that the secularization of modernity had removed.

### ***The Horizon of the Discussion: Boredom, Modernity, and Secularity***

This dissertation argues that profound boredom is a secular problem with spiritual roots. By this we mean that boredom in general is a feature inherent to secularity, and that feature fully manifests as the problem of profound boredom due to the secular, or perhaps, secularizing, nature of modernity. The work before us is focused on analyzing the problem of profound boredom, and offering a resolution to it. Given this objective, a full treatment of the history and structure of the concepts of modernity and secularity are beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, it is necessary to briefly define these concepts, as well as the concept of boredom in general, as they are they horizon before which the argument of this dissertation is made.

## ***Boredom***

What is boredom? The word “boredom” itself arrived in the English language in the late 1700’s with an etymology that remains unknown. The word was predated in France by “ennui,” but ennui lacked the existential and temporal factors now associated with it until boredom came into use.<sup>2</sup> As noted earlier, Goodstein refers to it as “experience without qualities.”<sup>3</sup> In her estimation, boredom is a feeling of nothingness, the failure of the self to be engaged, or a defense mechanism used to keep one from feeling something. Svendsen sees boredom as melancholy without the charm usually associated with it.<sup>4</sup> It originates from a lack of meaning, and by this Svendsen means personal meaning, so a meaning that is sensed by the individual feeling bored.<sup>5</sup> It should not be surprising that given boredom’s connection to personal meaning, it is actually a modern phenomenon. Goodstein recounts that the Enlightenment/Industrial Revolution shift from a faith based world to a more human-centric understanding of the world supplied the background from which boredom could be born, going so far as to suggest that boredom is the existential experience of the myth of modernistic rationality.<sup>6</sup> For the modern mind, the lack of transcendence leaves one in a state of perpetual boredom. Where as the “tedium of life” was known in ancient Rome, and the desert fathers spoke of acedia, neither of these words seem to indicate what is meant by boredom

Before going any farther, it may be helpful to divide boredom into various forms. There has yet to be a standardized list of types of boredom in philosophic circles, but

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<sup>2</sup> Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities*, 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Lars Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), 19.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>6</sup> Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities*, 4.

there have been various suggestions at possible types. Bortolotti has suggested there are at least two types of boredom: situational and habitual. The person who is situationally bored is the one who at a particular moment becomes bored with something. An activity that she may normally enjoy becomes repetitive and needs to be sat aside for a while, or perhaps a song that she enjoys has been played too often. This boredom is a trivial inconvenience and causes a person to want to change behavior. The person who is habitually bored however faces a much graver threat. This person is continually bored, finding no delight, or no lasting delight, in anything.

However, it seems that there are other types of boredom along the scale between these two extremes. Martin Doehlemann suggests that there are four types of boredom, adding categories for a lack of activity and a lack of creativity.<sup>7</sup> There also seems to be room for a boredom of ignorance, or the boredom one has when in a situation where he doesn't understand what is being said. Perhaps also the boredom of familiarity where, much like situational boredom, a person grows overtly familiar with a particular thing and then the appeal to it is gone. It seems that perhaps there is a type of boredom that can be conceived for most situations, but it comes back to what Pascal called a feeling of nullity.<sup>8</sup> An emptiness. Svendsen concludes his discussion on the types of boredom stating, "Boredom is practically indefinable because it lacks the positiveness that is typical of most other phenomena. It is basically to be [understood] as an absence—an absence of personal meaning."<sup>9</sup> No matter the type of boredom, be it the trivial or the

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<sup>7</sup> Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, 41.

<sup>8</sup> Michael L. Raposa, *Boredom and the Religious Imagination* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999), 45.

<sup>9</sup> Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, 45.



deeply existential, it entails a lack of perceived meaning on the part of the one experiencing the boredom.

Svendsen's understanding is helpful, but the concept can be expanded, or perhaps the term "meaning" can be clarified. Raposa notes that boredom is an inherently relational concept. While calling something boring sounds as though you are ascribing a property to a thing, you are in fact describing your relation to that thing.<sup>10</sup> It is not that the movie is boring; rather it is that I find nothing in the movie to elicit a response from me. Whereas Svendsen's emphasis on personal meaning is important, particularly for habitual boredom, it is important to note that situational boredom can be lifted by fear, anger, hate, happiness etc. Or at least it can appear to be. Kierkegaard believes that one can be in despair and not be aware of it, and Augustine believes that a person can be unhappy and not aware, but in both cases temporary distractions can help keep a person in a fiction of contentment. It seems that boredom often works in a similar fashion. Returning to Svendsen, "Where there are more substitutes for meaning, there is more meaning that must be substituted for."<sup>11</sup> In a world full of distraction, it is possible to attempt to cure one's situational boredom perpetually and in so doing to ignore the fact that one is floating in meaninglessness.

We have yet to supply a complete definition for boredom, seeking instead to point to aspects of the topic, if for no other reason than defining a felt experience seems a task too big for words. The idea that there are various types of boredom, all stemming from a banality of experience or a lack of meaning is instructive to our understanding of the topic. The various manifestations are interesting, but the shared core is what matters for

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<sup>10</sup> Raposa, *Boredom and the Religious Imagination*, 38.

<sup>11</sup> Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, 26.

this work. For the purposes of space and time, we will move forward with an understanding of boredom that subsumes these ideas under the umbrella of apathy. Apathy is the state of not having a desire for or a passion sparked by a certain thing. Boredom seems very similar to this idea, and perhaps the biggest difference is that boredom is the feeling of experiencing or coming into relationship with that thing toward which one is apathetic. So, as a young teenager I saw the movie *Titanic* and was bored the majority of the time. I was bored because nothing within the movie aroused a response in any of my passions, be it love, joy, or hate, and therefore, since the story was something I was apathetic toward, my experience of relating to that movie was one of boredom.

In trivial boredom, a person is apathetic toward a trivial thing, or perhaps more astutely, apathetic in a trivial manner. In profound boredom, this apathy is far greater. It is not merely that a woman has become apathetic toward her favorite song, but toward the totality of life, the universe, and everything. Indeed, if my assertion is correct, this apathy stems from the fact that she was created for a relationship with the divine. A relationship that she has subsequently rejected, leaving her passion for the transcendent without a proper object, and therefore her relation to the world as cold, and distant, as she finds the world empty and meaningless. However, this boredom, this apathetic manner of approaching the world is not unique to an individual, as noted earlier with Goodstein, it is the fundamental experience of modernity.

### ***Modernity***

The concept of modernity is incredibly difficult to fully define. It is not merely a philosophy, or a type of art, music, or behavior; but rather, it is an epoch that is marked

by a certain manner of approaching the world. Modernity brought about a paradigm shift, in which the central questions that a person considered changed, as did the mode in which those questions were addressed. Gillespie and Dupre have both produced excellent volumes chronically the shift from the classical, or pre-modern, world to the modern.

Dupre notes that the modern age was the first to distinguish itself from others by using a time designate, “*mondo*” or “now,” as a means of asserting superiority over the past.<sup>12</sup> Gillespie adds that “modern,” in its everyday use, means to be fashionable, or current; a definition that he believes parallels the epoch of modernity’s focus on that which is right in front of us, at the expense of that which is deeper or of possibly greater significance. The concern then is on the “freshness” of the belief, because to be modern means to be “new.” Defining one’s self by virtue of this time designation, of being now, being the most current, was a shift that occurred in modernity.<sup>13</sup>

The first uses of the terms “modern” and “modernity” to speak of an epoch occur in the late 15<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>14</sup> The development is no surprise given the changes and discoveries that were beginning to occur at this time. However, the paradigm shift that occurs which establishes not merely the epoch of modernity, but also the framework of modern thinking happens in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, in the thought of Rene Descartes. In no way should one understand this to mean that all thinkers who came after Descartes, were Cartesian thinkers. Certainly not. However, Descartes’ work established a new manner of thought, which changed how subsequent thinkers approached their own

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<sup>12</sup> Louis Dupre, *Passage to Modernity: Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (London: Yale University Press, 1995), 145.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 2.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

thinking. Descartes' work did not have his intended effect, in fact it very much had the opposite effect, but the manner in which he approached philosophy completely changed the way in which philosophy is done. One could say that everyone in the modern world breathes Cartesian air. Therefore, in order to understand modernity, and also the critiques of it located Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger, we must briefly consider Descartes' project.

Descartes was a theistic thinker. He believed in the God of Christianity, and while he considered the arguments for God's existence compelling, he was well aware that not everyone did. His desire was to present an argument that was so clear and compelling, that all people would agree that it demonstrated that God exists.<sup>15</sup> Yet, in order to make this argument, or any argument for that matter, Descartes saw need to find a new foundation for knowledge upon which all knowledge could be built. "And thus I realized that once in my life I had need to raze everything to the ground and begin again from the original foundations, if I wanted to establish anything firm and lasting in the sciences."<sup>16</sup> In order to accomplish this task, Descartes enacted a system of radical doubt. If there was anything that could be doubted in any of his opinions, that opinion was to be done away with. This radical doubt would go on until Descartes discovered an indubitable base principle that could not be doubted, and upon which all knowledge could be built.

Over the course of the first two of his *Meditations*, Descartes concludes that senses and authorities can deceive a person, and therefore both are to be rejected. Further, if a person cannot trust her sense experience, she cannot be certain that she has a physical

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<sup>15</sup> René Descartes, *Discourse On Method ; and, Meditations On First Philosophy*, 4th ed., trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 1998), 48.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

form, because the belief that we have a body is contingent upon sense experience. Further still, a person can never be positive that she is awake, as opposed to asleep, or that a demon of some sort isn't tricking her into experiencing reality after a certain fashion. Therefore, the senses, authority, the body, and one's perception of reality must all be rejected. Descartes then approaches the question of his own existence, and in so doing, discovers that in order for him to doubt his existence, he must first exist, or else he cannot doubt it. If he did not exist, what would be doing the doubting? Therefore, his doubt proves that he exists, and he concludes that, "I am, I exist" is necessarily true.<sup>17</sup> These words, the *cogito*, truthfully changed everything. Initially, Descartes is only able to conclude that he is a "thinking thing," but over the course of the remaining four *Meditations*, Descartes attempts to put back everything that he doubted in the first two. His manner of doing so comes from using an ontological argument for God's existence, in which God's existence is proved by virtue of humanity possessing ideas of innate perfection. Once the existence of a morally good God is established, we have good reason to trust our perception of reality, to trust that we are not being perpetually deceived, and to trust our senses. Therefore, the structure of all knowledge is restored, due to God's existence.

The weight of Descartes' work here cannot be overemphasized. Prior to Descartes, metaphysics was the central discipline of philosophy, and epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics, were all ground in the study of reality. What Descartes' thought experiment does is move epistemology to the center of philosophy, and metaphysics to a secondary position. It is no longer that truth is dependent upon reality, but rather, reality is

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 64.

dependent upon truth, or knowledge. It is not that something is real, and therefore someone can know truth things about it, but rather that a person's ability to know must be established before any conversation about reality can be had. Therefore the totality of thought is contingent on mankind's knowledge, or mankind's ability to know. Vizureanu correctly notes that, while Descartes is a Catholic thinker, he at least opens the door to a secularized epistemology, which becomes the defining trait of modernity.<sup>18</sup> This secularized epistemology is what leads to the eventual subordination of God to humanity is modern thought.<sup>19</sup> Prior to this time, the exterior world, and the existence of a deity, or deities as a part of that exterior world, was taken for granted, and formed the basis of knowledge, thought, argumentation, etc. Descartes asserts mankind's primacy, in particular mankind's mental primacy, and hinges the exterior world, including the divine, upon the individual—the thinking thing.

Sherover lists five ways in which Descartes' thought changed the way in which society thought and operated. His discussion is summarized in this enumerated list:

- 1) He inaugurated a tradition of radical individualism
- 2) He bequeathed a dichotomous world absolutely divided between what is mind and what is body
- 3) He dismissed Aristotelian causation and compressed causality merely to efficient cause, eliminating final cause, or purposiveness [meaning] from the universe.
- 4) He identified the method of science with mathematical reasoning in so compelling a way that it remains so to this day

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<sup>18</sup> Viorel Vizureanu, "Ways of Subordinating God to Human Beings in Early Modern Philosophy: A General Overview with Special Attention to the Role Played by Mathematics in Cartesian Epistemology," *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 73, no. 2 (2017): 726.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 717.

- 5) He established an analytic method which broke questions into component parts, renouncing attempts to see things as a whole, or as organic lived experiences<sup>20</sup>

This summary provides a helpful understanding of what is meant by modernity.

Modernity is an epoch characterized by reduction. The cosmos, and the human body, are mechanized and seen as the universe, and as a machine.<sup>21</sup> Mankind sees itself as distinct from nature, an observer, as opposed to a part of, and a participant in, the created order.<sup>22</sup> Meaning and purpose have a diminished place in the cultural mind.<sup>23</sup> And the physical world, and the spiritual world are completely disconnected. This last issue becomes the key shift in later thinkers that are either empiricist, like Hume, or pantheist, like Spinoza.<sup>24</sup> If the spiritual and the physical are divided, and as Gillespie noted, modernity's focus is on the immediate, that which is right before us, then these ideas in the hands of empirical thinkers will begin to deteriorate into materialism. Over time, this is indeed what occurred, and why secularity is inherent in modernity.

### ***Secular/Secularism/Secularity***

The word secular (and its cognates), as used in this dissertation, owes a great deal to Charles Taylor's, *A Secular Age*. In the introduction to his book, Taylor delineates three different secularities. The first two, public spheres untouched by religion, and

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<sup>20</sup> Charles M. Sherover and Gregory R. Johnson, *From Kant and Royce to Heidegger: Essays in Modern Philosophy* (Washington (D.C.): The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 6-7.

<sup>21</sup> Louis Dupre, *Passage to Modernity: Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture*.

<sup>22</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *The Open Secret: A New Vision for Natural Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2008).

<sup>23</sup> Goodstein, *Experience Without Qualities*.

<sup>24</sup> Jonathon Israel's four volume series on the Enlightenment is incredibly helpful in detailing much of the formation of the political and societal structures that developed throughout modernity.

people/entities falling away from religious belief, are fairly clear cut and (to make a pun out of the etymology of the word) mundane. However, the third secularity is the one that holds his attention and serves as the basis of his work. Speaking of secularity three, Taylor states, “The change I want to define and trace is one which takes us from a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others.”<sup>25</sup> He adds, “Belief in God is no longer axiomatic.”<sup>26</sup> A change, or a series of changes, have occurred over the last 500 years in which faith in God is no longer the default, and in some spheres of life is not only a minority position, but a scorned minority position.

What changed to make the rise of secularism possible? Taylor posits that in the pre-modern world, every facet of life testified to the divine, and therefore, disbelief was untenable. Nature and the cosmos, natural disasters, the structure of kingdoms, and everything else in existence inculcated people into belief. The world was seen as enchanted with spiritual and moral forces.<sup>27</sup> However, over the course of modernity, these things shifted. We addressed in the previous section how the cosmos became the universe, something mechanistic as opposed to mystical, or spiritual. Kingdoms began to fall, the church was questioned and went to war. The Reformation, the scientific revolution, all of these things, which led to Descartes’ thought experiment, also prepared the society for the Cartesian Shift toward a secularized epistemological approach to the world.

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<sup>25</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 3.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 25-26.



These changes run deep within society. During modernity, secularization theorists posited an understanding in which culture and society could remain unchanged, with religion merely removed, however, this is impossible. It's not merely the removal of belief in God that secularizes a society, but a restructuring of everything in society that points to or is based upon belief in the divine. It's Nietzsche's madman calling for the murderers of God to become Gods themselves and restructure society.<sup>28</sup> There cannot be sacred places, there cannot be sacred times, everything is and must be profane.<sup>29</sup> Everything is common. To borrow phraseology from Kierkegaard and Heidegger, everything is flattened, or hollowed out.

This flattening is where the connection between boredom and secularity can be most seen. If everything is flat, nothing has lasting meaning. This means that in the secular mind, eternity is terrifying. If I perpetually exist, but nothing has lasting meaning, I will then eventually out last meaning. This idea appears in the last story arc of the philosophically based television show, *The Good Place*, in which heaven must be finite or turn into a type of hell.<sup>30</sup> The secular mind cannot conceive of endless, perpetual, renewable joy, and inexhaustible love, so the idea of an unending existence necessitates boredom, because in fact, life in modernity is about trying to stave off boredom, and in an eternal existence, eventually one would fail.

For our purposes, we will use the term secularism to mean, not merely “not religious” but also to imply all the factors that are entailed in the removal of the

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<sup>28</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche and Walter Arnold Kaufmann, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, [ ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 181.

<sup>29</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 195.

<sup>30</sup> *The Good Place*. “Whenever You’re Ready.” Episode 51. Directed by Mike Schur. Written by Mike Schur. NBC, February 2020.

transcendent from individuals and societies. Modernity acted as an agent of secularization in that it displaced the transcendent, not merely by means of attacking belief in God, or changing governmental structures, but also by augmenting the manner in which people see the world, or think about the world, or think about themselves. The physical is what you can see, taste, sense, measure, quantify, etc., and therefore, it is what holds primacy. Nothing beyond the physical can be established by the physical, therefore there is nothing that transcends the physical. Secularism even goes so far as to shape the way in which people conceive of sacred institutions, or the manner in which religious people think about their religion. The house of worship is not a sacred place, but a non-profit organization with a CEO and a mission and vision statement, just like any other business. The holy has become divested of holiness, and therefore one among any other number of undifferentiated resources.

If boredom is a secular problem with a spiritual cause, we find boredom within the secular, and acedia (the spiritual root of boredom) within the spiritual. As we proceed, it will be in light of the idea that acedia grips individuals and cultures, and in the face of that acedia, individuals and cultures secularize, and continually secularize to further and greater lengths as boredom develops. Within the history of the Western world, this happened at the wake of modernity. In an increasingly acedia filled culture, Descartes' project opened a door that led to increasing secularization. The Cartesian Shift in philosophy birthed inherently mechanized modes of thinking that pushed modernism forward as a means of secularization, and therefore the problem of profound boredom manifested. In the following chapters we will analyze first, the spiritual condition of

acedia, and then the factors that make boredom untenable, as we move toward a resolution to the problem.

## Chapter Two: The Spiritual Roots of the Problem in Evagrius and Aquinas

### *Introduction*

As stated in chapter one, the problem of profound boredom is a secular problem with a spiritual root. That root is the sin of acedia, which is often translated “sloth.” Acedia itself is not boredom. Indeed, Raposa notes that much like the French *ennui*, translating acedia as “boredom” is viable only at the loss of a great amount of meaning.<sup>31</sup> Instead, it is more accurate to understand profound boredom not as acedia, but as a consequence of acedia.

In this chapter, we will look at the development of the sin of acedia in the work of two Christian thinkers from the pre-modern era. First, we will examine acedia as one of the *logismoi*, or thoughts, in the work of Evagrius on Pontus. Evagrius presented acedia as a unique sin that only afflicted anchorite monks, though his work on the matter led to further development with a far greater application. This discussion will look briefly at Evagrius’ theological background in general, but more closely at his theology of sin and the start of the list of the Eight Capital Vices.

Second, we will examine acedia as it appears within the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas. As the archetypical Christian thinker of the High Middle Ages, Aquinas presents the clearest and most robust understanding of the sin of acedia, and leads most naturally to a discussion of how that sin has led to the problem of profound boredom. In order to understand Aquinas’ view, we will look first at his understanding of virtue in general, and then at charity in particular. Charity is the root, and the perfecter, of all the

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<sup>31</sup> Michael L. Raposa, *Boredom and the Religious Imagination*, Studies in Religion and Culture (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 12.

virtues, and is itself friendship with God. After establishing Aquinas' understanding of charity as divine human friendship, then ultimately we will discuss Aquinas' understanding of acedia, as a sin against charity, which can best be understood as: "Sorrow at the demands placed on us by friendship with God."<sup>32</sup> This chapter will conclude by briefly considering the emaciation of the term acedia, and how it fits within the framework of modernity.

### *Evagrius' Anchorite Theological Context*

Compared to the other thinkers considered in this study, Evagrius of Pontus is somewhat more obscure, at least in the theological West. This relative obscurity can more than likely be attributed to the fact that, Evagrius clearly followed theologically in the footsteps of Origen of Alexandria. In 399CE, the year of Evagrius' death, one of many "Origenist Controversies" began, which eventually led to Evagrius' being condemned a heretic and most, though not all, of his works being destroyed. Many of his writings survived due to the use of pseudonyms, particularly "Nilus of Ancyra."<sup>33</sup> Given his status as a heretic, Evagrius' writings and thought fell out of favor in the West (though he remained influential in the East), appearing, if at all, in many accounts of the history of the church as at best a footnote; however, for our current study, Evagrius is of the utmost importance. It is in Evagrius' thought that the initial concept of the Capital Vices is found, and among their number are included the sins of acedia and tristia. In order to understand

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<sup>32</sup> Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung uses this synthesis definition in her multiple books and papers on the subject of acedia. See *Resistance to the Demands of Love* et al.

<sup>33</sup> Jean-Charles Nault, *The Noonday Devil: Acedia, the Unnamed Evil of Our Times*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2015), 24.

Evagrius' view of acedia, we turn first to his understanding of the monastic life as the context in which his view forms.

Evagrius was born in the mid-340s, in the city of Iborra, Helenopontus, which is located in modern day Turkey. In his early adulthood he became familiar with the Cappadocian Fathers, actually serving under both Basil the Great, and Gregory of Nazianzus, the latter of which ordained Evagrius as a deacon. After Gregory resigned his post as bishop of Constantinople, Evagrius continued to serve under Nektarios; however, during this time Evagrius also started a relationship with a married woman. In 382, Evagrius records having a vision of being thrown in prison on account of this affair and being told by an angel to flee to Jerusalem. Evagrius left in the middle of the night, not telling anyone he was leaving. He arrived in Palestine and was taken in by Melania the Elder. When he fell ill with a six month long fever, Melania asked him what he was hiding and Evagrius confessed to the affair. This confession led to his supernatural healing, and as a result, Melania told him to live the life of a monk, which he did.<sup>34</sup>

The exact reason that Melania suggested that Evagrius go to Egypt as an anchorite is unclear, but Sittser suggests that she saw in him a desire to run, or to escape, rather than a desire to face his actual temptations.<sup>35</sup> If this hypothesis is true, and it does seem to fit with Evagrius' flight from Constantinople and the hiding of his motivation for that act, then Melania pointing Evagrius toward the monastic life was actually done as a means of confronting the sin of acedia. Though not explicitly mentioned as the vice against which he had the greatest struggle, Evagrius does place acedia as a unique sin among other sins.

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<sup>34</sup> This biographical information taken from the introduction to *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*. Sinkewicz.

<sup>35</sup> Gerald Sittser, "The Battle Without and Within: The Psychology of Sin and Salvation in the Desert Fathers and Mothers," *Journal of Spiritual Formation* 2, no. 1 (2009): 53.

In fact, among his contemporaries in the desert anchorite tradition, only Abba Isaias (who saw acedia as the most deadly of sins) placed a greater value on the danger of acedia.<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, it may well be that the last 18 years of Evagrius' life were dictated by Melania's perception that, among other sins, Evagrius needed to kill his own acedia. And strive to kill that sin Evagrius did.

Before proceeding, it will be beneficial to paint a brief picture of the cosmos as envisioned by Evagrius. Rasmussen's summary of Evagrius' anthropology is most helpful in presenting this understanding. As mentioned above, Evagrius followed in Origen's theological footsteps. As such, he held that God is eternal, and uncreated, and all that exists is created, at least in some way, by God. In the beginning, God created rational beings of pure mind. At some point, a movement occurred causing a "fall" which produced ignorance in these minds, and the beings became colder, and heavier, which led to the formation of the soul. Some minds became so heavy, that God created the body as a condensation of the soul. These bodies were created by Christ, the only unfallen mind, and provide an avenue for union with God.<sup>37</sup> Mankind is therefore tripartite, mind, soul, and body, but the substance of both body and soul is the mind.<sup>38</sup> Here we see the rationale for Evagrius' emphasis on the thought life of the believer, and on the association of evil thoughts with demons. The substance of every entity is mind, therefore the thoughts of an entity are a part of who that entity is, and in the case of spiritual

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<sup>36</sup> Reinhard Clifford Kuhn, *The Demon of Noontide: Ennui in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 45.

<sup>37</sup> Evan Howard, "Is thoughtless Prayer Really Christian? a Biblical/evangelical response to Evagrius of Pontus," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 7, no. 1 (2014): 122.

<sup>38</sup> Mette Rasmussen, "Like a Rock or Like God? The Concept of Apatheia in the Monastic Theology of Evagrius of Pontus," *Studia Theologica* 59 (2005): 149.

entities like demons, there is almost no distinction between evil that the demon thinks, and the evil that the demon causes a person to think, or the evil that a person thinks on her own.

During his time in the desert, Evagrius compiled the most sophisticated demonology in early Christian monasticism.<sup>39</sup> The thoroughness of his demonology can be seen in his development of “The Thoughts” or the *logismoi*, which will be addressed in the next section of this chapter. The close relationship between demons and thoughts noted in the previous paragraph means that the monk is constantly bombarded by a demonic assault, and in order to achieve victory over the demon’s onslaught, the monk must control his thoughts, or better yet, overcome the passions that such thoughts give rise to, in order to transcend the thoughts themselves.<sup>40</sup> This quest to transcend the passions is the heart of Evagrius’ teaching on the monastic life.

How then does one transcend the passions? In *Praktikos* Evagrius summarizes the whole of his monastic theology in aphorism 81: “81. Love is the offspring of impassibility, and impassibility is the blossom of the practical life.”<sup>41</sup> It is important to note here that agape is not a passion in Evagrian thought. In fact, agape is only free to truly form once the passions have been overcome. The process of overcoming the passions starts with *hesychia* or stillness. This stage is so fundamental, it actually is not included in Evagrius’ schematic for the monastic life, it’s seen more as a prerequisite.

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<sup>39</sup> Evagrius, *Cistercian Studies Series*, trans. David Brakke, vol. 229, *Talking Back: a Monastic Handbook for Combating Demons* (Trappist, KY: Cistercian Publications, 2009), 3.

<sup>40</sup> Evagrius writes in *Praktikos*, “Sin for a monk is the consent of the thought to forbidden pleasure.”

<sup>41</sup> Evagrius, “*Praktikos*” in *Evagrius of Pontus: the Greek Ascetic Corpus (Oxford Early Christian Studies (Paperback))* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 110.



Stillness is a state of calm in which the mind is able to contemplate God. Evagrius' work *Foundations* is dedicated toward attaining stillness and includes advice on how to minimize distraction. The monk should be an anchorite, take little food during the day (unless ill), own only what is absolutely necessary, and meet only with the likeminded and keep social interactions to a minimum. By decreasing distractions, the monk is able to focus more clearly on God, and therefore minimize areas of possible temptation that demons can capitalize on. Once the monk attains stillness, he is ready to embark on the "practical life" which will eventually lead to the "gnostic life" in which the monk works toward the apprehension of the trinity.<sup>42</sup> The true goal of the gnostic life (and therefore life in general) is to achieve pure prayer, which is prayer in which the mind is emptied of all passions and representations, and becomes a dwelling place of God.<sup>43</sup>

In order to reach the gnostic life (which encompasses *apatheia* and *agape*), the monk must first pursue *ascesis*, or the practical life. In this stage, the monk turns himself over to arduous work to try and overcome his sin. Evagrius himself was known for undertaking extreme practices to punish himself for his sins, such as spending all night praying naked in a cistern full of water in mid-winter.<sup>44</sup> The monk would fast for extended periods of time and sleep short periods of time. Evagrius believed that the harsher one was to his body, the more deeply he could penetrate his conscious.<sup>45</sup> This belief is in line with what we spoke of previously, in which the body was a later creation

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<sup>42</sup> Robert Sinkewicz, "Introduction" in *Evagrius of Pontus: the Greek Ascetic Corpus (Oxford Early Christian Studies (Paperback))* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), xxiv.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxv.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, xx.

<sup>45</sup> Evagrius, *Eulogies*, in *Evagrius of Pontus: the Greek Ascetic Corpus (Oxford Early Christian Studies (Paperback))* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 54.

that came as a result of the fall of mind, or soulish creatures. In other words, during the practical life, the monk would punish himself for sinning in an attempt not to gain forgiveness, but to train himself to stand firm and focus on the divine. Even to desensitize himself toward the passions so that they no longer aroused him. In addition to acts of asceticism, the monk in the *ascesis* stage would spend time in prayer and in reading scripture to prepare for the next demonic assault.

During this stage (and throughout the rest of the practical life), the monk would practice *antirrhethikos*, or “talking back.” Talking back is based on the example of Jesus’ temptations from Satan. When faced with temptation, Jesus quoted scripture to rebuff the Devil. Evagrius had seen such success in making use of this technique that another monk, Loukies, requested he write a handbook to benefit others.<sup>46</sup> Evagrius gladly responded to the request and compiled *Antirrhethikos* as a war book for his fellow monks. At the start of the work, Evagrius notes that monks need to be willing to fight “the Philistines” [demons/thoughts] to the point of blood, and to that end, since thinking of the right word in the heat of battle can be difficult, Evagrius compiled lists of scripture to speak back to demons when they attempted to entice the monks with various sins.<sup>47</sup> It is of interest for this work that of the sins Evagrius compiles verses to respond to in *Antirrhethikos*, acedia is a noticeable absence. Its close companion tristia, or sadness, is present, but acedia itself is not. This absence might be explained by Evagrius’ understanding that the response to acedia is perseverance, as opposed to refutation; or it may be that here we see an inclination in Evagrius that later writers will make explicit, that acedia and tristia are for

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<sup>46</sup> David Brakke, “Introduction,” *Talking Back: a Monastic Handbook for Combating Demons* (Trappist, KY: Cistercian Publications, 2009), 31.

<sup>47</sup> Evagrius, *Talking Back*, 50-51.

the most part one and the same. Both of these suggestions will be explored in later sections within this chapter.

Over time, the monk will begin to progress in his work and weaken the hold that his passions' have on him. As the passion's hold weakens, the monk will begin to approach the early stages of the gnostic life, but first must attain impassibility. The battle for impassibility is a battle for complete freedom from the passions, a battle that takes place in the various faculties of the human soul. Evagrius, following a platonic strand of Christianity, understood the soul to be tripartite in nature. The soul is comprised of three faculties, divided into two sections. The two faculties of the soul that deal with and are inclined to the passions are the concupiscent, and the irascible faculties. These two should be seen as related to the body and the soul in Evagrius' anthropology, and with desire, and spirit in Plato's understanding of the soul. The final faculty is mind, which corresponds to reason in Plato's system, and as was mentioned previously, undergirds Evagrius' anthropology.

This division is by no means unique to Evagrius, indeed, we will see the distinction again in Aquinas, however, these two thinkers did not mean the exact same things by the use of these terms. For Evagrius, each sin, with the exception of acedia, takes place within or pertaining to one of the soul's faculties. The irascible faculty is the faculty of the soul that reacts strongly to things, in particular, it is the part of the soul that rejects or pushes away things that we need to avoid. The concupiscent faculty of the soul is the appetitive faculty, it's the faculty that draws us toward things and fills us with desire or passion. The intellectual faculty is the seat of human rationality. The faculties of the soul work properly when they are rightly focused. When the irascible faculty pushes

one away from something that ought be fled, that is a good and proper act. Concordantly, when the concupiscent faculty inclines one to desire that which ought be desired, that also is a good and proper act. However, sin occurs when the irascible nature sees as dangerous that which is good. Or when the concupiscent nature sees as desirable that which is to be fled.

Evagrius' theology of sin will be discussed in the next section, but when constructing a framework for his thought, it is important to see that sin is a misuse, or a misalignment, of the various faculties of the soul, and in order to gain impassability, the passionate part of the soul must be tamed, or properly ordered. The properly ordered soul will know that God is God, and the concupiscent faculty of the soul will desire knowledge of Him, and the irascible faculty will incline one to flee evil.<sup>48</sup> These faculties are tamed during the practical life. Once the monk has endured much struggle in the practical life, he approaches impassability. Or more precisely, little impassability, since full impassability seems to be reserved for the next life (though Evagrius is not fully clear on this point). For our purposes, "impassability" will be referencing "little impassability" unless otherwise indicated. The first stage of impassability is focused on the complete mastery of the passions of the concupiscent faculty, particularly gluttony and fornication. The progression in *apatheia* then moves into learning to control the irascible faculty of the soul. Sinkewicz notes that here Evagrius aims at control not mastery, because the irascible passions stay with the person until death.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Sinkewicz, "Introduction" xxxii.

<sup>49</sup> Evagrius, *Praktikos* 36, 104. This passage also indicates that acedia is far more all encompassing than the other sins.

Evagrius saw *apatheia*, or impassability, as full of the harmony of the soul and passions.<sup>50</sup> Sittser describes impassability as purity of heart, or as the ability to contemplate God without distraction.<sup>51</sup> Not only is the monk who has attained impassability not enticed to sin by objects, but even the representation, or the memory, of past pleasures no longer trouble or entice him.<sup>52</sup> At this stage the monk no longer practices abstinence, because abstinence indicates a draw toward something that one must abstain from, whereas the impassible monk no longer has said draw.<sup>53</sup> Evagrius adds that praying without distraction is a great achievement, but psalmody without distraction is an even greater one.<sup>54</sup> When a monk attains these attributes, he begins to enter more deeply into his interior life and contemplate God more fully.

Such contemplation takes place in the gnostic life. As the monk contemplates God, and does so with fewer distractions, the monk enters into pure prayer. Moments of pure prayer are the rare times when a monk is able to fully empty his mind of all distractions, passions, and representations, and contemplate God fully.<sup>55</sup> This knowledge of God is not merely intellectual, but it breeds agape, or love. With the passions overcome, and the mind contemplating and coming in contact with God, the monk is filled with love, both for God and for others. This state is the monk returning to his original state in which he sees himself as luminous.<sup>56</sup> Okholm draws the conclusion that such contemplation is the greatest move against the deadly sins (the “thoughts”) because the love of God is the end

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<sup>50</sup> Dennis L. Okholm, *Dangerous Passions, Deadly Sins: Learning from the Psychology of Ancient Monks* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2014), 4-5.

<sup>51</sup> Sittser, “The Battle Without and Within”, 63-64.

<sup>52</sup> Evagrius, *Praktikos*, 67.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>55</sup> Sinkewicz, “Introduction,” xxxv.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxii.

of self-love, which births the other sins.<sup>57</sup> To make this assertion Okholm has to read back into Evagrius the work of later authors, but his interpretation does at the least show the interconnectedness and depth of the logismoi, which is the topic to which we now turn.

### *Evagrius' Development of the Eight Thoughts/Logismoi*

Evagrius' longest lasting legacy is his establishment of what he calls the logismoi, or the thoughts. In the battle for the monk's soul, demons make use of thoughts to try and tempt the monk to fall into sin. The manner of their temptation comes internally from the use of representations, images, or thoughts. For Evagrius, the demon, and the thought which the demon uses to tempt, are almost one and the same, and in his writing he does not clearly distinguish between the two.

Representations are, in a way, the content of thought. In his introduction to *Antirrhetikos*, Brakke explains that in Evagrian thought, representations are "basic intellectual material" or a "simple concept" which form our thought. We receive representations through our sense experiences, and our memory stores those representations. That which is in the memory can then be called to mind either by the monk or by a demon, even while the monk sleeps.<sup>58</sup> The mind itself can only consider one representation at a time, which means that at any given moment, only one demon can be tempting, or attempting to tempt, a monk.<sup>59</sup> This limitation of the mind also means that while a demon is displaying a thought to the monk, neither the monk, or an angel, is

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<sup>57</sup> Okholm, *Dangerous Passions*, 6.

<sup>58</sup> Brakke, "Introduction," in *Talking Back*, 29.

<sup>59</sup> Evagrius, *Thoughts*, in *Evagrius of Pontus: the Greek Ascetic Corpus (Oxford Early Christian Studies (Paperback))* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 169.

unable to display a representation. These three entities are the three sources of representations in a monk's mind, and the speed at which representations can move through the mind makes it seem as though the thoughts exist simultaneously, but they are in fact alternating. As representations persist, they can begin to stir the passions. Brakke uses the example of the representation of gold, which would persist in the mind of a greedy person. It is to these representations, these attacks by demons, that Evagrius established the practice of Talking Back, which we have already discussed.<sup>60</sup>

Over time, Evagrius developed a list of the eight most dangerous thoughts that a monk might face, and he discussed them at length in many of his writings. His goal was to warn other monks about these demons, and give them encouragement to fight the thoughts that they use to tempt the monk into sin. Nault suggests that Evagrius chose eight thoughts as an allusion to the eight enemies of Israel listed in Deuteronomy 7. Israel's wilderness trials were a frequent analogy used by the Desert Fathers, and the picture of Israel leaving Egypt and battling seven other enemies on the way to salvation fits well with Evagrius' focus on spiritual warfare.<sup>61</sup> It should be noted that not all lists include eight logismoi. *On the Vices Opposed to the Virtues* increases the number to nine, and at times the number will occasionally be lower, but the general pool from which he draws is eight. These eight are: gluttony, greed, acedia, sorrow (tristia), vainglory, pride, lust, and anger.

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<sup>60</sup> Brakke, "Introduction," in *Talking Back*, 30.

<sup>61</sup> Nault, *The Noonday Devil*, 24.

The thoughts themselves are not sins. Vost suggests that it is best to understand the thoughts in a similar fashion to Seneca's first movements.<sup>62</sup> This suggestion seems fair in that Seneca saw a "movement" as an initial shock, not something that gives rise to anger, but as that which could be the start of what leads to anger. Understood in this manner, Evagrius' thoughts are not the sins, indeed they are as sinful as the representations the angels give are holy; however, they are the start toward sin and therefore are things that must be fought against. In this understanding, Evagrius does not leave room for a monk to be seen as a victim of sin. Extrapolating this conceptualization of sin to our current context, Sittser that no one is a victim of sin. A person falls into sin because she did not stay vigilant before God. The demon, or the thought provokes a person by forming representations in her mind, but sin occurs when the passions take hold of these representations and lead her to play God in her mind by creating a fantasy world in which she is sovereign.<sup>63</sup>

The demons will bring forward representations to monk's mind attempting to incite the passions to be drawn into sin. For example, in the midst of a fast, the demon of gluttony might bring to the monk's mind a memory, or representation, of a satisfying meal, hoping to incite the passions to drive the monk to break his fast, or to perhaps weaken him for another sin. Evagrius notes that the demon of lust might have the demon of gluttony attempt to weaken a strong monk with representations that might lead toward gluttony, only to more easily "...cast the soul into the pit of lust."<sup>64</sup> The goal of the

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<sup>62</sup> Kevin Vost, *The Seven Deadly Sins: A Thomistic Guide to Vanquishing Vice and Sin* (Manchester, New Hampshire: Sophia Institute Press, 2015), 28.

<sup>63</sup> Sittser, "The Battle Without and Within", 55-56.

<sup>64</sup> Evagrius, *Eulogios*, 39.



demons is to make use of thoughts and representations in any way possible to bring forth sin, and Evagrius comprised his list of the eight thoughts to counter this tactic.

The eight thoughts can actually be reduced to three, and these three to one. Evagrius sees gluttony as the greatest sin, or the strongest of the passions, as it is a desire to consume. When expanded to three, Evagrius sees gluttony, anger, and vainglory as the generals in the army of demons.<sup>65</sup> These three sins correlate with the three faculties of the human soul discussed previously. The logismoi come primarily from the passionate part of the soul, in order to darken the rational part of the soul. The sins of the concupiscent faculty are gluttony, greed, and lust; all of which draw the monk toward desiring what he ought not have. The sins of irascible faculty are anger, and sorrow; which lead the monk to be repelled by that which is good. These sins come together to darken the rational mind and prepare the way for the sins of the rational faculty, namely, vainglory and pride.<sup>66</sup>

As we can see, the majority of the logimoi are an attempt to lead toward sin in one particular area of the passions. There is however, one exception. Acedia arises in all the soul's faculties simultaneously. Nault sees acedia as acting at the intersection of the sins of the corporeal, and the spiritual passions.<sup>67</sup> Acedia, the noonday demon, attacks the monk on all fronts simultaneously. The totality of its attack means that it strives to make the monk desire what he ought not desire, flee what he should be drawn to, and think incorrectly about himself, all at the same time. It is here that we can begin to see how acedia can lay a foundation for the current problem of profound boredom.

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<sup>65</sup> Ockholm, *Dangerous Passions*, 4.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. This system can be seen in its nascent stage in Evagrius, but this presentation is more fully developed in John Cassian.

<sup>67</sup> Nault, *The Noonday Devil*, 26.

### *Acedia in Evagrius*

Evagrius did not develop the term *acedia*, nor he did not use the term in a vacuum. In the pre-Christian era, dating back to before Empedocles, the term was used for the act of neglecting to bury one's dead.<sup>68</sup> Since only humans bury their dead, the act of *acedia* was an act of dehumanization. To not bury the dead was an action that was bestial, or less than human. The term's meaning had changed by the time early Christian monks started making use of it, and the few references that we have to the use of *acedia* from the monks prior to Evagrius connote carelessness, apathy, and exhaustion.<sup>69</sup> In these uses, the action of neglecting to bury the dead is no longer in view, but the general feeling of not caring, or of not being burdened by a responsibilities and actions appropriate for humans is brought to the fore.

These definitions inform Evagrius' usage, but Evagrius is the one who develops the most robust understanding of the term prior to Aquinas. For Evagrius, *acedia* is more than just a lack of care, or the state of being tired; instead it is a spiritual coldness, an apathy toward a spiritual calling.<sup>70</sup> *Acedia* is a sin against the work that God has laid before the monk. Whereas Evagrius never explicitly states that only a monk can commit *acedia*, his writings only mention *acedia* in the context of the monastic life. It will be later thinkers who expand the concept to include others.

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<sup>68</sup> B. Forthomme, *De l'acedia monastique e l'anxio-depression: Histoire philoaopique de la transfoemation d'un vice en pathologie*, Paris: Sanofi-Synthelabo, 2000, quoted in Nault, 27.

<sup>69</sup> Stanley Jackson, "Acedia the Sin and Its Relationship to Sorrow and Melancholia in Medieval Times," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 55, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 173.

<sup>70</sup> Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2009), 83.

Acedia is mentioned across Evagrius' corpus, but we will limit our discussion to the four most significant passages in which he discusses the sin. Sinkewicz suggests that *The Eight Thoughts* takes the perspective of someone entering into the battle of the practical life, while *Praktikos* takes the position of someone who has been in the battle of the practical life for some time and may be reaching impassability, and *On Thoughts* is from the perspective of someone within the gnostic life.<sup>71</sup> To these three we will add *Eulogios*, which, according to Sinkewicz, is most concerned with the fundamentals of the practical life,<sup>72</sup> and therefore seems to serve well as an introductory text for monks attempting to understand acedia.

In *Eulogios* Evagrius writes:

At the time of the office, whenever the spirit of acedia should fall upon you, it suggests to the soul that psalmody is burdensome, and it sets laziness as an antagonist against the soul, so that with unmatched speed it gives the flesh over to the memory as though apparently wearied for some reason. Therefore, when we have been wakeful during the night, let us not give the office over to acedia, lest the demons come upon us and gather the weeds of the thoughts and at the same time sow them into the heart.<sup>73</sup>

In this passage Evagrius gives a preliminary glance at what acedia looks like. The monk afflicted by this sin begins to see the work of their office as a burden. The joy of singing psalms becomes a chore, and laziness begins to set in. In acedia, the work that is laid before the monk becomes a laborious task, and it serves as an opportunity for other demons to attack. In light of this passage, we can agree with Vogel's assertion that while Evagrius does not see acedia as the gravest of sins, it is an attack on the spiritual immune

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<sup>71</sup> Sinkewicz, "Introduction to *Praktikos*," 95.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>73</sup> Evagrius, *Eulogios*, 35.

system, meaning that it weakens to soul to any other demon's assault.<sup>74</sup> Later in this same passage, Evagrius adds that the demon of acedia makes one lazy in prayer and therefore causes agitation in prayer and psalmody, leaving a person weak and his soul blind to contemplation.<sup>75</sup> Whatever can be said of acedia then, a key aspect of the sin is in creating dissatisfaction with the spiritual work appropriate to the person so as to leave the monk vulnerable to attack.

In *On the Eight Thoughts*, Evagrius further details his understanding of acedia using 18 aphorisms. Below are his three clearest depictions:

1. Acedia is a relaxation of the soul, and a relaxation of the soul which is not in accord with nature does not resist temptation nobly. For what is food for the healthy body constitutes a temptation for the noble soul.
6. A person afflicted with acedia proposes visiting the sick, but is fulfilling his own purpose.
14. The eye of the person afflicted with acedia stares at the doors continuously, and his intellect imagines people coming to visit. The door creaks and he jumps up; he hears a sound, and he leans out the window and does not leave it until he gets stiff from sitting there.<sup>76</sup>

In the first of these aphorisms, acedia is depicted as a relaxation of the soul. This terminology should not be seen as a statement against leisure (though Evagrius would not think highly of leisure activities), but rather a loss of commitment. When struck with acedia, the monk experiences a loss of “tension” or dedication to his ascetic practices.<sup>77</sup> The monastic life is one of battle, and acedia weakens the will to fight, and in so doing, acedia makes the monk more susceptible to the attack of other demons.

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<sup>74</sup> Jeffrey Vogel, “The Speed of Sloth: Reconsidering the Sin of Acedia,” *Pro Ecclesia* 18, no. 1 (2009): 60.

<sup>75</sup> Evagrius, *Eulogios*, 36.

<sup>76</sup> Evagrius, *On the Eight Thoughts*, in *Evagrius of Pontus: the Greek Ascetic Corpus (Oxford Early Christian Studies (Paperback))* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 83-84.

<sup>77</sup> Sinkewicz, “Introduction to *On the Eight Thoughts*,” 72.

The latter two descriptions of acedia give pictures of how the afflicted monk acts. He will daydream about visiting the sick, but not to encourage them, rather to serve as a distraction for himself. Further, the monk will hope that someone will come and interrupt his work so that he might be able to do something other than his spiritual duties. Note, that the main reason one would be visiting in the middle of the day would be due to an emergency, or the need of spiritual counsel. In these two aphorisms, Evagrius shows that the one afflicted by acedia is, in some way, eager for misfortune to befall someone else. While the monk would never vocalize this joy, it seems inherent in the fact that another person's misfortune allows the monk the ability to leave his duties and tend to the trouble. It is not that the monk spitefully wishes ill on another person in particular, rather that the monk wishes for anything as a diversion from the practical life that he is engaged in, and a person, in general, suffering misfortune can be used as that respite. Here the neighbor becomes an object of distraction, as opposed to a fellow human made in God's image.

Summarizing the foregoing, Bunge describes acedia as anger at what is present, and a desire for that which is not present. This summery demonstrates the holistic assault of the demon of acedia as it incites both the concupiscent and irascible faculties of the soul.<sup>78</sup> In two other aphorisms in *On the Eight Thoughts*, Evagrius compares the one afflicted by acedia to a weak plant uprooted, or a waterless cloud blown away, by the wind.<sup>79</sup> The wind metaphor gives the impression that the monk is spiritually emaciated (relaxed) and is therefore easily cast about. In acedia there is no grounding, or rather,

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<sup>78</sup> Gabriel Bunge, *Despondency: The Spiritual Teaching of Evagrius Ponticus On Acedia* (Yonkers, N.Y.: St. Vladimir, ©2012), 54.

<sup>79</sup> Evagrius, *On the Eight Thoughts*, in *Evagrius of Pontus: the Greek Ascetic Corpus* (*Oxford Early Christian Studies (Paperback)*) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 84.

there is a loss of grounding, which leads to discontentment. In its contemporary manifestation, acedia is what leads a person to repeatedly check her phone, or to spend hours on social media to distract herself from any real obligation. Not only then does acedia breed dissatisfaction, but it also creates a weakened resolve for the spiritual work laid before a person, leading to a desire, and an openness, for any type of distraction.

Evagrius develops his thoughts on acedia further in *Praktikos*, which is his most thorough work on the practical life, addressed to the monk on the verge of impassability. It is quoted below with Sinkewicz' notations:

[VI. Acedia]

12. The demon of acedia, also called the noonday demon (cf. Ps. 90:6), is the most oppressive of all the demons. He attacks the monk about the fourth hour [viz. 10 a.m.] and besieges his soul until the eighth hour [2 p.m.]. First of all, he makes it appear that the sun moves slowly or not at all, and that the day seems to be fifty hours long. Then he compels the monk to look constantly towards the window, to jump out the cell, to watch the sun to see how far it is from the ninth hour [3 p.m.], to look this way and that lest one of the brothers... And further, he instills in him a dislike for the place and for his state of life itself, for manual labour, and also the idea that love has disappeared from among the brothers and there is no one to console him. And should there be someone during those days who has offended the monk, this too the demon uses to add further to his dislike (of the place). He leads him on a desire for other places where he can easily find the wherewithal to meet his needs and pursue a trade that is easier and more productive; he adds that pleasing the Lord is not a question of being in a particular place: for scripture says that the divinity can be worshipped everywhere (cf. John 4:21-4). He joins to these suggestions the memory of his close relations and of his former lifetime, while bringing the burdens of asceticism before his eyes; and, as the saying has it, he deploys every device in order to have the monk leave his cell and flee the stadium. No other demon follows immediately after this one: a state of peace and ineffable joy ensues in the soul after this struggle.<sup>80</sup>

Many of the elements addressed in the previous passages are present in this passage, and are perhaps amplified, and new elements introduced. This passage is the first in which acedia is referred to as “the demon of noonday” or “the noontide demon.” The name was

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<sup>80</sup> Evagrius, *Praktikos*, 99.

used because acedia attacked most fervently when the day was hottest, and the wait for the monk's daily meal (which was taken at 3pm) was at its zenith.<sup>81</sup>

This passage displays clearly what Nault has called the two dimensions of acedia: temporal and spatial.<sup>82</sup> First, Evagrius depicts the temporal dimension, in which the day seems to be 50 hours long, as though time is unending.<sup>83</sup> Second, Evagrius presents the spatial dimension in which the monk feels trapped, or grows to despise his cell. In the throes of acedia, the monk longs for a disturbance to relieve him of his seemingly unending waiting.<sup>84</sup> If my time in spiritual work seems empty as I wait for the relief of company, and if my spiritual work seems to keep me from that which is more enjoyable, like friends, close relations, food, love, etc., then the work that I'm doing will seem empty and useless and I will begin to languish.

Acedia also tempts the monk to believe that there is no love among the brothers. If agape is the eventual hope of the monk in acesis, then the closer one gets to apatheia, the more discouraging a lack of agape would be to the monk. In effect, acedia is not only creating a disdain for the monk's temporal and spatial existence, but his existential one as well, in asserting that all his work and sacrifice is for nothing. It seems that the varied nature of acedia's attacks are why it was called the most oppressive of the demons. Not only does acedia repel one from manual labor, but it also makes the monk's work appear

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<sup>81</sup> Bunge, *Despondency*, 46.

<sup>82</sup> Nault, *The Noonday Devil*, 30.

<sup>83</sup> We see here a connection to Heidegger's understanding of boredom, in particular his first type of boredom. Perhaps it is even safe to say that here the monk is experiencing profound boredom to some extent, as the work he is doing is no longer seen as transcendent, and to some extent is secularized (though the term is anachronistic), and therefore, he is left empty in much the same way that the man in Heidegger's train station is.

<sup>84</sup> Vogel, "The Speed of Sloth," 59.

empty and as a waste of his life. Again, such an attack leaves the monk vulnerable to the attacks of other demons; but beyond that, it also is targeted at making the monk want walk away from the life of faithful service.

At the end of this passage, Evagrius encourages his monastic brothers to continue to fight against acedia because, while its attack leaves one vulnerable to other sins, its defeat creates peace and joy. When anger or one of the other demons were defeated, the monk could expect to be tired from the battle and therefore be attacked by another demon, but after the long battle with acedia, the monk feels almost a type of immunity toward other sins.<sup>85</sup> This tranquility in part comes from the fact that, while other sins attack a particular faculty of the monk, acedia attacks every faculty of the monk at the same time. Tristia operates in a similar fashion. Therefore, overthrowing the demon indicates a strengthening of the monk's soul in such a way that demons will be at a loss for ways to further tempt him, and this victory appears to be one of the final ones prior to entering the gnostic life.

The final of Evagrius' works that we will consider is *On Thoughts*, which, as note above, is written from the perspective of one already in the gnostic life. Unlike the works considered previously, *Thoughts* does not give acedia any focus in particular. However, the lack of a prolonged discussion does not mean that acedia is not present in *Thoughts*. Two features in this work are of note for our purposes. First, *Thoughts* introduces two new demons to Evagrius' list: vagabond and insensibility. The demon of vagabond moves the monk to want to leave the cell and visit others, hold conversations longer than

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<sup>85</sup> Kuhn, *The Demon of Noontide*, 44.



needed and find any escape from observing the work that lay before him.<sup>86</sup> The demon of insensibility, on the other hand, dulls the senses and makes one seem indifferent to sin in general. In the discussion of insensibility acedia is actually mentioned in passing as moving a monk to want to leave his cell.<sup>87</sup> These two demons, not mentioned elsewhere, both seem to comprise elements of acedia that have been discussed in previous works. In effect, it seems that acedia was not mentioned explicitly by name in *Thoughts*, not because it was overlooked, or not of note in the gnostic life, but rather because it was enhanced, and subdivided into two sins.

Second, and of greater note, is Evagrius' description of tristia, or sadness. Tristia has been included in Evagrius' lists in various works, even being called in *Vices* a "kinsman to acedia."<sup>88</sup> Later, in his work *To Monks in Monasteries and Communities*, Evagrius continues the connection between acedia and tristia by asserting in aphorism 56: "The spirit of acedia drives away tears; the spirit of sadness crushes prayer."<sup>89</sup> In *Thoughts* Evagrius presents tristia as the one demon that does not teach the monk to love pleasure, but instead cuts off everything that the monk might find pleasurable.<sup>90</sup> However, as we saw in *Praktikos*, acedia was the demon that did not instill a love of pleasure, but instead made dissatisfying other pleasures. Further, in *Praktikos*, tristia is understood as a frustration of one's desires, connected most closely to longing for the days prior to being

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<sup>86</sup> Evagrius, *Thoughts*, 159.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>88</sup> Evagrius, *Vices*, in *Evagrius of Pontus: the Greek Ascetic Corpus (Oxford Early Christian Studies (Paperback))* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 63.

<sup>89</sup> Evagrius, *Monks*, in *Evagrius of Pontus: the Greek Ascetic Corpus (Oxford Early Christian Studies (Paperback))* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 125.

<sup>90</sup> Evagrius, *Thoughts*, 161.

a monk.<sup>91</sup> The corollary between tristia and acedia is visible in nascent form in *Praktikos*, but the virtual exclusion of acedia in *Thoughts* and the inclusion of two new demons that appear to be specialized forms of acedia, as well as the expansion of the definition of tristia to seem to encompass much of acedia seems to indicate that even though Evagrius did not discuss acedia at length when discussing the demon from the perspective of the gnostic life, he did not see it as any less dangerous. Perhaps, the temptation became all the more pervasive. However, the connection between acedia and tristia is not explored any further in Evagrius' work.

How then does the monk overcome acedia? In his survey of Evagrius' work, Nault summarizes the five antidotes suggested to the monk: tears, prayer and work, *antirrhethikos* (talking back), meditation on death, and *hypomone* (perseverance).<sup>92</sup> The most basic of these is *hypomone*, or perseverance. In *Praktikos*, Evagrius encourages the monk facing the temptation to flee his cell instead to stay and fight. "Rather, you must remain seated inside, exercise perseverance, and valiantly welcome all attackers, especially the demon of acedia, who is the most oppressive of all but leaves the soul proven to the highest degree."<sup>93</sup> When acedia comes, the battle begins with a renewed commitment to staying committed to the monastic life through the four other ways of fighting that Nault lists. The first step in battling acedia is to be willing to battle acedia.

By tears, Evagrius means the outpouring of sorrow over sin. As noted above, acedia drives away tears; it dulls the monk to a place of feeling no concern for his salvation. In the practice of repenting, the tears of the monk reveal a concern for his soul,

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<sup>91</sup> Evagrius, *Praktikos*, 99.

<sup>92</sup> Nault, *The Noonday Devil*, 37-43.

<sup>93</sup> Evagrius, *Praktikos*, 192.

and a love for God. This practice is closely related with works and prayers (including psalmody, which is a type of prayer).<sup>94</sup> In *Foundations* Evagrius encourages those starting the monastic life to work with their hands so as not to burden anyone, but also to overcome acedia.<sup>95</sup> By working, the sluggishness normally associated with the sin now called sloth is put to an end. Further though, the works of confession and prayer are also works that help one overcome acedia. The demon makes spiritual work seem like a burden, but by proceeding with spiritual work, the power of acedia is weakened. In the same way that hardest battle facing the person starting a workout regimen is in the deciding to get dressed to go to the gym, the monk facing acedia wins a great victory in choosing to pray when shown how much easier it would be not to.

In the introductory section on Evagrius we discussed the *antirrhetic* method enough to see how the use of scripture is used to unseat an attacking demon by revealing its lies, so we need not discuss that here further. We turn then to the final method suggested in overcoming acedia: meditation on death. In *Monks* Evagrius writes, “As fire melts wax, so goodly vigil melts wicked thoughts.”<sup>96</sup> This aphorism is talking about meditation in general, but can be applied in this situation in particular. As the monk thinks on holy things, the appeal of the thoughts begins to fade. As the monk allows the representations of the angels to dominate his thoughts, the representations of the demons cannot gain a foothold. Why death though? Nault suggests that because of acedia’s temporal dimension, the temptation to break monastic vows is lessened in the face of our

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<sup>94</sup> Vost, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, 92.

<sup>95</sup> Evagrius, *Foundations*, in *Evagrius of Pontus: the Greek Ascetic Corpus (Oxford Early Christian Studies (Paperback))* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 9.

<sup>96</sup> Evagrius, *Monks*, 125.

terminus. Death gives life direction and significance.<sup>97</sup> This assertion raises questions about eternity that are beyond the scope of our study, however, the idea that being fully aware that the monk will die gives the monk the ability to stand firm and remain dedicated to his vows seems to be a suggestion that the monk will be motivated to fight, knowing that his struggle will have an end and it is to his detriment to have that end come before it ought. This motivation appears to some extent to be the inverse of Heidegger's understanding of death. The monk's impending death does not give life meaning in that there will come a time in which the monk no longer exists, but rather in that the fight is not perpetual and in death the monk sees a promised end point.

In Evagrius we see acedia take on a position as a sin that attacks monks and calls them away from their vows. This demon tempts monks by creating in them a lack of satisfaction, a diminished joy, a general uneasiness, a longing for relief from the burden of their call, a relaxation in the soul which comes from a holistic attack on the soul's faculties. Notice though that the issue is only related to monks. This limitation is a weakness in Evagrius' presentation and analysis of acedia. As profound and helpful as his thoughts are the matter might be, he cut himself off from the Christian community, and wrote exclusively to others who had done the same. As Evagrius studied acedia, he did so from a position that lacked community and fellowship. If a person is made in the image of God, and God is triune, then God is inherently communal, and it would seem that persons are inherently communal as well. In cutting himself off from community, it is likely that some of what Evagrius understood as acedia, actually was a desire to live a communal life with fellow believers.

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<sup>97</sup> Nault, *The Noonday Devil*, 42.

One interesting application for our consideration in light of the limited framework of how Evagrius presented acedia, is that in his hermetic life, having cut himself off from community, and living in isolation, acedia was that which made him desire distraction from his spiritual work. In the contemporary world, the idea of spiritual work is all but absent, and yet the distraction of technological devices have allowed for people to isolate themselves in a similar manner to the anchorite monks, without being aware of it.

Evagrius saw acedia as the sin that would keep one from their spiritual work, if he is correct, the contemporary world is so consumed with distraction because without it, it would become apparent that there is no spiritual work to do; and yet, the isolation that was a feature of the monk engaged in a spiritual battle in his cell, is a growing feature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century citizen who has unknowingly lost the spiritual battle, cradling her iPad.

If then, acedia is to be the root of the contemporary epidemic of profound boredom, it must apply to more than just those in the monastic community; no, it must be a universally applicable sin, which has become rooted in western culture. We turn now to briefly trace acedia's development throughout the middle ages until the time of Aquinas, who will give us the tools necessary to understand the applicability of acedia as a universally applicable sin.

### *Acedia from Evagrius to Aquinas*

Evagrius' ideas moved from the Eastern Church to the Western Church due in large part to John Cassian (360-435CE). When discussing the eight thoughts, Cassian made no changes to which sins were included in Evagrius' list, but did make a few alterations to the definitions of those sins. As related to acedia, Cassian describes the sin

as more connected to manual labor than to any of the aspects discussed above.<sup>98</sup> It would be easy to assert that Cassian merely dismissed acedia as laziness, which is the general meaning of the sin of sloth today; however, it is of note that when talking about acedia, Cassian saw fit to transliterate the word as opposed to translating it. Acedia is a Greek word, and Cassian's work is in Latin. Had he seen acedia as merely laziness, he would most likely have translated the word in Latin. Instead, so as to not lose any of the depth that Evagrius had developed in his work on acedia, Cassian transliterated acedia into Latin.<sup>99</sup> Beyond a lack of motivation for manual labor, Cassian continues to depict acedia as a temptation to see the monastic life as spiritually unfulfilling and therefore useless.<sup>100</sup>

The next thinker to interact at length with the eight thoughts was Pope Gregory the Great (540-604CE). In Gregory's commentary on Job, he recounts the list of the *logismoi*, but with a few alterations. First, he removes pride from the list and depicts it as the root that the other sins come from. Second, he adds envy to the list. And third, he combines acedia and tristia into one sin, often translated as dejection or melancholy.<sup>101</sup> Vogel posits that Gregory combined acedia and tristia into one sin because traditionally acedia had had such a small circle that were affected by it (the monks) and he wished to show that the sin could affect more than just the anchorites. It is also very likely that acedia was used as opposed to tristia, because tristia can be a positive when one sorrows over a proper object.<sup>102</sup> As noted earlier, while Evagrius did not combine tristia and

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<sup>98</sup> Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, "Sloth: Some Historical Reflections in Laziness, Effort, and Resistance to the Demands of Love," in *Virtues & Their Vices*, eds. Kevine Timpe and Craig Boyd (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 179.

<sup>99</sup> Nault, *The Noonday Devil*, 26.

<sup>100</sup> Jackson, "Acedia the Sin and Its Relationship to Sorrow", 174.

<sup>101</sup> Gregory commentary on Job xlv 87.

<sup>102</sup> Vogel, "The Speed of Sloth", 55.

acedia, throughout his work, and in *On Thoughts* in particular, he does seem to establish a connection between the two that Gregory makes use of as he meshes the sins into one.

The changes that Gregory made reduced the list of the eight thoughts to seven.

Following Gregory, acedia began to become synonymous with melancholy, or what we today might be called “burnout.”<sup>103</sup> The list of the now seven thoughts remained unchanged until the final alternations to the list were made by Hugh of Saint Victor (1096-1141). Hugh kept the list to seven, but added pride back to the list by merging it with vainglory. He also changed the name of melancholy/dejection back to acedia believing that it was a more accurate depiction of the sin, whereas melancholy was a disposition of one’s temperament. Finally, Hugh titled these sins the Capital Vices.<sup>104</sup> He used the term “capital” in its military context, indicating that these sins are the generals that lead the rest of the sins into battle. Since Hugh of Saint Victor, the Capital Vices have not been changed, meaning this list is the list that Thomas Aquinas uses in his work.

### *Aquinas on the Virtues*

Unlike Evagrius, Thomas Aquinas’ impact and influence has been notably felt throughout the western world. Aquinas was a 13<sup>th</sup> century Italian monk, of the Dominican Order, and was at the forefront of the movement to synthesize Aristotle’s recently rediscovered teaching with the theology and philosophy of his day. Aquinas’ theological system is the quintessential work of medieval thought, establishing a framework by which to understand the world through distinctly Christian lenses. It is no surprise then

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<sup>103</sup> James Williams, “Working for Reform: Acedia, Benedict of Aniane and the Transformation of Working Culture in Carolignian Monasticism,” in *Sin in Medieval and Early Modern Culture: The Tradition of the Seven Deadly Sins*, ed. Richard Newhauser and Susan J. Ridyard (Woodbridge, England: York Medieval Press, 2012), 21.

<sup>104</sup> Nault, *The Noonday Devil*, 54.

that it is in Aquinas that we find the most thorough and systematized discussion of the sin of acedia. To fully understand Aquinas' teaching that acedia is sorrow at friendship with God, we first need to understand his teachings on virtue, love, and friendship.

We begin with virtue. For Aristotle, the word *arête*, or "virtue," means goodness, or excellence after it's own kind.<sup>105</sup> Aquinas continues in this vein. "Virtue denotes a certain perfection of a power. Now a thing's perfection is considered chiefly in regard to its end. But the end of power is act. Wherefore power is said to be perfect, according as it is determinate to its act."<sup>106</sup> Virtue is the perfection of a power. It is the perfection of a power in the sense that the power obtains its proper end. In this same section, Aquinas concludes that virtue is a habit, and in the next section concludes that it is an operative habit, or a habit that produces action. By habit, Aquinas means a quality, which implies a disposition toward something's nature, operation, or end.<sup>107</sup> Therefore, virtue should be understood as a habit that is quality that inclines a power toward perfect, or its proper end. This line of thinking is in line with Augustine's, whose definition of virtue Aquinas defends in *Summa Theologica* I-II Q55, Article 4: "Virtue is a good quality of the mind, by which we live righteously, of which no one can make bad use, which God works in us, without us."<sup>108</sup>

Aquinas defends this definition of virtue by explaining the four-fold causation of virtue, as follows:

This definition comprises perfectly the whole essential notion of virtue. For the

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<sup>105</sup> Kevin Timpe and Craig Boyd, "Introduction," in *Virtues & Their Vices*, eds. Kevin Timpe and Craig Boyd (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 6.

<sup>106</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1911-1925), I-II q.55 a.1.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, I-II, q.49.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, I-II, q.55, a.4.



perfect essential notion of anything is gathered from all its causes. Now the above definition comprises all the causes of virtue. For the formal cause of virtue, as of everything, is gathered from its genus and difference, when it is defined as "a good quality": for "quality" is the genus of virtue, and the difference, "good." But the definition would be more suitable if for "quality" we substitute "habit," which is the proximate genus.

Now virtue has no matter "out of which" it is formed, as neither has any other accident; but it has matter "about which" it is concerned, and matter "in which" it exists, namely, the subject. The matter about which virtue is concerned is its object, and this could not be included in the above definition, because the object fixes the virtue to a certain species, and here we are giving the definition of virtue in general. And so for material cause we have the subject, which is mentioned when we say that virtue is a good quality "of the mind."

The end of virtue, since it is an operative habit, is operation. But it must be observed that some operative habits are always referred to evil, as vicious habits: others are sometimes referred to good, sometimes to evil; for instance, opinion is referred both to the true and to the untrue: whereas virtue is a habit which is always referred to good: and so the distinction of virtue from those habits which are always referred to evil, is expressed in the words "by which we live righteously": and its distinction from those habits which are sometimes directed unto good, sometimes unto evil, in the words, "of which no one makes bad use."

Lastly, God is the efficient cause of infused virtue, to which this definition applies; and this is expressed in the words "which God works in us without us." If we omit this phrase, the remainder of the definition will apply to all virtues in general, whether acquired or infused.<sup>109</sup>

Here we see that the formal cause of virtue is a habit, which exists in the material cause of virtue, namely, the mind. Earlier in this question Aquinas explains that humanity is constituted such that the body holds the place of matter, and the soul the place of form. Mankind shares possession of a material body with animals, with which he also shares

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid, I-II, q.55, a.4.

the sensory appetites; however the rational appetites are in humanity but not in animals, the same goes for the virtues. Therefore, Aquinas concludes that virtues are not of the body, since they do not appear among animals.<sup>110</sup>

The final cause of virtue is action, not merely any action, but rather action that is good, and just. Timpe and Boyd understand Aquinas to see a person as acting virtuously if her actions are in accordance with right reason and promote human flourishing.<sup>111</sup> A virtue is a perfection of a power, and the perfection of a power is the end of that power, and the end of a power is action.<sup>112</sup> Virtue leads to human flourishing in establishing within us a desire for right things. Note, virtues (and vices) are operative habits, that lead to or incline toward morally right acts; they are not the actions themselves.<sup>113</sup> A person who commits a vicious act can be punished for the act, and the act may have come from a vice, but the act is the sin, the vice is not.<sup>114</sup> In the same fashion, courage is a virtue, in that it leads to virtuous acts, which are morally good, but the virtue is praiseworthy because it leads toward actions, and therefore toward a life, that is morally upright. We will return to the issue of action in due course, but for our purpose thus far the term virtue can be understood as summarized by Qiaoying, “[virtue] is a disposition that perfects human capacities and thus allows for actions to be carried out in accordance with reason.”<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid, I-II, q.55, a.2.

<sup>111</sup> Timpe and Boyd, 19.

<sup>112</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q.55, a.1.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, I-II q.55, a.3.

<sup>114</sup> Vost, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, 74.

<sup>115</sup> Lu Qiaoying, “Aquinas's Transformation of the Virtue of Courage,” *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 8, no. 3 (2013): 473.

The efficient cause of infused virtue is God Himself, who works this virtue in us, without us. It should be noted however, that while this statement seems to indicate that God only acts as the efficient cause of the infused virtues, Aquinas will later assert that charity (a theological virtue) is the mother of all the virtues, and it is an infused virtue, so while virtues can develop without God acting as efficient cause, those same virtues are not perfected until charity is infused in a person.

However, before getting ahead of ourselves, Augustine's definition of virtue, and the associated caveats, bring us to a division in the virtues. Aquinas notes that if the last line of Augustine's definition is removed ("which God works in us, without us") then the rest of the definition applies to all virtues, but with that line included, it applies explicitly to infused virtues. Our primary concern in this work will be in the infused, or theological, virtues, but we will here turn briefly to discuss all three divisions.

The virtues can be divided into three types; intellectual, moral, and theological. The intellectual virtues are discussed as virtues in Aquinas, but in a qualified sense. A habit can be called a virtue for two reasons: it makes one apt to do good, and it confers the proper use of that ability. The second of these ways does not apply to the virtues of the specular habits, but the first does. Aside from prudence (which is also a moral virtue), the other intellectual virtues (art, understanding, science, and wisdom) make people capable of good, but can be done with a bad will.<sup>116</sup> A true moral virtue perfects a person to be inclined toward goodness and can only be so inclined with a good will. For this reason, the intellectual virtues are not considered moral virtues.<sup>117</sup> With said caveat,

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<sup>116</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q.57.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, I-II, q.58, a.2.

the intellectual virtues will not be discussed further in this work, as they are not directly connected to the issues related to acedia and boredom.

The second type of virtue is moral virtue. Moral virtues are habits that pertain to the appetitive faculty, toward the desire, or the will.<sup>118</sup> The central moral virtues are also referred to as the cardinal virtues (and therefore the terms will be used interchangeably unless noted). Indeed, Aquinas asserts that all moral virtues, to some extent, fall under the cardinal virtues.<sup>119</sup> The cardinal virtues are: prudence, justice, temperance and courage.<sup>120</sup> They were present in Aristotle and therefore have been called the classical virtues, or the pagan virtues, but they also have been more helpfully called the acquired virtues.<sup>121</sup> Each of these virtues is the perfection of one of capacities of the soul: intellect, will, concupiscent nature, and irascible nature.<sup>122</sup> For example, courage is the virtue that is the perfection of the irascible power, meaning that as courage is perfect, the irascible power of the human soul draws more directly toward its proper end.<sup>123</sup> Courage is cardinal in that every virtue that pertains to the irascible nature is in some way related to courage.

The cardinal virtues, are considered acquired in that they make use of natural, or quasi-natural, inborn inclinations in the human person toward certain actions. These natural inclinations are what Aquinas calls appetites.<sup>124</sup> An appetite is the inclination of a person toward a thing that she desires, which is similar or suitable toward her.<sup>125</sup> When

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., I-II, q.58, a.1.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., I-II, q.61.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>121</sup> Sheryl Overmyer, "Saint Thomas Aquinas's Pagan Virtues? Putting the Question to Jennifer Herdt's 'putting On Virtue'," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 41, no. 4 (2013): 683.

<sup>122</sup> Timpe and Boyd, "Introduction," 15.

<sup>123</sup> Qiaoying, "Aquinas's Transformation of the Virtue of Courage," 472.

<sup>124</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q.58, a.1.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., I-II, q.8, a.1.

an appetite is moved in some way due to perceiving something as either good or evil, that movement is called a passion. Lombardo explains that “passion” means the act of being acted upon; it implies a metaphysical deficiency, or a potential that can be actualized.<sup>126</sup> Nault expounds on this idea seeing love as the fundamental passion given that everything we do we do comes from a kind of love. As he puts it, “Passions are initial experiences of happiness.”<sup>127</sup> This understanding of love will be vital when we further discuss Aquinas’ understanding of action. Passions, like appetites, are neutral, but become good or evil based upon the object toward which they become inclined.

Aquinas is clear that moral virtues should not be seen as passions for three reasons: First, a passion is a movement of the sense appetite, but virtue is not a movement, rather, it is a principle that dictates movement. Second, passions are neither good nor evil, but virtue can only be referred to as good. Third, passions begin in the appetite and end in the reason given that passions aim for conformity to reason, whereas virtue begins in the reason and ends in the appetite, insofar as appetite is moved by reason.<sup>128</sup> Put another way, moral virtues are not passions in that they are principles that dictate how the passions are inclined. Virtues train the appetites, which in turn incline the passions. Since a person is born with appetites, and those appetites are inclined toward things that he sees as similar to himself or as pleasing, whenever he judges something incorrectly, i.e. something that should not please, or that is not fit for him, the appetites lead him toward that which is wrong. However, if virtue is practiced, the appetites can be properly

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<sup>126</sup> Nicholas E. Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire: Aquinas On Emotion* (Washington, District of Columbia: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 20, 35. Given that God is pure actuality and lacks potential, God lacks both appetite and passions.

<sup>127</sup> Nault, *The Noonday Devil*, 63.

<sup>128</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q.59, a.1.

inclined and lead toward good. In this way, an individual is able to acquire the moral virtues through practice, with no need for action on the part of another entity. Since the virtues aim at flourishing, and therefore happiness, the pagan man pursuing the cardinal virtues can know happiness, but only an imperfect form of it because true happiness can only be found once the theological virtues have been added to the cardinal virtues.<sup>129</sup>

The intellectual and cardinal virtues are proportionate to human nature, comprehensible to human reason, and acquirable through human action, but the third set of virtues, the theological virtues, are distinct and operate in a completely different manner. Aquinas explains that man's happiness is twofold in nature. In one way, mankind's happiness is proportionate to human nature, and therefore can be acquired through the virtues already discussed. In another way, however, there is a greater happiness that surpasses human nature, and man cannot participate in it unless he in some way becomes a partaker in the divine nature. Here, God adds to the person additional principles, whereby he can now, with divine assistance, pursue supernatural happiness.<sup>130</sup> These principles are called theological virtues, "first, because their object is God, inasmuch as they direct us aright to God: secondly, because they are infused in us by God alone: thirdly, because these virtues are not made known to us, save by Divine revelation, contained in Holy Writ."<sup>131</sup>

The theological virtues are infused rather than acquired. Infused virtues are different in that they flow from grace, or put another way, they are superadded to the

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<sup>129</sup> Timpe and Boyd, "Introduction," 26.

<sup>130</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q.62, a.1.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

person by God Himself.<sup>132</sup> The three theological virtues are faith, hope, and charity. These three are rightly called virtues in that they incline the person toward the end of supernatural happiness, but unlike the cardinal virtues, the formation and growth of these three is not located in practicing the virtue, but rather pursuing God. One does not have greater hope by practicing hope, as if it were a part of the human nature, rather, one grows in hope by loving the God who infuses the individual with that hope. These virtues are added first to the intellect in the manner of faith. The will then is inclined toward God as that which is attainable (hope) and in a desire for union (charity).<sup>133</sup> The theological virtues build off of each other in that there is an order of generation. Faith precedes hope, which itself precedes charity, for it is by faith that the intellect apprehends God. But, there is not only an order of generation; there is also an order of perfection. Whereas charity comes after the other two in generation, it is the virtue that quickens and perfects, not only the theological virtues, but all other virtues.<sup>134</sup> Indeed, Aquinas goes so far as to assert that charity is the form of the virtues.<sup>135</sup> This assertion means that Aquinas sees love as the central component of action.

In his analysis of charity, Levering notes that Aquinas places charity at the center of the *Summa*. Charity is the friendship that arises when the triune God communicates His happiness to an individual. It heals our fallen will and allows us to desire things rightly.<sup>136</sup> This friendship cannot exist without faith; however, this friendship perfects

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<sup>132</sup> Thomas O'Meara, "Virtues in Theology of Thomas Aquinas," *Theological Studies* 58 (1997): 254-85.

<sup>133</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q.62, a.3.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., I-II, q.65, a.4.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., I-II, q.62, a.4.

<sup>136</sup> Matthew Levering, *The Betrayal of Charity: The Sins That Sabotage Divine Love* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2011), 2-5.

faith, as it perfects all the other virtues, it even outlasts hope and faith given that charity continues into the eternal state.<sup>137</sup> Charity is central to Aquinas, and we will explore it as friendship with God in the next section; however, first we need to understand charity as love and understand how love interacts with virtue.

As mentioned previously, every action we perform originates in a type of love. When I behold an object that I am drawn toward, I pursue it, and in that pursuit I am changed. Therefore, we see that, in a very real way, virtues lead to human flourishing because they lead toward actions that shape the heart and mind of the one performing the actions. Aquinas' understanding of action is displayed in three movements: affective union, desire, and real union. Nault uses the example of a woman seeing earrings in a store window. Initially she sees the earrings and there is a moment of change, a moment in which they impact her. Once impacted, she begins to be adapted to the earrings, and eventually she begins to think of what union with the earrings would be like. These three steps happen within the first movement of action--affective union. An object, or entity, imprints on an individual and begins to shape her. This shaping leads to the second movement in action, desire. At this moment, envisioning union with the earrings, the woman sets her potency toward achieving this union. In Nault's example the woman reminds her husband that their anniversary is coming up. The final movement of action is actual union, or joy. In Nault's example this is the woman who gets the earrings and rejoices in possessing them.<sup>138</sup>

Nault's story is trivial, but it is helpful in its triviality. By it we can see that action starts out of a love that forms when something pleasing is presented. This understanding

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<sup>137</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q.67.

<sup>138</sup> Nault, *The Noonday Devil*, 65.



of action will be applicable to our discussion of charity as divine and human friendship, but in our present discussion it reveals the importance of rightly ordered appetites, or put more clearly, perfected virtues. If a man's appetites are inclined properly, then what imprints on him and is seen as desirable will be that which is virtuous, and therefore his actions will be morally right, which in turn will help mold his character.

Love then becomes this central principle in that a person is compelled by of love, and changed because of what her loves. Charity then, as a particular type of love that originates from God, and that He infuses by grace into His children, directs the love of a person toward her last end, namely, back to God. God Himself is perfect and therefore does not have an end beyond Himself for which He acts, but He is the end for which all creation is to act.<sup>139</sup> Therefore, all moral virtue can only be perfected by being infused together with charity, which repairs the will, and the desire, of its recipient, in order to enable her to properly love God and the things of God.<sup>140</sup> It is in this way that Aquinas posits charity as the form of the virtues.

Related to virtues, form is dictated by efficient cause. In morals, the efficient cause gives form to an act. Charity is not the exemplar cause, nor the essential cause, but rather the efficient cause, acting as the root that sustains the virtues and the hand that guides the virtues, but does not comprise the other virtues.<sup>141</sup> Kauth explains that if charity were the exemplary form of the virtues, then they would all be of the same species, and clearly if it was the essential form of the virtues, then all virtues would be

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<sup>139</sup> Matthew Kauth, *Charity as Divine and Human Friendship: a Metaphysical and Scriptural Explanation According to the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Rome: Saint Benedict Press, LLC, 2013), 14.

<sup>140</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q.65, a.3.

<sup>141</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q.23, a.8.

the same virtue. Instead, Kauth notes Aquinas' example of a builder commanding a stonemason to cut stones toward the form of building a house.<sup>142</sup> The stonemason continued being a stonemason and doing the work of masonry, but the target, the end of his masonry was more than just the carving of a stone, but it was the building of a house. In the same way, courage remains courage, and prudence remains prudence, but when infused with charity, both are perfected and a person no longer is courageous or prudent as ends in themselves, but rather toward the end of perfect union with the triune God who has infused charity into her soul.

For Aquinas, "Virtue is a good quality of the mind, by which we live righteously, of which no one can make bad use, which God works in us, without us." As we have seen, virtue is a habit that trains the appetites and the passions to incline toward things that are inline with reason. Intellectual and moral virtues can be cultivated apart from God, but theological virtues must be infused in us by God, and in that infusion, God is revealed to be the efficient cause of the virtues, and the charity which He infuses in us then gives fuel and direction to the virtues which can now be perfected as they are no longer inclined toward goodness for the sake off goodness, but rather as they are inclined toward God for the sake of God. This inclination is rooted in the nature of charity as more than just love, but as friendship with the divine. With this understanding of Thomistic virtue as a foundation, we turn now to understanding first the relationship between love and friendship, and then the divine/human friendship that is central to Aquinas' understanding of charity, and therefore, acedia.

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<sup>142</sup> Kauth, *Charity as Divine and Human Friendship*, 179-182.

### *Love and Friendship in Aquinas*

The ultimate end of man is the enjoyment of God, and in order for man to enjoy God, he must be ordered by charity. It is possible for a person to do good apart from God, but the virtue inclining him toward that good is a lesser virtue, and not a virtue in its highest form. An act without charity can be generically good, but it cannot be perfectly so.<sup>143</sup> Charity, as the form of the virtues, and the perfecter of the virtues, guides a person into a deep and loving relationship with God, and therefore toward the fulfillment of this ultimate end. Love then is key in the fulfillment of mankind's purpose. Love is key in this fulfillment given that we enjoy that which we are like, and love shapes us to be like that which we love. Love fulfills mankind's ultimate end because it transforms humanity into people who rejoice in God.

Charity is not the only type of love. Levering's summary of the three types of love Aquinas mentions is helpful. First, there is *amor*. Amor is a sense passion that arises as a response to a good, or a perceived good. Second, there is *dilectio*. Dilectio adds to the concept of amor the notion of free choice, and intellectual consent toward the good. Finally there is *caritas*, or charity. Charity encompasses the lower two, but adds to them the elevation of the will into the Trinitarian good, leading one to love God, and to love others in light of God.<sup>144</sup> Each of these loves builds on each other, so amor can be called love, but it is not love in the same way or at the same depth that charity is love. What each of these loves holds in common though, is that they each include a moment of

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<sup>143</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q.23, a.7.

<sup>144</sup> Levering, *The Betrayal of Charity*, 6.

*extasis*, or a going out of oneself toward the beloved.<sup>145</sup> As Porzeczanski explains,

“...Aquinas argues that when the appetite or affection (*affectus*) fixes itself on an object apprehended as good, the loved good impresses its form on the appetite or the affect of the lover, not unlike the way the intelligible forms impress their form on the intellect. The fact that the beloved impresses its form on the lover’s appetite creates a kind of union: ‘the lover is one with the beloved, who is made into the form of the lover.’ In this fashion, as Aquinas says, love can be said to be ‘transformative.’”<sup>146</sup>

Every type of love is transformative. The beloved always imprints on the lover and therefore changes the lover; and in loving the beloved, the lover is herself changed even further.

It is important to clarify that love is not to be entirely equated with desire. Aquinas classifies them as different passions of the concupiscent appetite.<sup>147</sup> However, it is easy to see how love and desire could be mistaken for one another. Indeed, if love is defined as willing the good for another, then in common parlance “desire” would be a synonym for “will.” This substitution would not be fully accurate though. If an appetite is an inclination toward something, and love is an inclination toward a good in and of itself, then desire is the longing for that good (or perceived good). Gilson elucidates the difference between love and desire thusly, “Desire is merely the form which love takes when its object is absent.”<sup>148</sup> Love then sparks a desire for the good, and the lover experiences that desire until it is satisfied (as was detailed in the example of the earrings above). It would not be correct to say that love is the same as desire, but it would not be

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Daniel Porzeczanski, “Aquinas on Concord: ‘Concord is a Union of Wills, Not of Opinions’,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 57 (September 2003): 25-42. 28.

<sup>147</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q.23, a.4. “there are six passions for the concupiscent appetite: love and hatred, desire and aversion, joy and sadness; and five for the irascible appetite: hope and despair, courage, fear, and anger.”

<sup>148</sup> Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Random House, 1956), 279.

incorrect to say that desire is the response to love not obtaining its intended good.

If love is delight at a good in and of itself, and desire is the longing for an absent good, joy is the satisfaction, or rest, at a present or achieved good. For this reason, Aquinas sees love as a virtue, but not joy. Charity attains and unites us with God, while joy is the effect of that attainment.<sup>149</sup> Desire and joy are related to love, and are a part of the cycle of love mentioned above, but neither of them is explicitly love. At this point it is helpful to again note that the lower level of love, love that is a passion, can properly be called love, but it is not perfected love, that which is called charity. Both charity, and the love of desire (*amor*) are caused by an appetite finding satisfaction (or presumed satisfaction) in a good, and that good therefore appears beautiful to the lover. However, these two loves are not the same.

The love of desire is related to the sense appetite, and the goods that it is related to are those apprehended by the senses. Charity's subject, however, is the divine, which is not related to the senses and therefore is related to the intellectual appetite, or the will.<sup>150</sup> Love that is on the level of the passions can indeed be called love, but it is not the basis for friendship. One can love wine, but what one loves in wine is the pleasure that wine gives her, which is not friendship. Indeed, Aquinas notes that it would be absurd to speak of friendship with wine.<sup>151</sup>

The love of desire does not merely apply to food and drink though. Humans often love others with the love of desire and mistake this love for charity, and therefore mistake their relationships with others for friendship, when friendship is not there. If a man loves

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<sup>149</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q.23, a.3.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, II-II, q.24, a.1.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, II-II, q.23, a.1.

someone because of what he can get from that person, that is not true friendship, though it is a type of love.<sup>152</sup> Today we would talk about this type of love as either objectifying or as using the other person. This relationship might even be mutually beneficial, but that does not make the relationship one of friendship.

The love of friendship, charity, is not merely one of desire, but also of mutual connection. Gilson is helpful in understanding the way the two types of love are formed in an individual:

“The cause properly speaking of love lies in the relation between the lover and the loved. This relation itself is of two kinds. When a being lacks something and meets what it lacks, it covets it. Love of concupiscence arises then out of the fact that two beings are complementary, or to speak in technical fashion, out of the fact that one is in potency what the other is in act. But sometimes two beings meet and are both in act and in the same relation. This is so when an artist meets another artist or a scholar another scholar. There is a specific community of form or resemblance between them: *convenientia in forma* [agreement in form]. In this case there is usually established a love of friendship.”<sup>153</sup>

As we can see, the love of desire is formed when one sees in another the fulfillment of something they lack, and in that fulfillment there is pleasure. Therefore, “friendship” with that person is about nothing more than satisfying desire. It is clear though how one could approach God in this manner. In God, a person finds the complete fulfillment of all her privations.

While the love of desire is inherently self-loving, the love of friendship is more about loving another than it is about being loved by another.<sup>154</sup> In Gilson’s quote above we see that this love comes from an agreement, or commonality between the two lovers. They do not seek their own, they do not seek their own benefit, but instead they delight in

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<sup>152</sup> Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy*, 274.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 276.

<sup>154</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q.25, a.1.

one another and/or encourage each other in virtue. Aquinas categorizes friendship into three types: useful, delight, virtue.<sup>155</sup> Of these, the latter two are the actual loves of friendship.

However, this entire framework does present a notable issue. If charity is indeed the love of divine human friendship, and the love of God that supernaturally allows man to love his fellow man as God loves them, how is it possible for a human to experience and be capable of charity? The idea of divine and human friendship seems to contradict reason. When a woman stands before God, she sees within Him the fulfillment of her privations, as He is in perpetual act, and she is not. Further, because she cannot be in perpetual act, she can never find within God a kinship of the type that the artists in Gilson's quote establish. Further still, unlike God, she is not in perpetual act so they are not peers, nor does God find the fulfillment of a privation, as God is without privation, so this cannot be similar to the lower level of human loves. This question is central to understanding divine and human friendship, but prior to addressing it, we need first to flesh out more fully what Aquinas means when he uses the word "friendship."

Synthesizing Aquinas' commentaries on both Aristotle's *Ethics* and Lombard's *Sentences* with his work in the *Summa*, Kauth posits the following definition for Aquinas' understanding of friendship:

"Thomas finds that friendship itself has five basic characteristics or acts. As with any definition, remove one of these essential components and friendship is rendered impossible. The definition of friendship which I propose is a virtue founded upon some *communicatio* whose acts are:

- 1) mutual known benevolence as *amor amicitiae*;
- 2) mutually known benevolence as *amor concupiscentiae*;
- 3) beneficence
- 4) concord and

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., II-II, q.23, a.5.

5) delight.”<sup>156</sup>

Without these five things, there is no true friendship. A lesser friendship, perhaps a friendship formed on the love of desire, might exist apart from point one, and an acquaintanceship can exist apart from many of these, but actual friendship requires all five of these elements.

Starting first with the requisite for friendship, we consider *communicatio*. *Communicatio* is simply that which people share in common.<sup>157</sup> This commonality could be working together, living by one another, enjoying the same TV show, etc. Without some platform of commonality, community cannot form, and without community, then friendship cannot form.<sup>158</sup> It also appears that the stronger the *communicatio*, the greater the chance that friendship could develop (perhaps working on the same floor of a building, as opposed to just working in the same building). Further, we can pause momentarily to consider the eventual definition of acedia as sorrow at the demands placed on us by friendship with God, and see how even in the establishment of community, people place some small demands on us. In being in proximity to each other we breathe the same air, we hear the noises the other person makes, etc. Even at the smallest level, everyone places demands on each other, and as friendship develops between two individuals, those demands increase.

Once *communicatio* has been established, the starting place of true friendship is benevolence. The difference between benevolence and concupiscence (love of desire) is essentially one of the object toward which it is aimed. The latter is a love directed toward

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<sup>156</sup> Kauth, *Charity as Divine and Human Friendship*, 129.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 145-147.

<sup>158</sup> Perhaps here we see an issue that led to Evagrius' struggles with acedia in that his very manner living made such commonality impossible, and therefore friendship a rarity.



a secondary quality of the person, whereas the former is toward the person in and of herself. As Kauth states, “In other words, *amor amicitiae* [benevolence] is willing good to another upon the recognition of the good that they are with which I have congruity or pleasing affinity.”<sup>159</sup> *Amicitiae* is the ability to see the other as another self. A person might find something in another person desirable, perhaps their laugh or the way they treat people, but both of these are qualities about the person, not the person herself. In this situation, one in fact desires these things because of how they make her feel, in much the same way that a person would desire wine. However, as mentioned earlier, one does not have friendship with wine.<sup>160</sup> The reason one does not have anything more than *concupiscentiae* for wine is because wine is not a rational creature. Wine cannot be seen as another self, whereas another person can, and should, be seen as such. In benevolence, a person wills good to the other in the same way that she wills good to herself because she sees the other as another, or a second, self.

As we stand in *amor amicitiae* toward another, we see them as another self and therefore approach them as we approach ourselves. We desire good for them, we want to see them do that which is proper, and we mourn their failings, but still within the framework of love. Aquinas asserts, “We are to hate in the sinner his being a sinner and to love in him his being a man capable of bliss.”<sup>161</sup> The sin of the other does not take away our love for him, if that were the case it would be merely *amor concupiscentiae* and the love would fade when the desirable quality was gone (like the desire for a particular

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 110 footnote 132.

<sup>160</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q.23, a.1.

<sup>161</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q.25, a.6.

steak leaves once it has spoiled). Instead, in the face of sin, the lover loves the beloved as the lover loves the self, and desires repentance and proper delight for him.

In actual friendship both *amor amicitiae* and *amor concupiscentiae* are required. The lover loves the beloved because of the being the beloved is, and that allows the lover's desire to find rest in the other as another self. However, this love cannot be one way. Notice in Kauth's definition above, both of these acts must be mutual. If I love someone, and that love is not returned, then that person is not a true friend. The love that I have for him is a good thing, but since it is not returned, we do not have friendship. For actual friendship to be the case, both parties must will the good for the other who they have a pleasing affinity with (*amicitiae*) and love because of who/what they are; and delight in those qualities within the other that they find pleasing (*concupiscentiae*). If one lacks the former, then the friendship is merely one of utility in which the lover wishes a type of good to the beloved, but the ultimate good to himself.<sup>162</sup> If one lacks the latter, then no true friendship can develop because no concord can develop. In both cases, charity is absent, because charity is a mutual love.<sup>163</sup>

The third attribute of friendship is mutual beneficence.<sup>164</sup> Beneficence is benevolence made known. The good which one desires for herself, she will attempt to acquire for herself. If she sees the beloved as another self, she will then attempt to acquire the good for the beloved as well, and this action is beneficence.<sup>165</sup> In fact, since love is not static for Aquinas, it is possible to determine what a person loves most, based upon

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<sup>162</sup> Kauth, *Charity as Divine and Human Friendship*, 113.

<sup>163</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q.23, a.1.

<sup>164</sup> Kauth does not include the word "mutual" in his initial definition on page 129, but he does add it in his discussion of Aquinas' work on page 152.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

whose good that person seeks the most.<sup>166</sup> In true friendship then, since the lover sees the beloved as another self, the lover seeks the good of the beloved as fervently as she seeks her own good.

The fourth attribute of friendship is concord. In his article *Aquinas on Concord* Porzecanski begins by noting that in at least six places Aquinas states that concord is a union of wills, not opinions.<sup>167</sup> Likeness causes love, and in love the lover wishes to be as like the loved as possible. He wishes to participate in the form of the loved as much as his particular mode of being is open to doing so.<sup>168</sup> He wants to have union and peace with the beloved. However, goods and opinions are different in that goods are a matter of the will, and opinions are a matter of the intellect. Love, charity, is a matter of the will, and therefore is concerned with goods, but not opinions (insofar as opinions do not affect goods). Therefore, it is possible to have differing opinions and yet still love one another.<sup>169</sup> Concord then should be understood as union or agreement in that which leads to flourishing. It is possible for a person to be friends with someone who likes different movies than he does, but one cannot have concord with a person who is drawn to differing goods.

The final attribute in Kauth's summary of Aquinas' definition of friendship is delight. Delight has undergirded the entirety of the discussion of friendship, but in particular Kauth here emphasizes society and free choice, or open and elected

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<sup>166</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q.26, a.4.

<sup>167</sup> Daniel Porzecanski, "Aquinas on Concord: 'Concord is a Union of Wills, Not of Opinions'," *The Review of Metaphysics* 57 (September 2003): 25-42. 25.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-28.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

communication.<sup>170</sup> In effect saying that friendship entails a want to spend time with one another and choosing to communicate with one another. We can say then that friendship is centered on unity. In friendship the lover is the beloved of the beloved, and vice versa. Both lovers see the other as an object of delight in which they share commonality, display their mutual love, find rest in each other's presence, and ultimately delight in as a good being both loved by God, and capable of loving God. Gilson summarizes this in noting that friendship is ecstatic by definition. It takes us out of ourselves and unites us with the other.<sup>171</sup>

Having considered Aquinas' understanding of friendship, we return to the question of how charity can be seen as friendship with God? If friendship entails all that was just stated, in what way can one be called a true friend of God, when it seems that we have no *communicatio* with God, we lack mutual beneficences and benevolence since we are born at enmity with Him, and it does not appear that we have any concord with Him. These concerns are the basis of the next section.

### ***Charity as Friendship with God***

Thus far we have seen that charity is the mother of, the formal cause, and the perfecter of the virtues. All virtues find their root in charity, are guided by charity, and are not perfect until properly ordered by charity. Charity itself is an infused virtue that is actually the perfect form of love. It may subsume other forms of love, but charity is what is meant by love in a true, Christian sense for Aquinas, and that is because charity is a particular type of friendship, based in and infused by the love of God. God Himself is

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<sup>170</sup> Kauth, *Charity as Divine and Human Friendship*, 153.

<sup>171</sup> Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy*, 276.

love, and loves all His creatures.<sup>172</sup> However, in light of the previous section and Kauth's distillation of Aquinas' understanding of friendship, how can mankind hope to be friends with the divine? How can charity be defined as friendship between God and man?

The answer starts in Aquinas' understanding that charity is beyond mankind's natural gifts and is therefore a gratuitous gift of grace given by God. This gift is the fellowship of everlasting happiness.<sup>173</sup> God Himself is perpetually happy, and He shares that happiness with humanity as the start of friendship. This friendship, or charity, is infused in mankind by the Holy Spirit. Lombard said that the Holy Spirit Himself was charity, but Aquinas understands this statement to mean not that charity is the third person of the godhead, but rather that the Spirit infuses people with charity directly without an intermediate habit.<sup>174</sup> So the ability to have friendship with God is given to mankind by God Himself. O'Mera, referring to the virtues as a whole, puts it beautifully, "Out of divine love and wisdom the human is offered a supernatural destiny."<sup>175</sup>

Since not all love is friendship, and charity is actual friendship with God, God then must have true benevolence for humanity, not merely desire.<sup>176</sup> Indeed, God does not love humanity as though humanity meets a need in God, but rather God loves humanity out of a want to love humanity, and out of a want to allow humanity to love Him. In fact, humanity cannot know true happiness apart from the happiness of loving God.<sup>177</sup> Aquinas expresses this truth by means of Augustine: "On the contrary, According to Augustine (De Doctr. Christ. i), to enjoy is to cleave to something for its own sake.

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<sup>172</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-I, q.20.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., II-II, q.24, a.2.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., II-II, q.23, a.2.

<sup>175</sup> O'Meara, "Virtues in Theology of Thomas Aquinas."

<sup>176</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q.23, a.1.

<sup>177</sup> Josef Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 224.

Now ‘God is to be enjoyed’ as he says in the same book. Therefore God is to be loved for Himself.”<sup>178</sup> Notice that, while one might have *amor concupiscentiae* for the benefits of God, one also must have *amor amicitiae* for God as well.

It seems obvious why one might develop *amor concupiscentiae* for God, at least in a basic and self-serving way, but *amor amicitiae* is a gift. In his study on charity, Levering notes that when God communicates His blessedness to someone, He creates with her *communicatio* and a likeness with Himself.<sup>179</sup> This infusion establishes the basis for friendship that eventually will grow into concord, and it also establishes *amor amicitiae*, or seeing God as another self.<sup>180</sup> This *communicatio* references the church, the incarnation, but also the goodness of God and the intertrinitarian love of God, which manifests itself in concord and beneficence.

Aquinas speaks of the person in this world growing in virtue and love as the wayfarer. He uses this image of a traveler to indicate that the wayfarer is not yet where she desires to be, but is moving toward that goal and is being guided there by God. The wayfarer is seeking God and therefore embracing friendship with Him. As she grows closer to God, her love for Him will increase; it will become more intense.<sup>181</sup> This infusion of charity has no breaking in the state of the wayfarer. As long as she draws nearer still to God, charity will increase within her.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q.27, a.3.

<sup>179</sup> Levering, *The Betrayal of Charity*, 7.

<sup>180</sup> It should be noted that in friendship, seeing God as another self is not either deifying man, or un-deifying God. Rather, it is referencing the relationship structure already discussed in which the one in friendship with God will seek the good for God, just as God seeks the good for her. The unique feature in this friendship being that God is the good for Himself, and also the ultimate good for the one with whom God has friendship.

<sup>181</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q.24, a.4-5.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, II-II, q.24, a.7.

As the wayfarer grows in charity, she will focus not on being loved, but on being more loving. The friend of God will love for the sake of loving.<sup>183</sup> Friendship with God will bleed into love of neighbor, and even into love of enemy. Aquinas explains that to love enemies on account of their being enemies is perverse, because charity cannot love evil; however, the more that one loves God, the more she will grow to love the neighbor for His sake. Aquinas uses the example of being friends with a man who has a disobedient child. Even though the child is unfriendly, out of love for the man, one might come to love the child, and perhaps we can extrapolate that initially one loves the man despite the fact that the child is unfriendly, but ultimately love for the child manifests.<sup>184</sup> In the same way, while the wayfarer does not love her enemy because she is her enemy, she does love her enemy because she loves God, and God loves her enemy. Here we see that charity transforms the person, challenges the person, and makes demands on a person to change into being a more loving person.

In drawing close to God, the wayfarer can come to have charity perfected in this life. God is Himself perfect, meaning that there is no potential in Him. Perfection pertains to actuality. Something like matter is imperfect, in that it exists in perpetual potentiality, but God, exists in a state of pure actuality.<sup>185</sup> As God perfects charity in the wayfarer, He actualizes its potential toward its proper end more fully. That proper end is in the fullness of friendship with God. The Christian life is perfected radically in charity.<sup>186</sup> God is perfect, and charity is the divine love that perfects the virtues, and therefore the wayfarer.

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<sup>183</sup> Levering, *The Betrayal of Charity*, 20.

<sup>184</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q.25, a.8.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, I, q.4, a.1.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, II-II, q.184, a.1.

The Christian is perfected in relation to God, and as he pursues God more deeply, the more deeply he is perfected.

Aquinas lists four ways that charity can be perfected. The first is that the one who is loved is loved as fully as he ought be loved. In the case of friendship with God, the only entity capable of loving an infinitely loveable God as fully as He ought be loved is God Himself. Therefore, humans cannot have charity perfected in this manner. However, charity can be perfected in relation to one who loves. This perfection can happen in three ways. One's heart can be borne toward God, but this is the perfection of heaven and not one that applies to the wayfarer in this life. However, the last two ways in which charity might be perfected are of note for our study:

“Secondly, so that man makes an earnest endeavor to give his time to God and Divine things, while scorning other things except in so far as the needs of the present life demand. This is the perfection of charity that is possible to a wayfarer; but is not common to all who have charity. Thirdly, so that a man gives his whole heart to God habitually, viz. by neither thinking nor desiring anything contrary to the love of God; and this perfection is common to all who have charity.”<sup>187</sup>

Here we see the fruit of our study of Aquinas. Charity gives birth, guides, and perfects the virtues. Charity is friendship with the divine, in which God provides all the requisite attributes and acts. However, it is up to the wayfarer, lost in a far off land, to respond to charity and embrace friendship with God. To do so, as charity is perfected, as the wayfarer progresses, demands are made on her. In perfect charity all other things are secondary to God; all sinful things are scorned. All sin is a sin against charity, and the joy that charity causes in God's presence. It is for this reason that acedia is connected to sadness, because it is a sin against happiness itself.<sup>188</sup> If man is created to rejoice in

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., II-II, q.24, a.8.

<sup>188</sup> Levering, *The Betrayal of Charity*, 9.



friendship with God, acedia is a fundamental rejection of that charity, and of that joy, seeking a lesser pleasure, or a more easily attainable manner of existence. As Vost states: “Sloth is evil in itself because it is sadness in reaction to the highest good.”<sup>189</sup>

### *Acedia: Sorrow at Divine Friendship*

In light of all that has been said, what is the sin of acedia? As we discuss Aquinas’ understanding, we will see many parallels with Evagrius, but also some differences, most the most notable being one of scope. Evagrius understood acedia as a sadness and resistance to the works proper to the office of a monk, whereas by the time of Aquinas, the discussion of acedia fully engulfed the discussion of tristitia, and became applicable to all people, not exclusively monks. It should be noted that even though Evagrius was monumental in the development of our understanding of acedia, Aquinas never cites him as an authority. Nault notes that Aquinas did not know Greek well, but beyond that, Evagrius was condemned as a heretic during Aquinas’ life, and was therefore left to obscurity.<sup>190</sup> If Aquinas had connection to Evagrius’ work it came via Cassian, who we already have shown carried the discussion of acedia into the Medieval Period. Therefore, if Evagrius influenced Aquinas’ discussion of acedia, it was by setting the tone of the discussion, but not by his works directly.

Before looking at Aquinas’ definition of acedia, we first must determine how many definitions of acedia he provides. Nault argues that Aquinas provides two definitions for acedia, the first being “sadness about spiritual good” and the second being

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<sup>189</sup> Vost, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, 89.

<sup>190</sup> Nault, *The Noonday Devil*, 57.

“disgust with activity.”<sup>191</sup> However, Lombardo rightly notes that while Aquinas does connect acedia with an aversion to work, he defines acedia as a spiritual vice, one that is located in the intellectual appetite, and is directed at a spiritual object. Furthermore, Lombardo points out that Aquinas rejects the idea that acedia is a denial of physical work as it is related to the divine, or a sacrifice of pleasure, because in either situation acedia would then be a carnal vice as opposed to a spiritual one.<sup>192</sup> In light of Lombardo’s understanding, it is best to conclude that Aquinas gives one definition of acedia proper, but that acedia, like all spiritual vices, manifests in physical action (or in this case, physical inaction).

It should also be noted that Lombardo’s discussion does bring us to another important difference in Aquinas’ and Evagrius’ understanding of acedia. As discussed earlier, Evagrius seems to understand acedia to be the demon that tempts the monk to flee the life of hardship he has dedicated himself to, with the monk not praying being an act of acedia. Aquinas seems more nuanced in his approach, seeing acedia as a spiritual sin that manifests physically. Therefore, the temptation, or the action of not fulfilling physical requirements placed on the person is connected to acedia, but acedia is actually something far deeper that is at work in the intellectual and spiritual core of the person. The lack of spiritual devotion is not acedia, but comes from acedia.<sup>193</sup>

In his answer to the question “Is Acedia a Sin?” Aquinas starts by noting that there are two kinds of good: that which is truly good, and that which appears good, but is only good in a limited way, or in a limited aspect, but is not truly good because it is not

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>192</sup> Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire*, 195-196.

<sup>193</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *On Evil*, ed. Brian Davies, trans. Richard Regan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), q.11, a.1.

good in every aspect. In the same way, there are two kinds of evil, that which is truly evil, and that which appears evil, and may be evil in some respect, but is actually absolutely good.<sup>194</sup> In both cases, the latter option is only apparently good or evil, but not actually so. Love and desire that are aimed at an actual good are praiseworthy, and hate and aversion that are aimed at an actual evil are good and praiseworthy. However, love and desire aimed toward that which is evil is sin, and hate and aversion aimed at that which is actually good is sin as well.<sup>195</sup>

It is here that we see Aquinas' definition of *acedia*, "And *acedia* consists of [tedium] or sadness regarding a spiritual and interior good, as Augustine says in Ps. 107:18' 'Their souls abhorred every kind of food.'"<sup>196</sup> and in the *Summa*, "I answer that, Sloth, according to Damascene (De Fide Orth. ii, 14) is an oppressive sorrow, which, to wit, so weighs upon man's mind, that he wants to do nothing; thus acid things are also cold...and from the definition of some who say that sloth is a 'sluggishness of the mind which neglects to begin good.'"<sup>197</sup> *Acedia* then is hate or aversion toward that which is absolutely good, and therefore that which is of God. We see here that DeYoung's definition we stated the chapter with is a fitting one in that seeking the divine places demands on humans, and looking upon those demands and perceiving them not as a good, but as an evil, is the very core of Aquinas' understanding of *acedia*. To be slothful is more than to be lazy, no it is to be overcome by sorrow at that which is pleasing to God.

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid., q.11 a.1.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid. Regen translates the Latin *taedium* as "boredom" as opposed to the more accurate "tedium." This choice reflects a contemporary broadening of the term boredom, as opposed to Aquinas' intent in this passage. I have made the change in the quotation.

<sup>197</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q.35, a.1.

It is important to emphasize that acedia is sorrow at that which is pleasing to God, and not merely sorrow qua sorrow, because godly sorrow is not a sin. Aquinas here looks to Christ as being perfect in virtue and yet experiencing great sorrow. Christ's sorrow means that sorrow and virtue can and do coexist.<sup>198</sup> The source of sorrow is the same as the source of joy, namely, love. Joy is caused in either the obtaining of, or being in the presence of, that that which is loved. Sorrow is caused in the losing of, or lacking of the thing loved; or in evil occurring to that which is loved.<sup>199</sup> In Christ we sorrow at that which is displeasing to God, but in the one afflicted by acedia, what we see is a person who beholds God, and the demands of friendship with Him, and sorrows greatly. For this reason, acedia should be seen as a sin against charity, because it is a sin that causes sorrow where charity ought be, and in doing so manifests sorrow at that which should be most deeply loved.

As discussed earlier, love includes with in it an idea of rest. When one is within the presence of the beloved she is at rest and her desires are satisfied. When the wayfarer comes to a place of rest in God, this is the Sabbath, or the intent of the Sabbath. However, "Spiritual apathy is contrary to the precept to keep holy the Sabbath, which as a moral precept commands repose of the mind in God."<sup>200</sup> Humans are created as lovers, and are made to love God, and to be at rest in loving God, and in being loved by God. Acedia makes repulsive the actual intended object of our love, and therefore makes impossible true rest.

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid., II-II, q.55, a.3.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., II-II, q.28, a.2.

<sup>200</sup> Aquinas, *On Evil*, q.1, a.3.

Due to true rest no longer being an option, and agreeing with Aristotle that the human being cannot remain pleasureless and sad, Aquinas sees two responses the human soul makes. “Therefore, two things result from sadness, one of which is that human beings withdraw from things that make them sad, and the other of which is that they turn to other things in which they find pleasure.”<sup>201</sup> Acedia conceives of true spiritual good as that which causes sadness, so the person attempts to find joy and rest in other pleasure and then begins to think through the illicit things that cause carnal pleasures. It is in this way that acedia is a capital vices, one that causes other sins, or as Aquinas puts it, “And in avoiding such sadness, we note the progression wherein human beings indeed first avoid spiritual goods and then attack them.”<sup>202</sup>

While we have been careful not to equate acedia with boredom, both Evagrius and Aquinas have used terminology that indicates that acedia contains within in the idea of boredom with God, or perhaps spiritual boredom. As we turn in later chapters, we will see the concept of boredom explained more fully within the secular sphere, but the root cause is here in acedia, which manifests as a blandness, or apathy toward God, at least initially. It does not stay there however. Whereas acedia can cause one to desire distraction, and can cause one to experience “spiritual boredom” which means that God and the divine good leave the person empty, or feeling nothing, when it reaches its full extent in the intellect, and acedia no longer is merely sorrow at the divine good, but “dislike, horror, and detestation at the Divine good, on account of the flesh prevailing over the spirit.”<sup>203</sup> Perhaps we see here a hint that once profound boredom manifests,

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid., q.11, a.4.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q.35, a.3.

eventually it necessitates transformation from needing perpetual distraction, to generating that distraction out of hatred at the divine good.

We see then the irony that the sin of sloth is actually a sin against true rest. What is often depicted as laziness is not the sin of a person resting too much, but instead not resting at all, and actually moving against the very source of true rest. In so doing, a person finds God and the demands of friendship with God repulsive, and must look for other pleasures and distraction elsewhere. We should consider however, that such revulsion does not mean that a person, or a society, suffering from acedia wants to be thusly afflicted. Instead, it could also be manifest in a person who desires change but not the work of transformation. Vogel suggests that we can understand acedia as distress over divine slowness and revulsion at having to wait for God. In this understanding acedia can be seen attacking a person who initially desires friendship with God, but becomes impatient or who finds the work tiresome.<sup>204</sup> Lamothe suggests, Aquinas makes use of Cassian's understanding of acedia in that a person is able to recognize the good, but not desire it.<sup>205</sup> Perhaps Vogel and Lamothe's point can best be understood with the example of weight loss. There are plenty of overweight people that would like to be skinnier, but there are far fewer overweight people who want to eat healthier and go to the gym. There are people who may find being godly attractive initially, but when faced with the work, it becomes too hard and a matter of scorn.

Continuing Vogel's line of thought, DeYoung understands the slothful person as the one who wants all the security and comforts of a relationship but refuses to let themselves be loved. In order to have such security and comforts, a person must allow

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<sup>204</sup> Vogel, "The Speed of Sloth", 57.

<sup>205</sup> Ryan LaMothe, "An Analysis of Acedia," *Pastoral Psychol* 56 (2007): 15-30. 17.

himself to be loved, and for that to happen the old self must die so that the new self might be born.<sup>206</sup> The person who enters into the friendship relationship with God in which God gives the beloved a new self, the commonality required for friendship, and then continues to rejoice and rest in the friendship with God will grow to find ungodly things matters of sorrow; however the one afflicted by acedia, who sees the work involved in such a transformation will shirk back, attempt to flee God, and create all matters of diversion to distract from the lack of rest, or lack of satisfaction in the fulfillment of carnal desires. Sloth manifests a dislike for that which is most desirable, and creates a need for a substitute that by nature cannot hold the weight of delight placed upon it, and therefore will be found boring.

What then is acedia? Acedia is sorrow at the divine good. God, in His love offers the gift of friendship to an individual. That friendship entails transformation, and such a transformation that the individual more rightly is aimed at that which is the proper end of all his faculties, and therefore brings with it the promise of supernatural happiness. However, this transformation, this grace, is seen as demanding, as oppressive, and therefore is met with sorrow, and scorn. Such friendship is what humans were created for, and that for which humans long. By nature, we are creatures drawn to charity. Charity is the chief virtue, being both the efficient cause of the virtues and the perfecter of the virtues. The virtues are perfected when they find God as their object, which happens as one enters into divine friendship. Such friendship requires a drastic change of the self, and a consistent dedication to being changed. Acedia is the sin that sees the work associated with this change as sorrowful, and therefore something to be repulsed by, or

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<sup>206</sup> DeYoung, "Sloth," 192.

rejected. DeYoung notes that the primary temptations for acedia are escapism and despair, because acedia always craves the easy way out.<sup>207</sup>

However, actual joy never comes easy. DeYoung looks at the example of marriage. Getting married is easy, but the joy of being married is hard. Yet, the joy of getting married seems eclipsed by the prolonged deeper joy of being married.<sup>208</sup> Aquinas himself agreed that joy is not easy, seeing the cure for acedia to be in the incarnation and the crucifixion.<sup>209</sup> The incarnation happened so that people might participate in the divine, and yet there was a great effort and work entailed in it. For Aquinas, God is the ultimate object of our joy, and when we see Him as an object of sorrow, we are afflicted with acedia and will fall short of attaining our proper end of union with the divine.

### ***Conclusion***

From our study of Evagrius and Aquinas we have seen that the sin of acedia is not boredom in and of itself, and translating it as such is an error. However, these thinkers have presented an understanding of humanity in which the epidemic of profound boredom can possibly be understood to have a spiritual root. Colon notes that acedia cannot be translated as boredom because acedia connotes the theological weight of the Christian worldview that sees friendship with God as the *telos* of mankind.<sup>210</sup> As the western world was secularized, the theological depth of the term acedia was removed and it became synonymous with its outward symptoms of lethargy and laziness.<sup>211</sup> While the

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<sup>207</sup> DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, 96.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-90.

<sup>209</sup> Nault, *The Noonday Devil*, 84-85.

<sup>210</sup> Sarah Colon, "This Twittering World': T.S. Elliot and Acedia," *Religion and Literature* 43, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 69-90. 71-72.

<sup>211</sup> DeYoung, "Sloth," 182.



Modern world was secularizing, and therefore secularizing sloth, the church ignored the sin as well. From Ockham until the Second Vatican Council, acedia is not mentioned in works of theology, and when it appears in works of spirituality it looks much like the new secular understanding of sloth having more to do with distraction than sorrow at divine friendship.<sup>212</sup>

We are now at a place to consider the rise of the phenomenon of boredom itself, and the epidemic of profound boredom. As discussed in chapter one, boredom as a concept did not arise until the advent of Modernity, which as a whole was a secularization of the world, and a turning from the Christian worldview in particular. If Evagrius and Aquinas are right in their understanding of acedia, it would make sense that after individuals, and society writ large, give into acedia, this new concept of boredom would manifest as people lose the draw to the call of divine friendship, and instead must create lives of distraction. If this is the case, then acedia is at the bedrock of our current society, manifesting in both laziness and busyness, in both despair and distraction. Why is this the case? Because apart from the connection to the divine, there can be no lasting joy. In the following chapters we will analyze the rise of Modernity and its central beliefs, and then consider the concept of boredom from both the Christian and the Secular mode of existence.

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<sup>212</sup> Nault, *The Noonday Devil*, 105.

## **Chapter Three: Pascal's Response to the Problem in Early Modernity**

### *Introduction*

In the previous chapter we discussed acedia, sorrow at the divine good, or sorrow at the demands placed on us by friendship with God. While acedia is not boredom, in particular it is not profound boredom, it is the root cause, the spiritual prerequisite, for profound boredom. In this chapter we pivot our discussion from the prerequisite for profound boredom, to an analysis of, and responses to, the matter. The following three chapters each address the thought of a different thinker, thinking about the issue of profound boredom from within the context of modernity. As was discussed in chapter one, modernity is an epoch that entails a certain attunement to the world. This attunement entails a disenchantment of the world, a flattening of purpose, and a removal of the transcendent. In the wake of these features, profound boredom manifests as a uniquely modern phenomenon.

In this chapter we will look at the thought of French philosopher and mathematician, Blaise Pascal. Pascal's contribution to our study of profound boredom is two-fold. First, Pascal is a contemporary of Descartes, not just historically, but also geographically. The two men met, but did not form a friendship. Pascal was complimentary of Descartes in the realm of mathematics, but adamantly rejected his approach to philosophy. In fact, they represent two drastically different manners of approaching the world. Alan Bloom goes so far as to say, "Every Frenchman is born, or

at least early on becomes, Cartesian or Pascalian.”<sup>213</sup> Bloom’s quote, though by his own admission an oversimplification, indicates that while Descartes shaped the way the future would see the world; Pascal rejected this fundamental paradigm shift, which he seemed to see as a Pandora’s box of sorts. For this reason, Pascal would be the only philosopher to not work within a Cartesian paradigm until the nineteenth century.<sup>214</sup>

Second, Pascal is the first thinker to extensively address the topic of profound boredom. Though he did not create the word “ennui,” Pascal’s use of the word established it within the French language, and cemented the concept as part of the overall way of existing within the Modern period. To understand what Pascal means by ennui, we will first look at his understanding of the self and see how sin has fostered a rejection of the divine. This rejection in part stems from our imagination, which is our primary mental faculty, misunderstanding what might make a person truly happy.

This chapter will conclude looking one of the most troubling of Pascal’s aphorisms, which seems to indicate that Jesus at one point experienced profound boredom. After discussing the actual intent of this passage, the topic of the impossibility of divine boredom will be addressed.

### *Pascal in the Shadow of Descartes*

In chapter one we noted that the rise of Modernity, in large part, occurred due to the work of Rene Descartes. Descartes’ project shifted the central question of philosophy to epistemology as opposed to ontology, and in so doing, started a quest for absolute

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<sup>213</sup> Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: [how Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students]*, 25th ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2012, 1987), 52.

<sup>214</sup> Peter Kreeft and Blaise Pascal, *Christianity for Modern Pagans: Pascal's Pensées Edited, Outlined, and Explained* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 9.

certainty that had not been central prior to his work. However, while this new approach to philosophy became the way that one “does” philosophy in the centuries following, there was at least one early dissenter in Pascal. To clarify, there were many thinkers who would disagree with any number of Descartes’ conclusions, perhaps most notably his ontological argument for God’s existence, but Descartes’ mode of thinking was almost universally accepted by the world writ large. However, Pascal, who actually agreed with the conclusion that God exists, would be the lone hold out in rejecting, not necessarily Descartes’ conclusions, but Descartes overall philosophic approach.

Descartes and Pascal were well acquainted with each other’s work, and interacted on multiple occasions, but their relationship was never a close one. Prior to their disagreements in philosophy, they were contemporaries, perhaps rivals, in the mathematics realm. In her biography on Pascal, *Blaise Pascal: Miracles and Reason*, Mary Ann Caws tells of two defining moments in their relationship, the first being when Pascal, at age 16, demonstrated a theorem (now known as the Pascal Line), and Descartes accused him of plagiarism.<sup>215</sup> While it might not be immediately evident that this action was one of jealousy as Caws claims, later in her book she mentions a meeting between the two men in which they discussed their thoughts on vacuums, present experiments, and philosophy. Two years following their meeting, Descartes stated in a letter that he had essentially told Pascal how to conduct his Puy de Dome experiment.<sup>216</sup>

Even if their interpersonal relationship was not a healthy one, Descartes’ influence on Pascal’s thought cannot be ignored. In addition to serving as a foil to

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<sup>215</sup> Mary Ann Caws, *Blaise Pascal: Miracles and Reason*, Renaissance Lives (London, UK: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2017), 36.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

respond to, some commentators go so far as to say that Descartes was Pascal's introduction to philosophy itself.<sup>217</sup> It is of note that Pascal's interests in the theological sphere appears to have started in 1648, and the meeting with Descartes occurred in 1649, which was followed by an intense study of scripture, Augustine, authors from the Protestant Reformation, in addition to early Jansenist writers (a belief he would eventually embrace), leading to his Night of Fire experience in 1654.<sup>218</sup> Given the nature of Descartes' thought, and Pascal's desire to return to an Augustinian view of the world, it is not a surprise that the two thinkers would present two very different views of the world, and as a result, have what today would be considered a very passive aggressive "friendenmy" relationship.

When describing Pascal, von Balthasar writes,

[After discussing Erasmus]...so with Pascal the same religious sense of structure bridges the tension between an ascetic Augustinianism, which embodies for him the primitive ecclesiastical tradition, and exact, scientific research—that is what marks Pascal off in a decisive and exemplary way, from all that stems from Descartes' approach to philosophy which, in itself dualistic, has led to the modern schizophrenia between science and imageless inwardness.<sup>219</sup>

Von Balthasar here is noting the great chasm that forms the disparity between these two, and what will serve for our purposes as the launching point into Pascal's discussion of boredom, namely, focus on objective reason over against true subjectivity. Descartes was incredibly optimistic about the ability of human reason to come to complete certainty in its understanding of matters. Pascal on the other hand was much more pessimistic about

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<sup>217</sup> Henry Phillips, "Pascal's Reading and the Inheritance of Montaigne and Descartes," in *The Cambridge Companion to Pascal*, ed. Nicholas Hammond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 31.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-23.

<sup>219</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: a Theological Aesthetics* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983-1991), 172.

our ability to understand the world with absolute certainty (not even seeing it as important), and even our ability to reason objectively.

As we enter into a discussion of Pascal's philosophy, perhaps the distinction between these two men's thought can best be seen in two of their most well known statements: Descartes' "I think, therefore I am" and Pascal's "The heart has its reasons that reason knows not." As we discussed in chapter one, Descartes' *cogito* serves as the foundation upon which all knowledge can and should be built. Descartes arrives at this base principle using methodological doubt, and from this certainty, Descartes constructed an argument to reestablish the existence of God and therefor restore everything in the world that he heretofore had called into question. Society loved his optimism related to humanity's ability to reason; however, they found his argument for God's existence ultimately unconvincing. In the process of establishing his thought, Descartes establishes humans primarily as a "thinking thing."

Pascal finds Descartes' starting point fundamentally flawed. He goes so far in his *Pensées* to write, "Descartes useless and uncertain."<sup>220</sup> The phrase is somewhat puzzling in both its construction (it lacks a verb) and intent. Roger Ariew, in *The Cambridge History of the French Language* rejects the idea that this statement is a wholesale dismissal of Descartes, saying instead that Pascal embraces Cartesian metaphysics, but thinks that trying to understand what is behind the physical is useless, because all such activities are useless, since they do not lead to salvation.<sup>221</sup> Ariew is correct that Pascal

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<sup>220</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. Roger Ariew (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Pub. Co., 2005), 133, S445/L887.

<sup>221</sup> Roger Ariew, "Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century," *Cambridge History French Literature*, ed. B. Burgwinkle, N. Hammond, and E. Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 302-304.

believes that salvation is vitally important, but he misses the bigger point that because salvation is important, Descartes' entire project is flawed. Pascal doesn't embrace Cartesian metaphysics; he thinks it is tragically flawed. Whereas Descartes believed that reason could establish absolute certainty, Pascal believed that there were an infinite number of things that reason could not know about the physical world, and if so many natural things were beyond reason, what could it even say about the supernatural?<sup>222</sup>

Whereas the Modernist movement that started due to the work of Descartes was built upon humanity's ability to gain certitude, Pascal's system is built upon acknowledging reason's inability. As Phillips' phrases is: "Reason as an instrument in understanding faith is acceptable (L7/S41), but faith in reason is not."<sup>223</sup> This focus on faith is why we appealed earlier to the statement, "The heart has its reasons..." In Pascal's conception of the world, we are not primarily thinkers, but lovers. Reason is a tool that can help us understand the world we live in but we are not isolated objective thinkers. Instead, our thoughts are colored by experience, desire, bias, sin, and love.

We've included this extended discussion of Descartes and Pascal in large part to set the stage for what is to come. If it is the case that profound boredom is a uniquely Modern phenomenon, and if it is the case that Descartes was uniquely involved in the birth of Modernity, then seeing that the earliest thinker to note the problem of boredom did so while also seeing a fundamental flaw in the thought (and perhaps the person) which put the enterprise of Modernity in motion is vital. Pascal's critique is such that he sees the deficiency with Cartesian thought, and the deficiency of a society that has

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<sup>222</sup> Pascal, *Pensées*, L188/S220.

<sup>223</sup> Phillips, "Pascal's Reading and the Inheritance of Montaigne and Descartes," 34.

embraced the Cartesian shift. From here we will look at Pascal's thought proper, starting with his understanding of the human self.

### ***The Moi***

At core, Pascal's understanding of the world in general, and the self in particular, is theological. Any attempted understanding of the self that lacks a proper theological grounding is going to fail to give an accurate understanding of the human experience. William Wood summarizes Pascal's account of the self, noting that Pascal presents two different types of the self. The first, the *moi*, is an imaginary construct that a sinful individual projects into the world and comes to perceive as an accurate self-depiction. The second type of self is an explicitly Christological understanding of the self in which true subjectivity is derived from membership within the body of Christ.<sup>224</sup> Elsewhere, Wood expands his description of the *moi* noting that the *moi* becomes a parody of God. Instead of submitting to God as the source of goodness, the individual creates the *moi* as an act of trying to usurp God's proper place of authority.<sup>225</sup> Pascal's understanding of boredom entails an understanding of how we misconstrue our identities, and how we can obtain true subjectivity.

The *moi* is a false self that an individual creates; however, she does not create it in a vacuum. The false self is an illusion that rests in large part on one's situatedness in society. Wood rightly understands Pascal as making the ontological claim that the *moi* is "a societally constructed, imaginary self [that] does not correspond to the way one really

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<sup>224</sup> William Wood, "What Is the Self? Imitation and Subjectivity in Blaise Pascal's *Pensées*," *Modern Theology* 26, no. 3 (July 2010): 417-35. 418.

<sup>225</sup> William Wood, *Blaise Pascal On Duplicity, Sin, and the Fall: the Secret Instinct, Changing Paradigms in Historical and Systematic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 118-119.



is” and the epistemological claim that it is incredibly difficult to remove the *moi* from an accurate depiction of the oneself; meaning that we are never alone with ourselves, but are always imaging ourselves as others do.<sup>226</sup> My understanding, and presentation, of myself is always contingent upon my cultural and societal existence.

In what way does society dictate one’s self-conception? Pascal believes society, or the majority in a given situation, does this by means power: “Why do we follow the majority? Is it because they have more reason? No, but more power.”<sup>227</sup> Decisions, and our understanding of the world, very rarely are actually based upon reason, but rather, the power of the majority. In Pascal’s mind, what the majority dictates as truth, or as acceptable, is what people will submit to, even if it is unreasonable, incorrect, or contrary to the proclivities of the individual. This submission to the power of the majority means that an individual constructs a *moi* that is less herself, and more the opinion of the majority. Or, at least, the opinion that the majority imagines that it ought to have.

Indeed, in an earlier fragment in the *Pensées* Pascal writes:

The imagination disposes of everything. It creates beauty, justice, and happiness, which are the whole of the world. I would gladly see the Italian book, of which I know only the title, *Opinion, Queen of the World*, which alone is worth many books. Without knowing the book, I approve of what it says, except for any evil it may contain.<sup>228</sup>

Here Pascal is using the term “create” to mean that imagination fabricates alternate understandings of beauty, justice, and happiness in place of the properly understood Christian understandings of the concepts; however, that is not the main point of this entry. Though Pascal has only heard the title of this book, he playfully says that he fully

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>227</sup> Pascal, *Pensées*, 176, S589/L711.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 15, S78/L44.

approves of the book, aside from the parts that he doesn't of course, because of the title alone. Opinion is the queen, or the sovereign, of the world. Humans are rarely themselves; instead they are constantly attempting to reflect the opinion that dominates the world at any given moment. This reflection is done to the extent that it is possible, and perhaps very likely, that the majority becomes so concerned with holding to the societally accepted opinion, or generating what they believe is, or will be the societally accepted opinion, that it is no longer even a thought as to what might be true. Not only does it no longer matter what might be true, but the particular beliefs of the individuals in the majority no longer matter to those individuals. The opinion of the world is what matters and influences the construction of the *moi*.

Further, toward the ending of his fragment discussing self-love, Pascal concludes:

Human life is thus only a perpetual illusion; we do nothing but deceive and flatter each other. No one speaks about us in our presence as he would in our absence. The union among men is founded on mutual deceit; few friendships would endure if everyone knew what his friend said about him when he was not there, even though he was then speaking sincerely and dispassionately. Man is, therefore, only disguise, falsehood, and hypocrisy, both in himself and with regard to others.<sup>229</sup>

We will return to the ideas in this passage later in our discussion; however at this point it is important to note the idea that human life is an illusion. We are in a perpetual relationship of deceiving each other, and in that deception, deceiving ourselves. Wood correctly asserts that our subjectivity depends upon our mutual venture of projection and deception.<sup>230</sup> Put more plainly, what I perceive to be myself is itself a projection that I believe will please the majority opinion; however, that majority opinion is itself constructed by other selves who are reflecting what they believe will please the majority

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 268, S743/L978.

<sup>230</sup> Wood, *Duplicity*, 99.

opinion. In a very real way, Pascal sees everyone playing a game, in which truth and/or reality is unseated for spin and popular deception. I am not attempting to be myself, I am instead attempting to be the self that I believe you believe, or desire, me to be.

Why do we do so much work in creating our false selves? Pascal believes we do this because we are dissatisfied with our own lives and being, so we construct imaginary lives to forget the real one.<sup>231</sup> The real tragedy of this construction in Pascal's mind is that our true selves would be ones that are far more satisfying than the one that we attempt to project. However, the true self would entail a rightly ordered relationship with God, and such a relationship is wholly unappealing to fallen mankind. Pascal sees humanity as habitually rejecting ourselves in order to construct false selves that give us the impression of love that people so deeply desire, without having to submit to the one who made us to desire that love.

The mingling of love and sin within humanity led von Balthasar to understand the Pascalian individual as one who is in self-estrangement.<sup>232</sup> As one looks at herself, she sees a desire to be loved, and yet nothing worth loving. About this relation Pascal asserts, "It is false that we are worthy of the love of others; it is unfair that we should want it. If we were born reasonable and indifferent, knowing ourselves and others, we would not give this inclination to our will. However, we are born with it."<sup>233</sup> We are born desiring love, desiring to love, and yet also unworthy of it. Humans are born, and exist, distant from themselves, because the only solution to the problem is repugnant. Later in that same section he concludes, "No religion but our own has taught that man is born in sin.

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<sup>231</sup> Pascal, *Pensées*, S653/L806.

<sup>232</sup> Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 210.

<sup>233</sup> Pascal, *Pensées*, 215, S680/L421.

No sect of philosophers has said this. Therefore none has told the truth.”<sup>234</sup> Mankind’s sinful condition is foundational to understanding the construction of the false self.

### *Sin as the Barrier to True Subjectivity*

As we turn to discuss the effect of sin upon humankind, and therefore sin’s effects on the construction of the *moi*, it needs to be understood that Pascal actually has a very high view of humanity. Following in the Catholic tradition, Pascal affirms that mankind is made in the image of God, and therefore has great worth. Such worth also means that mankind’s sin is all the worse, or perhaps better stated, mankind is able to sin because of its great worth. In a fragment from June 1658 Pascal writes, “Man’s greatness is so obvious that it can be derived even from his wretchedness. For what in animals is nature, we call wretchedness in man. In this way we recognize that, his nature being now like that of animals, he has fallen from a better nature that once was his own.”<sup>235</sup> In another fragment from that same month he also writes, “Man’s greatness lies in his knowing himself to be wretched. A tree does not know itself to be wretched. So it is to be wretched to know oneself wretched, but it is to be great to know that one is wretched.”<sup>236</sup>

Mankind is wretched, but it would not know that it were wretched if it were not great. While this initially seems to be a paradox, Pascal is operating from a framework in which he is talking about two different states of mankind. Mankind is created with great worth, being made in God’s image, and therefore a rational and moral being. In the two quotes in the previous paragraph, we see both of these attributes of humanity displayed. A tree is not rational and therefore lacks the ability to know that it is wretched--to know

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 32, S149/L117.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 32, S146/L114.

that it is failing at being a tree. If a tree has a privation, such that it grows poorly, or doesn't produce fruit, the tree is unaware of it; however, the human is not. In being aware of our failing to be what we were made to be, humanity reveals itself to be great in creation, but wretched in our current station. In the same vein, animals that act beastly are far from wretched. They kill, steal, deceive, etc., and yet it is not unbecoming of their nature. Yet, when a human acts in the same manner, there is a disparity between what he is created to be, and how he is currently acting. Humans therefore, are great in creation, and made for greatness, but instead live in wretchedness; and that wretchedness dictates the *moi*.

The wretchedness of mankind stems from two sources for Pascal, pride and sloth.

Since the two sources of our sins are pride and sloth, God has revealed to us two of his attributes to cure them: his mercy and his justice. The characteristic of justice is to lower pride, however holy the works may be: *and do not enter judgment*, etc.; and the characteristic of mercy is to combat sloth by inviting good works, according to that passage: ***God's mercy invites repentance***, and this other one of the Ninivites: ***Let us do penance to see if by chance he will have pity on us***. And thus mercy, far from authorizing slackness, is on the contrary the quality formally attacking it.<sup>237</sup>

Pascal's inclusion of pride is expected given his Augustinian influence and his desire to reinterpret Augustine for his day; however, the inclusion of sloth might be a bit surprising.

Pride is the root of all sin in Augustinian thought, meaning that sloth is born of pride.<sup>238</sup>

However, in this passage Pascal draws particular attention to sloth as the source of sin, revealing an agreement with Evagrius about the evil of the noonday demon, but also revealing the centrality of acedia in his understanding of the human condition.

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 189, S638/L774.

<sup>238</sup> Augustine of Hippo. *The City of God*. Hendrickson Publishers ed. (Peabody, Mass.:Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), 14.3

As we discussed in chapter two, sloth/acedia is sorrow at the divine good, or the demands placed on us by friendship with God. These demands are actions, and ways of being, that transform people into who they were created to be. Acedia by nature despises transformation. Snell goes so far as to say that acedia is ontological boredom, revealing a sense in the individual that there is nothing worth desiring.<sup>239</sup> We will tease out the relationship between acedia and boredom in Pascal in a later section, but Snell here is noting that reality, and goodness itself, leaves the person suffering from acedia feeling no desire, and therefore the individual sees no draw to either goodness, or reality.<sup>240</sup>

Later in his discussion of acedia, Snell argues that sloth is overcome, not by non-sloth, but by the fullness of virtue, and affirming the world as God sees it.<sup>241</sup> This line of thinking is in line with Pascal's. Notice in the quote from fragment S638/L774, God extends mercy in order that the slothful one might do good works. Pascal seems to affirm the Aristotelian notion that virtue is a habit. In one miscellaneous fragment he states, "The habit makes the doctrine."<sup>242</sup> This aphorism, with no context to cement a particular reading, seems to indicate that a person's actions over time, forms a person's beliefs. While Aristotle stopped at virtue as a habit, Pascal seems to be going further indicating that a person's beliefs are dependent upon those virtues, or lack thereof.

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<sup>239</sup> R J. Snell, *Acedia and Its Discontents: Metaphysical Boredom in an Empire of Desire* (Kettering, OH: Angelico Press, 2015), 71

<sup>240</sup> It seems though that a better understanding is that reality and goodness actually repels out of hatred or fear, meaning that boredom probably is not the best word to use in this situation. As will be discussed later, it seems perhaps a better way of understanding this relationship is to say that acedia repels a person from reality, and being severed from the real, everything else becomes empty, and therefore boring.

<sup>241</sup> Snell, *Acedia and Its Discontents*, 111.

<sup>242</sup> Pascal, *Pensées*, 296, S791/L954.

Returning to our discussion of the *moi*, is it not possible though for someone to pretend to be virtuous when in reality she is not? Pascal would readily affirm this possibility; in fact he believes that people feign virtue often, assuming that it is within public opinion to do so. However, Pascal believes that virtue is not something seen over a short period, nor is virtue to be measured by a person's efforts. Instead, virtue is a person's ordinary behavior.<sup>243</sup> Here we see the crux of sloth's relation to the *moi*. Sloth is sorrow at the demands placed on us by friendship with God, and that friendship breeds virtue, and that virtue can be established due to the grace that God shows to slothful people. However, that virtue is developed over time, with much pain and effort, and if a person does not see as desirable the one with whom this friendship is with, then he will flee the work that is required for virtue. In so doing, he will try and meet the inherent need that he feels for love by relating to others. Yet as we have discussed, he is unworthy of love, and in fact knows that he isn't being loved, because he himself doesn't love others, merely some of their qualities.<sup>244</sup> Due to this knowledge, he constantly attempts to remake the self to be like the qualities that he believes others see in him, or desire to see in him; yet at no point is he ever actually being his true, actual self.

How then can one actually know himself? Returning to Wood's analysis of the two selves, Wood states that for Pascal, true subjectivity is Christocentric.<sup>245</sup> This bold claim, which we will see echoed in Kierkegaard, is taken from what would have been the first section of Pascal's *Apology* had it been finished, "Not only do we not know God except through Jesus Christ, but also we do not know ourselves except through Jesus

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 178, S605/L724.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 172, S567/L688.

<sup>245</sup> Wood . *Imitation*, 432.

Christ. We know life and death only through Jesus Christ. Apart from Jesus Christ, we do not know what is our life, or our death, or God, or ourselves.”<sup>246</sup> Humans are slothful, and sorrow at the demands that true subjectivity would place on us. In order to truly know over selves, we must know both our wretchedness and the one who created us.<sup>247</sup> Pascal believes that the true self is the self in relation to God, and as a sinner, that relationship will always predicate an understanding of our sinfulness.

Even though mankind pulls back from understanding itself as wretched, it would seem that the most reasonable thing would be to admit our wretchedness and embrace the true self, however, while we care about nothing more than our own state, we are terrified contemplating eternity.<sup>248</sup> We are terrified because, though it is reasonable to seek God, humanity is slothful, not reasonable, and instead of embracing true Christocentric subjectivity, chooses to create the *moi*. To that end we can end this discussion with Pascal’s assessment on the reasonableness of humanity:

There are only three kinds of people: those who serve God, having found him; those who are busy seeking him, not having found him; those who live without seeking or finding him. The first are reasonable and happy, the last are foolish and unhappy; those in the middle are unhappy and reasonable.<sup>249</sup>

Those who seek and find God embrace their true selves, those who and have not yet found God wrestle between the true self and the *moi*, and the largest population are those who do not seek God, nor do they want to. They are unreasonable, and unhappy. If they are unhappy though, why do they not change their station? They stay in their current

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<sup>246</sup> Pascal, *Pensées*, 7, S36/L417.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 225, S690/L446.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, 219, S681/L427.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, 51, S192/L162.



situation because they believe they are happy. Such is the power that imagination has over reason.

### *The Superiority of Imagination over Reason*

While clearly valuing reason, Pascal asserts that imagination has a far greater hold on humanity. “[Imagination] In man it is that dominant part, that master of error and falsity...”<sup>250</sup> Imagination dominates mankind, and in doing so overtakes reason. Later in the same fragment Pascal gives this example: “Put the world’s greatest philosopher on a plank hanging over a precipice, but wider than it needs to be. Although his reason will convince him of his safety, his imagination will prevail. Many could not bear the thought of it without getting pale and sweating.”<sup>251</sup> If the philosopher were moved by reason alone, he wouldn’t experience fear, because reason would properly conclude that he was safe. However, it is the imagination, the faculty that generates how we perceive the world, which colors the philosopher’s mind on the plank. The same faculty is what allows those who live without seeking or finding God to continue in their unhappiness. If they were reasonable, they would know they were unhappy; however, the imagination makes them think they are happy, therefore, they have no reason to explore their unhappiness. Imagination is unable to make fools wise, but it can make them happy, while reason only makes them miserable.<sup>252</sup>

Before proceeding, we need to address what Pascal means by “reason.” Throughout the *Pensées* Pascal sets reason in juxtaposition with imagination, but also sets it in juxtaposition with the heart, and while there is overlap in the meaning of terms,

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 12, S78/L44.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 13, S78/L44.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 12, S78/L44.

the exact meanings aren't quite clear. In particular, when setting reason against imagination, it seems as though reason is to be preferred, but when reason is set against the heart, the heart is to be preferred, and yet in many ways imagination and the heart seem somewhat related.

Kreeft notes that Pascal uses the term reason in the modern Cartesian way; namely, as the act of discursive reason alone, ignoring the other two acts of reason in the Classical tradition.<sup>253</sup> This usage is of note, given Pascal's rejection of the Cartesian philosophical method; however, it does begin to clarify the confusion in terms. Pascal uses "reason" in the same manner as Descartes, so that he can respond to Cartesian thought. Discursive reason focuses solely on intellectual reasoning, excluding the rest of the person. James K.A. Smith humorously states that Descartes' form of reasoning leaves humans as brains on a stick, and ignores that humans are not merely thinkers, but lovers.<sup>254</sup>

Smith sees the world through the same lenses as Pascal. Humans do not reason in a vacuum, but rather reason in light of imagination. Imagination constructs how one sees the world, even if that imagination is overtly unreasonable (i.e. the example of the philosopher on the plank). Imagination colors how one perceives information. Pascal thinks even such civilities as "I'm sorry to bother you" reveals the weakness that reason feels in light of imagination/feeling. In this case he says a person is either persuasive or irritating, and in fact, this holds true in every statement of value.<sup>255</sup> When I describe the

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<sup>253</sup> Kreeft, *Christianity for Modern Pagans*, 230.

<sup>254</sup> James K A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2016), 3.

<sup>255</sup> Pascal, *Pensées*, 143, S454/L528.

world, I do so in light of how I imagine it to be, and then stimulate the other person's imagination so that she is never reasoning as deductively as she believes.

So it seems that imagination is the bane of reason; however the heart seems to be greater than reason, and yet still connected to the imagination. Why is this the case? Wood is helpful in his speculation as to how Pascal would address the heart and the imagination prior to the fall, presuming that the heart would see goodness and the imagination would see beauty, and those two categories would be the same.<sup>256</sup> The heart is the seat of the person for Pascal. One reasons in light of the heart, and one imagines the world a certain way in light of the heart. However, when divided and not seeking after God, reason and the imagination work against one another, with reason being the more trustworthy adjudicator of truth, but with imagination being far more persuasive in constructing the world that we desire to perceive.

Pascal sees the power of imagination as a type of madness. In fact, it would seem another type of madness not to be mad. This insanity can be typified by the cause and effects of love. The cause is "something I know not what" and the effects can be catastrophic. In one of his most enigmatic, yet insightful, aphorisms Pascal writes, "Cleopatra's nose: had it been shorter, the whole face of the earth would have changed."<sup>257</sup> Here Pascal is noting again the irrationality of imagination. Due to Cleopatra's beauty, empires shifted, and had she been less attractive, those empires would have acted very differently. Reason, the use of grey matter by itself, cannot persuade in light of the imagination.

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<sup>256</sup> Wood, *Duplicity*, 138.

<sup>257</sup> Pascal, *Pensées*, 6, S31/L412.

Reason has almost no power in persuasion. This is at least in part why it is possible for a person to know there is a God, and yet have no love for Him. Mankind hates religion and fears that it is true, the cure for this is to make religion attractive so that mankind wishes it were true, and then show that it is true.<sup>258</sup> This type of argumentation perhaps gives the greatest clue to how Pascal has been using terms. Mankind hates religion, it does not refute religion, rather it hates it, and due to that hate, fears that it is true. The hate of religion does not come from reason, but imagination. In light of that hatred, reason fears that religion might be true. However, the way that one moves from this is to persuade the heart, and in so doing, make religion beautiful so its truth can be seen.

“We know the truth, not only through reason, but also through the heart. It is through the latter that we know first principles, and reason, which has no part in it, tries in vain to challenge them...Reason must use this knowledge from the heart and instinct to base all its arguments on it.”<sup>259</sup> Reason in the Cartesian proves or combats what the heart knows. When imagination constructs a world that is not in line with reality, reason will combat the heart and “labor in vain” against truth. When properly aligned, reason proves that which is true, the imagination inclines us toward that which is beautiful, and both are anchored in the heart. Reason then is important, but of lesser importance than Pascal’s contemporaries gave it credit for. While Modernity saw reason as the great hope for truth, Pascal noted that reason can only do this in light of imagination. When pressed, humans will always go after what they believe is beautiful more than what they believe is true, but in doing so they will try and convince themselves the beautiful is true.

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 9, S46/L12.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 31, S142/L110.

Again, we see Pascal's emphasis on true subjectivity over the *moi* in that the heart, the true core of an individual, is not convinced by reason, and is often overshadowed by imagination, and yet reasons deeper and desires stronger than either of the former. Pascal states both that faith, in its true sense is not obtained by reason, but rather is "God felt by the heart, not by reason,"<sup>260</sup> and also, at the end of one version of his famous wager, "Work, then, on convincing yourself, not by adding proofs of God's existence, but by diminishing your passions."<sup>261</sup> The heart is created to desire God, but when imagination depicts God as repulsive, and this world as attractive, reason then follows suit, and no amount of argumentation will change the imagination. However, altering the passions will. At core, the passions reveal what mankind desires more than anything else, happiness, and imagination depicts what it believes will bring such happiness. It is to the topic of happiness that we now turn.

### ***Happiness and Diversion***

Pascal sees happiness as the primary driver of human action.<sup>262</sup> Wood correctly asserts that the very nature of Pascal's entire argument is that everyone desires restful happiness.<sup>263</sup> This assertion is evidenced by Pascal's words in fragment S20/L401:

We want truth and find only uncertainty in ourselves.  
We seek happiness and find only wretchedness and death.  
We are incapable of not wanting truth and happiness and are incapable of certainty or happiness.  
We have been left with this desire as much to punish us as to make us perceive from whence we have fallen.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 215, S680/L424.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 214, S680/L418.

<sup>262</sup> In light of *The Wager*, and the following discussion, it seems that stating that Pascal sees happiness as the single primary driver of human action is very reasonable.

<sup>263</sup> Wood, *Duplicity*, 49.

<sup>264</sup> Pascal, *Pensées*, 4, S20/L401.

In the previous section we discussed mankind's inability to be completely rational, and in the section's prior the inability of mankind to obtain absolute certainty. To that, Pascal here adds that every human longs for happiness, and yet only finds death or wretchedness. What Pascal means here can be understood in light of the final line of this fragment. Mankind's longing for truth, yet inability to attain it, as well as mankind's longing for happiness, and never finding that satisfaction, is both a punishment, and a reminder of what mankind is supposed to be. Our inability to be happy is seated in our inability to be what we were created to be.

One could easily protest and point to any number of people at any given time who are happy and see an end at once to Pascal's project. However, Pascal wants to draw into question the very nature of what mankind calls happiness.

We are so unhappy that we can only take pleasure in something on condition of our being annoyed if it turns out badly, as thousands of things can and do every hour. Anyone who found the secret of rejoicing in the good without being annoyed by its contrary evil would have found the point. It is perpetual motion.<sup>265</sup>

Pascal posits that a person is only able to take pleasure in something not not going their way. If a woman enjoys a nice lunch, Pascal here asks if she would have been annoyed had the service been slow, or the food undercooked? If she would have been annoyed, can she truly say that she is happy with lunch? Or is she merely not unhappy with it? Granted, it seems that "not unhappy" is prerequisite for "happy," but Pascal believes that mankind has settled for the prerequisite and labeled it "happiness." Since, as stated in fragment S20/L401, mankind desires happiness, settling for something less than happiness cannot satisfy and can only leave a person empty. In Pascalian thought, people

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 18, S89/L56.

are almost never happy, they are just momentarily not annoyed. Humanity has called neutral “good” because it isn’t bad. Or perhaps more broadly stated, humanity calls unhappiness, happiness.

What then is the cause of this unhappiness? The key to understanding Pascal’s notion of unhappiness is in the concept of privation. A person is not unhappy not having X, and person is unhappy not having X when he ought to, or believes that he ought to, have X.

For who is unhappy not being king, except a deposed king? Did anyone think Paulus Emilius was unhappy no longer being consul? On the contrary, everybody thought he was happy having been consul, because the office could not be held indefinitely. But people thought Perseus was so unhappy no longer being king, because the position was permanent, that they found it strange he could bear life. Who would be unhappy having only one mouth? And who would not be unhappy having only one eye? Probably no person has ever thought of being distressed not having three eyes, but we are inconsolable having none.<sup>266</sup>

Certainly, a peasant may want to be king, or a sports fan may imagine how it would feel to be a famous athlete, but neither of these would be unhappy not being this thing of which they dream. They may be unhappy, and believe that such a status would cure that unhappiness, but lacking kingship or fame is not the cause of the unhappiness. However, if the sports fan was going to be a draft pick for the NFL, and endured a career ending knee injury, he would then not merely imagine what it would be like to be an athlete, but in reality would be lacking something that ought to have been there. That lack is what causes unhappiness.

If, humanity desires happiness but only finds death and wretchedness, and if mankind considers the mere lack of annoyance to be happiness, and if the key to unhappiness is in lacking what one ought to have, then it stands that mankind is the

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 32, S149/L117.

unhappiest of beings. Pascal sees humanity as a race being perpetually unsatisfied, and yet craving satisfaction to the point of labeling lesser dissatisfaction as satisfaction. But if it is the case that humanity is perpetually unsatisfied, and perpetually unhappy, how is it that mankind is unaware of this fact? Pascal believes that mankind's ignorance of its own dissatisfaction is a willful ignorance, manifested in, and testified to by, humanity's perpetual diversion.

The concept of diversion is woven throughout the *Pensées*, and is perhaps the chief indicator that mankind is unhappy. In multiple sections and contexts, Pascal asserts that if mankind were truly happy, he would not need to be diverted. He mentions this in relation to Job and Solomon, whom he calls the happiest and saddest of all men (note that he never specifies which he considers sad, and which happy);<sup>267</sup> he also repeats the refrain when referencing Ecclesiastes and mankind's desire for rest (we will expand on this in due time).<sup>268</sup> Pascal also connects the idea to mankind's desire to escape death. Humanity cannot cure death, suffering, wretchedness, etc., so instead, it has decided not to think on these things.<sup>269</sup> Diversion is possible, immortality is not.

In his project from June 1658, Pascal writes:

I have often said that man's unhappiness arises from one thing alone: that he cannot remain quietly in his room. A man who has enough to live on would not go to sea or lay a siege, if he knew how to enjoy staying at home. Men would never buy commissions in the army at such expense, unless they found it unbearable not to leave town. They would not seek conversation and the entertainment of games, except that they do not enjoy staying at home.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 22, S104/L70.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 133, S445/L889.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 38, S166/L133.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 39 S168/L136.



Note here some possible similarities to Evagrius' initial understanding of acedia in the monastic tradition. If a person is content, he can stay in his quarters and has no need of diversion; however, being unhappy, or discontent, Pascal sees the modern man acting in a similar manner to a monk suffering an assault from the demon of noontide. We have yet to broach the topic of boredom within Pascal's thought, but here in his discussion of diversion there appears to be the faint specter of sloth as he begins to explain that the human living in Modernity is one bathed in deep dissatisfaction.

Pascal's observation is an astute one, though perhaps an extreme one. Why does a woman choose to stand up when she does? It could be any number of reasons, perhaps she's hungry, perhaps she's tired, perhaps there was a knock at the door, but in all cases she arises because she believes that doing so will make her happier than staying seated on the couch. On a grander scale, Pascal asks why anyone does anything at all? If a man were completely content in every way, would he strive after things? To strive seems to indicate a lack, but if there is no lack, then there is nothing to strive after.<sup>271</sup> In this way, Pascal notes that people need to experience something new, or something different, in order to escape what leaves them unfulfilled. It could be asked if Pascal is being too draconian, and that perhaps discontentment, or desiring a change of scenery doesn't equate with someone being unhappy; however, in Pascal's framework, happiness and contentment are one in the same, and therefore to lack anything is to be unhappy. Perhaps

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<sup>271</sup> It would seem that to some extent this would also apply to altruistic actions as well. If a person sees someone in need, they become discontent and desire to help. This motivation, in Pascal's thought, could take two forms. The more positive of these would be in the truly actualized self, being motivated out of love. However, the more probable, and the more widely applicable, would seem to see this motivation closer to Evagrius' monk sitting in his cell hoping for a person to need assistance to be distracted from his present work.

one could disagree, and suggest that an action could be motivated out of contentment. A person who is happy, or content, sees another person in need, and out of love for that person acts to meet that need. It seems that in that situation, Pascal would still see the act as coming from a lack in the one acting, in that a loving person, seeing someone else in need is not as content as a loving person having met that need.

The examples that Pascal uses are not things that are evil, or sinful, by any means. Yet, sea exploration, conquests, etc., all stem from this need for diversion. The whole of human history has been shaped by mankind not being content, and that discontentment, that unhappiness, has led to medicines, technology, and empires; in a very real way, the need for diversion has led to productivity and human advancement. Indeed, that advancement was the promise of early modernity. Pascal himself created and invented out of this drive; however, it still stemmed from the fact that he himself was discontent and unhappy. The advancements of history, thought, and technology are not bad things, but Pascal's observation here is that if Alexander had been happy, there would not have been a Greek Empire. Mankind is driven to diversion due to his unhappiness.

Pressing his point further, Pascal asks his reader to consider a king. This king has all the advantages that come with his position, and yet without distraction, he too will fall sullen. He will think about revolts, threats, and his inevitable death. Truthfully, the greatest source of happiness in being the king is that he has access to a wide array of diversions. However, if he were not being diverted, the king would be unhappier than his lowest subject who was able to divert himself.

“That is why play, and the conversation of women, war, and high offices are so sought after. Not that they bring happiness, or that we imagine true bliss to consist of money won at games or at hares that are hunted; we would not accept these if they were given to us. We do not seek that easy and peaceful life that allows us to

think about our unhappy condition, nor the dangers of war, nor the burdens of office, but the bustle that turns our thoughts away and diverts us.—Reason why we prefer the hunt to the kill.”<sup>272</sup>

Not only is it the case that a man is unable to sit contently in his room, but the tasks or objectives that he develops to divert himself do not make him happy. Was Alexander satisfied after taking over the known world? No, he wept that there were no more worlds to conquer. If someone were to take a cooler full of salmon and go to a group fishing on a lake, and give them the salmon, would the group be pleased and stop fishing? No, because it is not the fish they want, it is the act of trying to catch the fish, the diversion. Pascal therefore understands human life as constant empty striving. There is a shard within a person that lets her know that happiness is not found in work, but in rest; however, that rest is disconcerting and thinking of it depressing, so instead, a person constantly seeks, constantly hunts, but can never find, because in the finding, the seeking ends, and the despair once again returns. This is a life of perpetually chasing after the wind, and as Raposa notes, for Pascal, time in diversion is dead time, or empty time.<sup>273</sup> If one’s life consists of empty or dead time, then it is the case that one’s life is empty and hollow.

It is here, in this conception of the empty life, that we can begin our discussion of boredom. The next section of this chapter will analyze Pascal’s use of the word *ennui*, and how boredom situates itself in the totality of his thought, but at this stage it is important to see the connection between boredom and unhappiness. The fragment that we have

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<sup>272</sup> Pascal, *Pensées*, 39, S168/L136.

<sup>273</sup> Michael L. Raposa, *Boredom and the Religious Imagination*, Studies in Religion and Culture (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 92

been analyzing in this section begins with Pascal stating that a man is unable to sit in his room because he is unhappy, and ends thusly:

We seek rest in struggle against some obstacles. And when we have overcome these, rest proves unbearable because of the boredom it produces. We have to escape from it and beg for excitement. For we think either of our miseries or of those threatening us. And even if we should feel safe enough from all sides, boredom of its own accord would not fail to rise from the depths of our heart, where it is naturally rooted, and to fill our mind with poison.<sup>274</sup>

There is an obvious parallel between unhappiness and boredom in these two passages. In the earlier passage, man is unable sit still because of unhappiness, in the latter, man cannot enjoy rest because of boredom. Pascal is not explicit in his view of the relationship between boredom and unhappiness. It could be argued that he sees these two concepts as one in the same; it could be argued that he sees them in a cause and effect relationship. It seems most likely that the relationship between these concepts falls victim to Pascal's linguistic vagueness that we saw in our discussion of reason, imagination, and the heart. What is clear though, is that they are deeply connected to the concept of boredom, and that both of them elicit the desire for diversion.

In the case of the two passages that bookend section A of fragment S168/L136, it appears that boredom is the cause of unhappiness. The woman who overcomes an obstacle cannot enjoy her rest because it produces boredom; and Pascal states in the former passage that her unhappiness arises from one thing, namely, her inability to remain quietly in her room. We cannot rest, because we become bored, and that boredom produces unhappiness, and that unhappiness drives us toward diversion.

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<sup>274</sup> Pascal, *Pensées*, 40, S168/L136.

The relationship between boredom and unhappiness is not quite so neatly defined however. The next section of the same fragment begins, “Thus man is so unhappy that he would be bored even if he had no cause for boredom out of his own temperament. And he is so empty that...the least thing, such as pushing a billiard ball with a cue, is enough to amuse him.”<sup>275</sup> It appears that there is a reading of this passage in which either boredom, or unhappiness, is seen as the cause of the other; however, the most natural reading may be Pascal indicating that the pervasiveness of mankind’s unhappiness (as cause) testifies to its pervasive boredom (as effect). In either case, the exact causal relationship between boredom and unhappiness is a greater concern for our study than it is for Pascal, whose main concern is their interrelation, and the overwhelming prominence of both in the life of modern man.

Boredom and dissatisfaction are deeply connected. Even if a person has convinced himself that he enjoys living at home, Pascal writes, “Our boredom in leaving pursuits to which we are attached. A man lives happily at home. Let him see an attractive woman or gamble happily for five or six days; you will find him miserable if he returns to what he was doing before.”<sup>276</sup> Again, it is possible to understand this passage as indicating that boredom produces dissatisfaction, but, in light of our understanding of acedia as the root of profound boredom, it seems that we can clarify Pascal’s statement in that the man, who was content in his room, is now bored by it because he is unhappy, not being diverted as he was by the woman, or by gambling. All said, modern man craves diversion because he is deeply unhappy. He is never himself, he creates a self that he believes others desire him to be, and in doing so he is never satisfied nor pleased with

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<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 40, S168/L138 B.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 24, S114/L79.

what he is doing or pretends to be. He can never be at rest, and the attempt to rest suffocates him in boredom and unhappiness to the point that he despairs if he is not pursuing a diversion; a diversion that is ultimately empty, and therefore condemns modern man to a life of perpetual boredom and unhappiness.

It is for this reason that Pascal sees diversion as humanity's greatest misery. While boredom and unhappiness are miserable, diversion, the attempt to escape that misery, is a greater misery still. "For it is mainly what prevents us from thinking about ourselves, leading us imperceptibly to our ruin. Without it we would be bored, and this boredom would drive us to seek a more solid means of escape. But diversion amuses us and guides us imperceptibly to death."<sup>277</sup> Pascal sees boredom as a great problem for humanity, but one that could lead a person to realizing his/her emptiness. Diversion is a salve that people use to keep them from experiencing boredom, but in actuality, diversion enhances boredom. As Raposa notes, boredom is an experience of emptiness for Pascal, but it is a meaningful emptiness.<sup>278</sup> Instead of facing that emptiness however, humanity embraces any type of diversion.

Diversion, mankind's greatest misery, is a means of escaping the looming ever-present boredom that waits around every corner; and because these diversions are trivial, they reveal the vanity of the world, and those seeking them.

Anyone who does not see the vanity of the world is himself very vain. Indeed, who does not see it, other than young people absorbed in noise, diversion, and thoughts of the future? But take away their diversion, and you will see them shrivel out of boredom. Then they will feel their nothingness without recognizing it, for it is indeed wretched to be insufferably depressed, as soon as you are reduced to introspection without any means of diversion.<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 6, S33/L414.

<sup>278</sup> Raposa, *Boredom and the Religious Imagination*, 47.

<sup>279</sup> Pascal, *Pensées*, 12, S70/L36.

Note here that Pascal includes thoughts of the future in league with noise and diversion. Pascal is not against planning for the future; rather, he is concerned with anything that removes a person from the present. In another entry he explains:

Humans will do anything to not have to consider their present state. A person will become so obsessed with the past, or a possible future that she never lives in the present. She cannot be happy, because she spends her time planning to be happy. In her planning to live, she never actually lives.<sup>280</sup>

And in another passage, making reference to the Wisdom of Solomon, “*The fascination for trivialities*. So that passion can do no harm, let us act as if we had only one week to live.”<sup>281</sup>

For Pascal, the present is the important moment. The world is full of trivial things, including the thoughts and fancies of those who live in the past, or those who cannot stop imagining the future, but in both actions, a person is not living in, or interacting with the present. They are in many ways, waiting for life to begin, or as Pascal states in the first quote in this section, attempting to not feel their nothingness. When the thoughts of times past, or times to come are wiped away, and all the distractions, vanities, and trivialities are removed, a person will then “shrivel out of boredom.” This fear of shriveling is why people embrace distraction; however, what if one had only a week to live? Would the diversions still matter, or would they be seen as the vanities they are, and in that case, would it not be more prudent to consider the meaning of life? Boredom is something humanity dreads, but humanity dreads it because it seems to point beyond itself. As mentioned earlier, someone is only sad at not king, if and only if he were supposed to be

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid., 16, L47.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid., 2, S5/L386.

king. In the same way, a person despairs over emptiness, if and only if, he were meant to be full. Pascal sees boredom as a clue to the nature of humanity.

### *Ennui: The Great Cause of Dread*

What then is boredom for Pascal? Thus far we have discussed that it entails a feeling of emptiness, and that it causes unhappiness and spurs people toward diversion, but what is boredom itself? For Pascal, boredom is part of a triad that he labels the condition of humanity: “Man’s condition, Inconstancy, boredom, anxiety.”<sup>282</sup> Hammond notes that of these three terms, the first and third indicate movement and restlessness, while boredom, or *ennui*, indicates stasis. Further, whereas the other two words are direct opposites of other nouns, *ennui* lacks a contrary concept.<sup>283</sup> Due to this lack, *ennui* cannot be defined in relation to its opposite, but it can be understood to be a negative in light of the other words that Pascal pairs it with.

Before we continue, three factors in understanding Pascal’s use of *ennui* should be considered. First, as has been discussed in other chapters, prior to the modern era, the concept of boredom does not seem to have existed. Kuhn pushes the advent further back stating that *ennui* became a dominant concept in western thought at the dawn of Christianity;<sup>284</sup> however, in doing so he is drawing a connection between *acedia* and *ennui* that makes them synonyms, as opposed to causally related. In Kuhn’s defense, the second factor that must be taken into consideration is that the term *ennui* is not an exact equivalent to what can be called trivial boredom. *Ennui* seems more inline with the profound boredom that is at the heart of this study. However, prior to Pascal, boredom

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid., 10, S58/L24.

<sup>283</sup> Hammond, *Playing with Truth*, 82.

<sup>284</sup> Kuhn, *The Demon of Noontide*, 36.



did not appear to be discussed. Trivial boredom as the concept of *tedium de vita* had been, but the closest thing to profound boredom that had been discussed was acedia.

However, the similarity between acedia and ennui does not justify Kuhn's assertion. Whereas Kuhn is correct that the concept of acedia, sorrow at the demands placed on us by the divine, did not become a dominant concept until the advent of Christianity, we would argue, that it was the removal of Christianity, or the divine, as the central narrative of the West that caused the birth of ennui. What we briefly discussed in chapter one as Taylor's "disenchantment." Christianity did not bring ennui, but the removal of Christianity in the West did. In part, this can be seen in the manner in which Pascal develops the term. Ennui and acedia do not mean the same thing, and the drive by Kuhn (along with Tooley, and others) appears to be that prior to Pascal, there was not a conversation about the concept of boredom, but there was a conversation about acedia, and since there is some overlap, acedia must be the earlier equivalent. Given that acedia still exists, and is still discussed, along side ennui, it seems more convincing that acedia is the cause of ennui, and Pascal, writing in early Modernity, is the first thinker to address profound boredom in the wake of the start of secularization.<sup>285</sup>

The third factor that must be taken into consideration as we analyze Pascal's use of ennui is that the word existed prior to his writing. Pascal did not create a new word for the concept of profound boredom; however, he took an existing word and gave it a specialized meaning. Pascal is recognized in all general studies on the word "ennui" as

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<sup>285</sup> Note, this is not to say that profound boredom did not exist in the Medieval or Ancient world, more that the phenomenon was not prevalent enough to merit a prolonged discussion, or at least not one that has survived.

having brought a central importance to the word; some going so far as to say that in Pascal the term ennui reached its highest point.<sup>286</sup>

In his incredibly helpful word study on ennui, Hammond notes that of the three major French dictionaries published in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, two of them give very general definitions for ennui.<sup>287</sup> Richelet's dictionary defines ennui as "sadness" or "displeasure."<sup>288</sup> Furetiere defines ennui as "grief" and "anger due to something unpleasant."<sup>289</sup> The third major dictionary, the Academie's, draws a distinction between these general definitions and a more particular meaning in "The weariness of spirit caused by a thing that despises itself."<sup>290</sup> Of these three definitions, the latter is the closest to how Pascal uses the term.

In his study, Hammond does not address the years of publication of these works. Pascal passed away in 1662, and the first edition of his *Pensées* was published in 1670. Richelet's dictionary, which contains the most basic definitions for ennui, was published ten years after the *Pensées* in 1680. Furetiere, whose general definitions include one that is slightly expanded, was published in 1690, 20 years after the *Pensées*; and the Academie's was published in 1694, 24 years after the *Pensées*. Though connection perhaps cannot be proven, it is of note that while ennui was a word used in the French language prior to Pascal, at least looking at the three major dictionaries published in the

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<sup>286</sup> Nicholas Hammond, *Playing with Truth: Language and the Human Condition in Pascal's Pensées*, Oxford Modern Languages and Literature Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 103.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid., This paragraph in particular will be pulling from Hammond's work, however, the words that he leaves in the original French have been translated, but the French will be noted in footnotes.

<sup>288</sup> *Tristesse* and *deplaisir* respectively.

<sup>289</sup> *Chagrin* and *facherie que donne quelque discours, ou quelque accident desplaint* respectively.

<sup>290</sup> *Lassitude d'esprit, causee par une chose qui deplaist par elle-meme ou par sa duree*

17<sup>th</sup> century, the further from the publication of his work the dictionary was produced, the more the definition of ennui began to resemble Pascal's.

Another important point that Hammond notes is that the Academie's particular definition is supported by examples of uses of ennui that are in the singular, whereas the general definitions of ennui that are presented in the other dictionaries are in the plural. Hammond concludes from this that *ennuis*, the plural of ennui, is used to reference more frivolous forms of boredom, and the singular a deeper, more specialized sense. This distinction is important for our purposes because each of the 29 instances of ennui in the *Pensées* are in the singular form. Hammond points to Pascal's editing of fragment L136 where he initially used *ennuis* instead of ennui to further show that Pascal avoided the plural, which would have been seen as more frivolous, or trivial.<sup>291</sup> One does wonder though if, given the years of publication of the dictionaries after the *Pensées* how much the difference in the use of the singular and the plural predates Pascal, or is due to Pascal. That however, is beyond our scope.

Hammond also notes that in the *Pensées* ennui is used in a passive and an active sense. In the passive sense, ennui is connected to the idea of emptiness, and in the active sense, it is connected to entertainment, or diversion, which we have discussed already at some length. It is important to note that, in relation to nothingness, ennui does not itself seem to indicate being empty, but rather the awareness of that emptiness.<sup>292</sup> Pascal writes:

Nothing is so intolerable for man as to be in complete tranquility, without passions, without dealings, without diversion, without effort. He then feels his nothingness, isolation, insufficiency, dependence, weakness, emptiness.

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<sup>291</sup> Hammond, *Playing with Truth*, 103-14.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, 107-114.

Immediately there arises from the depth of his soul boredom, gloom, sadness, chagrin, resentment, despair.<sup>293</sup>

When a person is empty, it is not correct to say she suffers from ennui, or is bored; however, when she becomes aware of that emptiness, then boredom arises. In the above quote, we see that boredom arises along with many other negative states of being, some of which the dictionaries mentioned prior have considered possible definitions for ennui. However, ennui is a particular mode of being, and perhaps as we discussed in the last section with unhappiness, ennui is the source of these other negative states.

This sense of emptiness is why Raposa suggests that ennui should be seen not merely as boredom, but rather as boredom combined with melancholy, or sadness with no known source. This affliction can often be admired as opposed to pitied because it can manifest as a sign of superiority related to persons or situations<sup>294</sup> As though this person is so enlightened that he is aware of the emptiness of everything surrounding him, and that leaves him perpetually saddened. Raposa's assessment falls almost completely in line with Pascal's line of thinking, though Pascal would perhaps want to clarify one point.

We have already seen the connection between unhappiness and boredom. But the sense of superiority that Raposa notes, Pascal will want to drive to a spiritual root, namely the acedia discussed in chapter two. In what is believed to be the earliest fragment in the *Pensées*, Pascal starts his projected work "To be insensitive to the point of despising things of interest and to become insensitive to what interests us most."<sup>295</sup> The following fragments discuss the prophets, and the centrality of Christ, and yet mankind's fascination with the trivial. It seems, that if the projected order of the opening

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<sup>293</sup> Pascal, *Pensées*, 163, S515/L622.

<sup>294</sup> Raposa, *Boredom and the Religious Imagination*, 34-35.

<sup>295</sup> Pascal, *Pensées*, 2, S2/L383.

fragments are correct, that Pascal believed that Christianity is of central interest for humanity, and yet humanity is empty because it experiences a sense of superiority even to God, and from that can come nothing but emptiness.

The melancholy, the pensive sadness, that Raposa senses in ennui, comes from the fact that mankind is made to think, but thinks wrongly. Instead of thinking about his existence, his creator, and his reason for living, Pascal says that people instead think of dancing, singing, playing the lute, etc, without ever thinking about what it means to be human.<sup>296</sup> This insight returns us to the idea of the moi discussed earlier. Instead of a person thinking about what it means to be a person, he instead thinks about distraction, or social convention, which focuses on the self creating the false self for others, is another type distraction. Kreeft notes that the totality of our civilization is mostly fox hunting, or a distraction that we've developed. A social game that we play. "The social dance has replaced the cosmic dance [the medieval image] as the pattern to conform to."<sup>297</sup> Instead of seeing oneself as a being created as a part of the cosmic dance of nature, here at the birth of Modernity, one constructs a false self as a means to try and find happiness, but can only find sadness and emptiness.

Again we return to the somewhat hopeful nature of ennui for Pascal. The person who senses her emptiness is the one more likely to try and fill it. However, here we see Hammond's second use of ennui, the active sense, in that the one who experiences ennui seeks entertainment, or diversion. Wood correctly asserts that for Pascal the Fall in Genesis 3 causes both ennui and diversion.<sup>298</sup> We have become insensitive to the point of

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 163, S515/L620.

<sup>297</sup> Kreeft, *Christianity for Modern Pagans*, 179.

<sup>298</sup> Wood, *Duplicity*, 44.

despising that which ought to interest us the most, and the options then are to either return to being sensitive to it, or to be distracted. In the former sections we have discussed Pascal's understanding of distraction and unhappiness at length, so it need not be repeated here, aside from to use it as a stepping stone to Pascal's answer to the problem of profound boredom.

Mankind seeks entertainment, or distraction, to escape boredom and the unhappiness that arises from realizing that he is empty; however, seeking happiness in entertainment ultimately fails. Pascal says that the Stoic says one can find happiness within himself, and others say happiness is in diversion, but both are wrong, because true happiness is "...in God, both outside and within us."<sup>299</sup> However, the one who seeks God is, as stated early, both reasonable and happy. Pascal goes further stating, "No one is happy like a true Christian, or so reasonable, or virtuous, or loveable."<sup>300</sup>

It is here that we see the great danger of boredom. "All men seek to be happy. This is without exception...They all strive toward this end...They will never take the slightest step except toward this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who go hang themselves."<sup>301</sup> The great desire of mankind is happiness, yet only those with faith achieve what they are aiming for.<sup>302</sup> Those outside of faith have within them an empty trace of where happiness ought to be, or an infinite abyss, or as this idea has been translated in more contemporary settings, a God shaped hole. In light of

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<sup>299</sup> Pascal, *Pensées*, 5, S26/L407.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, 103, S389/L357.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*, 45, S181/L148.

<sup>302</sup> Pascal does not state explicitly Christian faith in this paragraph, and perhaps it could be argued that those outside of the Christian faith have achieved what Pascal is addressing here, but within the context of this fragment, it should be understood that Pascal intends "faith" to mean "faith in Christ."

chapter two, and the sorrow that comes from looking at the demands placed on humanity by friendship with God, the awareness of humanity's emptiness breeds terror. Mankind is unhappy, mankind does not want to be unhappy, so mankind pretends to be happy, or chases things that they claim will bring happiness, because doing so keeps them from having to face the emptiness inside them, an emptiness that can only be satisfied in their creator. In boredom, people stop, and sense that need for something greater, but what that something greater might be they despise.

The only true escape from profound boredom is in embracing one's creator. Only the infinite can fill the infinite abyss within humanity. Pascal posits that everyone seeks the universal good, but since they have turned from the true good, they attempt to fill themselves with other goods that do not satisfy. However, a religion that points a person to his creator can in fact make him happy. "To make man happy [religion] must show him that God exists; that we are required to love him; that our true bliss is to be in him and our sole ill to be separated from him."<sup>303</sup> In the beginning of this chapter we discussed how Pascal desired to reintroduce Augustine to his 17<sup>th</sup> century context, and here we see a statement that sounds very much like Augustine's famous quote at the start of *The Confessions*, that man does not rest until he rests in God.

Pascal uses the term "true bliss" to describe the correct relation of a person to God. This bliss eradicates the possibility of boredom. Pascal has stated that embracing God through true religion can make a person happy, and assuming that boredom comes from unhappiness, then God eliminates boredom altogether. Given that boredom comes from the realization that one is empty, Pascal would adamantly deny that one who has

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<sup>303</sup> Pascal, *Pensées*, 46, S182/L149.

embraced her true bliss could be bored. When a person's inner void is filled with the infinite love of God, she is changed. As noted in fragment S389/L357, she is more virtuous, more loveable, but also more happy. She is happy because she is not empty. When a person is not empty, she cannot have the sense of emptiness (boredom), and therefore is not unhappy. Boredom then, is a clue to humanity's need for God's infinite love, and also a malady that is cured by God's infinite love. Where love abounds, profound boredom cannot.

### ***The Possibility of Divine Ennui?***

Before concluding this chapter, there is one passage in the *Pensées* that deserves our attention. The argument presented in this chapter takes into consideration every use of ennui in the *Pensées* with the exception of one: "Jesus is soul weary (*ennui*)."<sup>304</sup> Notice that Ariew saw fit to translate "ennui" as "soul weary" in his translation, yet included "ennui" in a parenthetical reference to make sure that its use was not missed. In light of the forgoing argument, the possibility that Jesus Himself could experience boredom is inherently problematic. The question though, as to what this passage might mean, does allow for a brief consideration of the possibility of divine boredom.

Nietzsche suggested that someone should write a poem about God's boredom on the seventh day of creation,<sup>305</sup> and that God struggled in vain against boredom, so he created humanity to entertain him..<sup>306</sup> Clearly, Nietzsche did not think the God of the

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 274, S749/L919.

<sup>305</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 323.

<sup>306</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, ed. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 47.



Bible, nor the god of Olympus actually existed in order to face boredom; however, his indictments seem to be aimed the possibility that an eternal being could be perpetually happy. In fact, the myths of Olympus seem to indicate that gods cannot. Further, Svendsen notes that Kant and Nisbet believed that had Adam and Eve not been banished from Eden, they would have suffered terrible boredom. Even though they were in God's presence.<sup>307</sup> We can extrapolate from these assertions that both Kant and Nietzsche would presume heaven to be a place afflicted with boredom as well.

However, as we discussed in chapter two, charity is the bane of acedia, and acedia is the root of boredom. If Adam and Eve had maintained perfect friendship with God, they would never have experienced boredom, because they would have been filled with divine love for God and for each other. In the same manner, those who dwell in heaven are infused with such love, and therefore heaven is a place of endless delight. As von Balthasar notes, "In man's relation with God there is only an ever new love."<sup>308</sup> Since the divine love is the source of this delight, Aquinas and Pascal would stand against Nietzsche's assertions as well, noting that God Himself is love. Since God is love, He Himself cannot be empty. Some might suggest that because heaven, or eternal existence, are perpetually the same, that boredom is inevitable. Erfani is right to posit that humans associate boredom with sameness; however, it could be otherwise.<sup>309</sup> If one were completely satisfied, completely fulfilled, would not perfect continuity be a blessing? Remembering Pascal's statement that man is unhappy because he cannot sit perpetually in his room, it would seem that this inability is not the same for God, or for those who

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<sup>307</sup> Lars Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), 20.

<sup>308</sup> Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 175.

<sup>309</sup> Farhang Erfani, "Sarte and Kierkegaard On the Aesthetics of Boredom," *Idealistic Studies* 34, no. 3 (2004): 304.

seek Him. God is love, and perpetually content, and therefore He cannot be bored, and those who seek Him are infused with love and freed from boredom.

What then might Pascal have meant in fragment S749/L919? This passage is seated in a prolonged discussion of Jesus' last night on Earth as He awaited the crucifixion. Though the fragment is its own pericope, the surrounding pericopes in the fragment discuss Jesus praying in Gethsemane while His disciples have fallen asleep. Remember that ennui is not emptiness itself, but rather, it is the recognition of said emptiness. Hammond suggests that the use of ennui here does not focus on Jesus' human frailty, but rather His abandonment by His earthly support, the disciples.<sup>310</sup> In light of Pascal's other uses of ennui, we would argue that in this instance he is not changing his view, but rather, using ennui as a means of emphasis. Jesus here is not spiritually empty, He is not devoid of love; however, His disciples are sleeping and will abandon Him, He will be betrayed, beaten, tortured, and then put to death as a criminal. Jesus was not empty, but He was at that moment as emotionally close to empty as the God-man could be. The translation "soul weary" does Pascal's intent justice. None of the things that Jesus was facing are of the nature to leave one bored, but they are such as to leave one alone and in despair, and that appears to be what Pascal was attempting to communicate in this passage; not an emptiness of interest, but an emptiness of exhaustion.

### ***Conclusion***

Pascal lived at the start of the Modern World, but in many ways was a pre-modern thinker. His rejection of the Cartesian philosophical underpinnings of modernity led to an analysis of 17<sup>th</sup> century France that at times could be harsh. However, Pascal's intention

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<sup>310</sup> Hammond, *Playing with Truth*, 115.

was never to be cruel, instead he desired people to return to their creator. Prior to Pascal, the experience of boredom surely occurred, it seems that even Pascal would use the term ennui to describe the experiences of some who had lived in the pre-modern world; however, the experience was not common enough to merit prolonged discussion. The sin of acedia was discussed at length, but the effect of that sin that we have been calling profound boredom, or ennui, is addressed first by Pascal. With the removal of the certainty of the exterior world, and the divine who holds that world together, mankind was left empty. In order to try and fill that void with the happiness that humanity craves, Pascal believed that humans create false selves to try and gain acceptance by the crowd, and in doing so, are never actually themselves. This lack of true subjectivity plagues humanity, but reveals the innate desire that people have for happiness.

As Pascal looked at the state of humanity in the early modern world, he saw emptiness. A society emptied of happiness, and what's more, a world, or way of thinking, emptied of its actuality. "The eternal silence of these infinite spaces frightens me."<sup>311</sup> Kreeft explains that at the wake of Modernity, what the ancients and the medievals called "the heavens" became "space," something with cosmic content became empty. In that emptiness, Pascal felt the isolation that was starting to afflict his fellow man, and in particular the rise of the phenomenon of ennui, or the profound sense of emptiness that one feels toward existence. Pascal noted that this problem could be a clue toward its own solution, but more often than not, spurs the need toward perpetual distraction. The only true resolution for Pascal, is to come into a proper union of God, our true bliss. This

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<sup>311</sup> Pascal, *Pensées*, 64, L201.

answer is very similar to the next thinker that we turn to, as in the next chapter we consider Kierkegaard's approach to boredom in Late Modernity.

## Chapter Four: Kierkegaard's Response to the Problem in Late Modernity

### *Introduction*

In the previous chapter we considered the Christian response to profound boredom in early Modernity as presented by Pascal. As noted in that chapter, Kreeft sees Pascal as the only thinker to reject Descartes' approach to philosophy until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>312</sup> In this chapter we turn to look at the 19<sup>th</sup> century philosopher who continues in Pascal's rejection of Descartes' project. In many ways, Pascal and Kierkegaard see the world from the same vantage point; however, separated by 200 years of modernism shaping the culture.

In our study, Pascal and Kierkegaard can be seen as bookends to some degree. While Evagrius and Aquinas present the spiritual root of boredom, namely acedia, and Pascal helps craft the concept of boredom as acedia takes root in society; Kierkegaard responds to boredom from within the context of a society deeply saturated in it. Whereas Pascal provides a Christian, or spiritual, response to boredom from within a culture that is just beginning to detach from the spiritual, Kierkegaard is responding to a society in which boredom is not a new threat, but rather an expected facet of life.

In this chapter we will analyze Kierkegaard's approach to existence, and his views on despair and melancholy, and how those concepts relate to the concept of boredom. Many of this chapter's conclusions will resemble those of the previous chapter; however, Kierkegaard's literary output is far more robust and therefore his reasoning is to some extent more complete than Pascal's. Further, Kierkegaard is responding as a

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<sup>312</sup> Peter Kreeft and Blaise Pascal, *Christianity for Modern Pagans: Pascal's Pensées Edited, Outlined, and Explained* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 9.

Christian thinker to a society that, as his contemporary Nietzsche notes, is growing increasingly secular, while also growing increasingly bored, and Kierkegaard's understanding of the two is vital to understanding Heidegger's thoughts on the matter, which will be the basis of chapter five. This chapter resolves in presenting Kierkegaard's understandings of love and faith as his answer to the growing epidemic of profound boredom.

### *The Goal of Kierkegaard's Authorship*

Some thinkers present their ideas in such a way that one is able to consider each of their books in isolation. Kierkegaard does not give his reader this luxury. Kierkegaard's authorship is a combination of books written in his own name, books written using pseudonyms, books written using multiple pseudonyms, essays, and upbuilding discourses. Each type of writing serves a particular purpose, and each pseudonym serves as a voice that speaks to that purpose. The complexity of Kierkegaard's authorship means that it is possible to find areas of contradiction in which it appears that Kierkegaard disagrees with himself, and that the absolute goal of his works can be missed. For this reason, the starting place of our discussion must be in addressing the goal of Kierkegaard's authorship in full, before considering how boredom fits into his thought.

Kierkegaard answers the question as to goal of his authorship in *The Point of View*, stating, "Thus my entire work as an author revolves around: becoming a Christian in Christendom."<sup>313</sup> Before this answer can be helpful, many other questions need to be

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<sup>313</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, vol. 22, *The Point of View* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), 90.

addressed, and indeed will be throughout this chapter; however, in Kierkegaard's own words, this is what his goal was in both his writing, and in the manner in which he wrote. In his usage, the term "Christendom" refers to a culture that is influenced by Christian ideas, and includes Christian trapping such as attending church (a state sponsored church no less), praying, etc.; however, lacks any actual commitment of the self to Christ, and therefore is a fake, or a pretend Christianity.

In many ways Christendom can be seen as the society of Kierkegaard's day, a society which Kierkegaard sees as shallow, reflective, and lacking passion. By reflective, Kierkegaard does not mean that those within the society think deeply about matters related to life and faith, rather, he means the exact opposite. Instead of thinking deeply through matters, those within society merely reflect back what they see/hear. Instead of being themselves, they are what everyone else wants them to be. We can see here similarities with Pascal's understanding of identity discussed in the previous chapter.

To this end, that means that though there was a state church in Denmark, people attended, and went through Christian motions, not because they believed Christianity, but because that is simply what one does. This is reminiscent of Nietzsche's pronouncement that God is dead, but "thunder takes time" so the majority of the populace did not yet realize they did not believe. However, as opposed to demanding that people lean into the death of God, Kierkegaard believes the solution to the issue is in the re-embracing of the divine. Indeed, in Kierkegaard's reading of his culture, society was not even passionate enough to cling to Nietzsche's atheism. Connell rightly suggests that Kierkegaard believed that in any state/cultural religion, real unbelievers are as rare as real believers,

and that perhaps a genuine atheist is more “religious” than a conventional member of Christendom.<sup>314</sup>

How then can it be the case that Kierkegaard saw people neither believing nor disbelieving? Again, this is due to the reflective nature of his society. In *The Present Age* Kierkegaard uses an analogy of a jewel on a frozen lake. The jewel is on a patch of ice that is rather thin, but closer to the shore the ice is sturdy and safe. “In a passionate age,” Kierkegaard writes, “the crowds would applaud the courage of the man who ventured out...” they would cheer him, mourn him, tremble with him. However, in a reflective age, people would dismiss the task as unreasonable and not worth the effort. They would transform it into a feat of skill, and watch from a safe distance while skaters would skate on the safe part of the ice and make it look as though they were going to go to the dangerous part of the ice.<sup>315</sup> Everyone would be safe at all times, no real risk would have been taken, and yet the crowd would loudly celebrate the performers who facsimiled danger. In fact, the celebration would be nothing more than a joke and an excuse for the celebrators to celebrate themselves.<sup>316</sup> In his peers, Kierkegaard saw a generation of people who believed in nothing, not in a nihilistic sense, but in a sense that they lacked beliefs. Christendom was not about taking risks, not about passionately believing, deeply loving, exercising faith or doing anything that could put the individual in jeopardy; but rather, about placidly reflecting the society, and approaching everything with skepticism and irony. For Kierkegaard, the Christian within Christendom is almost never a Christian.

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<sup>314</sup> George Connell, *Kierkegaard and the Paradox of Religious Diversity*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 129.

<sup>315</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, Alexander Dru and Walter Arnold Kaufmann, *The Present Age* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010). 8.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.



For a person within Christendom to become a Christian she either becomes what she already is, or she must be wrestled out of a delusion.<sup>317</sup> In the case of the former, her inwardness deepens, but that is a rarity. The majority of those within Christendom fall into the latter category and are Christians only in their imagination.<sup>318</sup> Instead of being Christian, and living in what Kierkegaard refers to as the religious sphere of existence, instead, “They live in the esthetic or, at most, the esthetic-ethical categories.”<sup>319</sup> We will take up the spheres of existence in the next section, but at this point it is worth noting that Kierkegaard sees those within Christendom as living in one mode of existence, while pretending, or perhaps being ignorant of the fact, that they are in one of the other modes of existence. Given that they are in other modes of existence, they live in rebellion before God. However, they need not stay that way. Indeed, what pushed Kierkegaard forward was the belief that, “And this is my faith, that however much confusion and evil and contemptibleness there can be in human beings as soon as they become the irresponsible and unrepentant ‘public,’ ‘crowd,’ etc—there is just as much truth and goodness and loveableness in them when one can get them as single individuals.”<sup>320</sup>

We see now that in becoming a Christian in Christendom, one must become the singular individual, the one who mimics Christ in stepping away from the untruth of the crowd, and comes to embrace God as the middle term, infusing all relationships with love. As we will discuss later, this transformation entails embracing the love of God, and being filled with the love of God. Love is so central to this transformation that Strawser asserts that the goal of Kierkegaard’s authorship should be understood “...phenomenologically

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<sup>317</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 55.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

as the task of becoming a lover.”<sup>321</sup> However, for our purposes at this early stage, that process of becoming a lover entails stepping away from the crowd, and embracing that goodness and loveableness which Kierkegaard believes is within his fellow man. To get people to see this need for transformation then is the key. In order to do this task, Kierkegaard believed that he needed to be cautious. “If one in any way causes the one ensnared [in an illusion] to be antagonized, then all is lost. And this one does by a direct attack...”<sup>322</sup>

Kierkegaard believed that if he initially directly assaulted those in Christendom, he would never help free any of them from the illusion that entangled them. Instead, he saw his role as teacher to entail putting himself in the position of the learner and traveling with them.<sup>323</sup> Instead of telling them about the problems within Christendom, he wanted to help them discover the problems themselves, and therefore step away from the mindless crowd, and become the single individual.<sup>324</sup> In order to employ this pedagogy, Kierkegaard developed his pseudonyms.

Kierkegaard uses over 20 pseudonyms in his writing, each of them embodying a different life view depending where they are situated within the spheres of existence. By making use of so many voices, Kierkegaard is able to speak to his audience, which is scattered throughout these spheres of existence, or approaches to life, from within. In many cases, he has these voices mingle and has those in different life stages disagree and

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<sup>321</sup> Michael Strawser, *Kierkegaard and the Philosophy of Love* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), ix.

<sup>322</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 43.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>324</sup> In his later writing he does change tactics in what is called “The Assault on Christendom,” but this is only after he applies his initial approach.

discuss with one another, but it is never Kierkegaard doing so. In fact, Kierkegaard sees the pseudonyms as distinct identities:

In the pseudonymous books there is not a single word by me. I have no opinion about them except as a third party, no knowledge of their meaning except as a reader, not the remotest private relation to them... Therefore, if it should occur to anyone to want to quote a particular passage from the books, it is my wish, my prayer, that he will do me the kindness of citing the respective pseudonymous author's name, not mine...(CUP, 627)<sup>325</sup>

The books that do not bear his name, in a real way for Kierkegaard, are not his. However, within a few months, in some cases a few days, after publishing the pseudonymous works, Kierkegaard would publish a collection of upbuilding discourses that accompanied the books. These discourses are not called sermons, as Kierkegaard did not have the training that he felt necessary to present and deliver sermons.

The discourses come from Kierkegaard himself, and are religious documents. By religious, we mean that they come from within the third stage or sphere of existence, the religious stage. While many of the pseudonymous works come from the aesthetic or ethical stages, the upbuilding discourses are solely from the religious. Kierkegaard points to this fact to show that his goal was always to move people from the aesthetic and ethical stages into the religious stage.<sup>326</sup> The religious authorship was always present, and Kierkegaard was always pointing his readers in that direction.

At this point it may seem like a glaring omission to have spoken at length about Kierkegaard's authorship, even to have mentioned the spheres of existence, and yet to have barely addressed them. This omission is intentional. The spheres are the arena in

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<sup>325</sup> Summarized quote as presented by Hough in, Sheridan Hough, *Kierkegaard's Dancing Tax Collector: Faith, Finitude, and Silence* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1.

<sup>326</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 8.

which all of Kierkegaard's thought, including his understanding of boredom, takes place. The spheres are fundamental, but can easily become the entirety of the discussion. For this reason, the spheres will be discussed at length after some more groundwork in Kierkegaard's thought has been established. The next piece of that groundwork is addressing Kierkegaard's understanding of objectivity and subjectivity.

### ***Objectivity and Subjectivity***

Given the nature of Kierkegaard's authorship, not only does it become difficult at times to determine what Kierkegaard believes, but also how he approaches that belief in general. One of the most difficult of these topics to decipher is the relation of the individual to the concepts of objectivity and subjectivity. It appears from his writing that Kierkegaard, at least at times, jettisons the concept of objectivity. Indeed, in perhaps one of the most confusing passages to those who deeply agree with Kierkegaard, but also hold to the primacy of objective truth, Kierkegaard states, "Truth is subjectivity."<sup>327</sup> We will return to this passage in a moment, but first it must be noted that Kierkegaard at no point denies objective truth, nor does he deny one's access to reality. In fact, Kierkegaard affirms that in the midst of all the changes that one faces in the world, the eternal is unchanging, and should guide people the way that the stars guide the ship captain in the storm.<sup>328</sup> The eternal is objective in that it is the same for everyone, and

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<sup>327</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, Howard Vincent Hong and Edna H Hong, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript To Philosophical Fragments* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 185.

<sup>328</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, vol. 5, *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), 19.

helping others see the truth of eternity was in fact Kierkegaard's goal. So when Kierkegaard emphasizes subjectivity, it is not in the service of a subjectivist relativism.

No, instead it is a response to the mechanistic modernist understanding of objective truth that was birthed in Descartes, but had its fullest manifestation in Kant. Whereas Kant would agree with Kierkegaard that people use the term "truth" in multiple ways, Kant's driving concern was for objective/material truth, and as Harries notes, he would have had a difficult time referring to subjective truth as a "perfection of knowledge," and therefore truth in an actual sense.<sup>329</sup> Kierkegaard on the other hand, while not disagreeing with objective truth, emphasizes the subjective as vital, and in many ways far more important than objective truth.

In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* Kierkegaard, through the pen of Johannes Climacus, writes:

The way of objective reflection turns the subjective individual into something accidental and thereby turns existence into an indifferent, vanishing something. The way to the objective truth goes away from the subject, and while the subject and subjectivity become indifferent, the truth also becomes indifferent, and that is precisely its objective validity, because the interest, just like the decision, is subjectivity.<sup>330</sup>

In seeking objectivity, two things happen. First, the subject doing the seeking becomes nothing. The subject is emptied of all personality, or perhaps personhood, in the effort to find that which is the case apart from the self. Second, the truth, once found, is also empty. It becomes like a bit of trivia. Perhaps the proposition relates to a fact in the world, but it doesn't actually matter. Harries notes that in light of this fact Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger all recognized that the other side of objective truth is

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<sup>329</sup> Karsten Harries, *Kierkegaard studies. Monograph Series*, vol. 21, *Between Nihilism and Faith: A Commentary On Either/Or* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 158.

<sup>330</sup> Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript To Philosophical Fragments*, 193.

nihilism.<sup>331</sup> Something might be deemed true, but the one deeming it true, and the import of its truth have been divested into nothingness. The Modern world then becomes full of empty, disinterested ideas and beliefs, and the one holding these beliefs is passionless, and can be, at most, reflective.

Humans were not meant to be disinterested, or merely reflective. Kierkegaard, in a discourse reminiscent of Ecclesiastes, writes that there is an “eternal” part of humanity that can transcend every change.<sup>332</sup> That which has eternal significance should never be divested of its value, or of its meaning. Doing so produces emptiness, and therefore, boredom. No, instead humans were made for subjective truth. In fact, objective truth matters because of subjective truth. This is the idea that Kierkegaard is presenting when he says, “Truth is subjectivity.”

Hough notes that the claim “truth is subjectivity” is a meditation on the way in which truth is held, rather than on truth itself. She notes Kierkegaard’s example of a lunatic who states that the earth is round each time the tail of his coat strikes him.<sup>333</sup> While the proposition “the Earth is round” is objectively true, the lunatic’s relation to the objective truth is disordered. It is not merely enough to say a proposition, or to believe a proposition but for erroneous reasons, but rather to hold something subjectively true, one must conform to the truth. Connell is helpful here in noting that in objective truth, ideas conform to object, however, in subjective truth, the knower (or subject) changes herself

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<sup>331</sup> Harries, *Between Nihilism and Faith*, 159.

<sup>332</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, vol. 15, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 11.

<sup>333</sup> Hough, *Kierkegaard's Dancing Tax Collector*, 34.

to correspond to the idea.<sup>334</sup> Connell explains further, “[Climacus] isn’t saying that we can make any proposition true simply by fervently believing it. Instead, he is saying that the most important form of truth, ‘essential truth,’ is something we are, something we live, rather than something we know.”<sup>335</sup> Truth is subjectivity, because we are subjects, and any truth claim comes from a subject. Any pursuit of pure objectivity robs the one making the truth claim of her subjectivity. Therein, the quest for certitude that started with Descartes’ *cogito* is a quest seeking to establish a mechanized objectivity, sanitized of the subjectivity necessary for one to hold a truth claim.

Mark Dooley suggests that this subjective knowledge, what he calls “ethical and religious knowledge,” is essential because it comes from the realm of value. It does not give technical information about the world, but answers humanity’s desire for meaning.<sup>336</sup> Dooley can perhaps find some support for this interpretation in Climacus’ parable of the fervent pagan and the disinterested Christian. In this example Climacus compares a “Christian” who enters the church and prays in untruth, and a pagan who prays to an idol with “the passion of infinity,” and concludes that the latter, though praying to an idol, is worshipping God, while the former, though praying to God, is worshipping an idol.<sup>337</sup> A possible reading of this text could easily seem to indicate that prayer in and of itself is communicating a wish, or expressing a value, and the objective existence of a deity does not change matters.

However, it would seem that this reading is an unlikely one. Connell makes a persuasive case to understand this passage from the perspective of an inclusivist Christian,

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<sup>334</sup> Connell, *Kierkegaard and the Paradox of Religious Diversity*, 74.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>336</sup> Strawser, *Kierkegaard and the Philosophy of Love*, 93.

<sup>337</sup> Connell, *Kierkegaard and the Paradox of Religious Diversity*, 70.

understanding the pagan to be praying to the real God, who objectively exists, though he doesn't realize it.<sup>338</sup> If this is the case, then a passage that would be excellent support for Dooley's claim appears not only to not support the claim that this knowledge is merely the communication of value, but also seems to reverse the matter to indicate that the claim communicates value because of objective truth. It is not merely the case that the pagan prays, but due to his sincerity, prays in ignorance to the real and existing God. More importantly for our purposes however, is the Christian who prays to an idol, while believing that he is praying to God.

There is much that can be said about the pagan in this story, but the Christian who shows himself to not be a Christian, reveals Kierkegaard's concern in relation to subjective knowledge. The man prays, and in the prayer communicates, as Dooley would note, what is a value to him (i.e. God). However, it seems that in Kierkegaard's understanding, God is not a value, because the man in the church does not actually believe there is a God, or perhaps worse, does not care if there is a God. The issue is not that the man in the church needs something to create value in his life; rather, it is that all humans need value because there is something eternal within them (Pascal's God shaped hole), and this man, though full of objective knowledge of this fact, does not value what he ought. Humans do not create meaning out of existential need, humans have an existential need for meaning, because meaning objectively exists and must be subjectively embraced. Not doing this leads to despair.

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 70.



### *Despair: The Death of the Possible*

The Danish word *Fortvivlelse* conveys the idea of intensified doubt. It indicates a doubling of the self. Beabout sees Kierkegaard's use of this term (which we translate as despair) to indicate one's misrelating to oneself.<sup>339</sup> This understanding seems to be similar to James' warning in his epistle not to be double minded, or not to be two selves, because in being two selves a person is not actually fully oneself at all. This is the understanding Kierkegaard is presenting. Roberts furthers this idea positing that doubt is often less concerned with the intellect and more with fear and timidity. For this reason, Roberts asserts, that Kierkegaard does not see doubt as liberating, but rather as oppressive.<sup>340</sup> Doubt, the central tenant of the Cartesian tradition, is not the path the certitude that Descartes desired it would be, rather it oppressively divides the person against herself. This oppression means that despair is something that rules over humanity due to each human's fear of actualizing the self.

It's important before we proceed to understand what Kierkegaard means by despair. It must first be noted that when Kierkegaard uses the word despair, he does occasionally mean by it a feeling (which is often the way it is used in general language), but in *The Sickness unto Death*, his main focus is on this misrealation within the self.<sup>341</sup> In his earlier work, *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard used despair primarily to discuss a life view, whereas in the later *Sickness*, his focus appears to be more on a life style.<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>339</sup> Gregory R. Beabout, *Freedom and Its Misuses: Kierkegaard On Anxiety and Despair* (Milwaukee: Marquette Univ Pr, 1996), 73.

<sup>340</sup> David Roberts, *Kierkegaard's Analysis of Radical Evil* (London: Continuum, 2006), 68

<sup>341</sup> Beabout *Freedom and Its Misuses*, 92.

<sup>342</sup> Hannay, *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, 339.

This distinction is helpful in order to understand Kierkegaard's program. In *Either/Or*, despair is the mood that one comes to as he begins to find the stage of life in which he lives no longer satisfying. As an aesthete, one begins to view his life in a despairing way once he no longer finds satisfaction in a purely sensate life. As the futility of this manner of living begins to emerge, the aesthete's view changes to one of despair. This change occurs again in the ethical and religious A stages as well. In the *Sickness unto Death*, despair is not a way that one views the world, but a way in which one lives in the world. One lives a despairing life, not when he sees that his life is unfulfilling, but by persisting in that which is unfulfilling, which is ultimately anything that does not lead to being a singular individual. This state of existence is one of sin, which for Kierkegaard is an intensification of despair.<sup>343</sup>

The understandings of despair presented in *Either/Or* and *The Sickness unto Death* are clearly distinct, but that does not rule out the idea that they are complimentary. The aesthete who sees her life in a despairing way can only do so because she is living in despair, for it would be impossible to see life in a despairing way (*E/O*) if one were not living in despair (*SUD*). For this reason, it seems that the latter Kierkegaard's use of despair, through the pen of Anti-Climacus, does not contradict nor replace his earlier usage of the word, but expands on it. This is to be expected as Anti-Climacus is writing a religious book, while A in *Either/Or* is writing as an aesthetic, and therefore has a somewhat myopic understanding of the phenomena he is experiencing. As Kierkegaard's works progress, a person's experience of despair evolves from the feeling that things

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<sup>343</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, vol. 19, *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), 77.

aren't the way they ought be, to acknowledging one's persistence in living in a state of things not being as they ought to be. This state of disorderedness must be acknowledged before one can proceed in correcting it, and actualizing the self.

Beabout emphasizes this point in Kierkegaard's use of the term "sickness unto death." Despair is the sickness unto death because it is the torment of trying to do away with one's self but not succeeding.<sup>344</sup> And how could one succeed? A human is created to actualize himself, and the thought of attempting to actualize another self seems akin to a person attempting to have another's experience of sight. To attempt to have someone else's experience of sight is a futile endeavor, as is attempting to throw off the self; however, people still attempt the latter and their perpetual failure leads them to despair. It leads to distraction, or as Hannay has suggested, addiction to the world.<sup>345</sup>

Despair is a phenomenon that afflicts humans because we are made for more than this world. If there were nothing of the eternal in mankind, then mankind would be unable to despair. Further, if despair could fully consume a person, then she would also not be able to despair.<sup>346</sup> By this, Kierkegaard again emphasizes the tension that exists for the person who is in despair as opposed to the person who is actualizing the self. If a person were not made to be something in particular, a particular individual (one relating properly to God), then she would not be able to despair, because despair is the failure to actualize the self, or to properly relate to the eternal. Therefore, without the eternal within humanity, despair could not occur. Further, if one could fully throw off the self, then there would also be no despair. If the teleological goal of a person's existence is removed,

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<sup>344</sup> Beabout, *Freedom and Its Misuses*, 98.

<sup>345</sup> Hannay, *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, 339.

<sup>346</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 21.

then there is no mark that she is not hitting, no reality that she is not actualizing and therefore despair becomes a null term.

However, neither of these is the case. The self cannot be removed, and humans are made for connection with the divine; therefore, despair remains. Kierkegaard sees this fact as part of the human's superiority over the animals, because despair is not a thing that animals are able to experience.<sup>347</sup> Humans are higher than animals, we have more weight, more gravity, more value than the animal. The animal lacks a self that they are called to actualize. In many ways, though Kierkegaard does not trace this line of argumentation, it seems as though the person attempting to be rid of the self is actually attempting to become an animal, to become an entity that is less than he is supposed to be. To shirk the self seems to be a beastly act, but one that can never be as beastly as one hopes in that one can never be less than human, and therefore cannot be rid of the self. Further, the Christian has an edge over the non-believer in that he is aware of the sickness unto death. The sickness is a pandemic, yet the natural man is unaware of this fact in the way that the Christian is, and that is to the detriment of the non-believer. It is better to be sick and be aware of the illness, than to be sick and believe yourself healthy.

This false health is a very real possibility for humanity. The majority of humanity is in despair. Though we often think of despair as being rare, when we do so we are thinking of the feeling of despair, the life view of *Either/Or*, not the life style of *The Sickness unto Death*. No, Kierkegaard asserts that as opposed to being rare, despair is actually universal.<sup>348</sup> This point means that the majority of those who are in despair are unaware that they are in despair. This ignorance of one's state of despair is itself another

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 26.

form of despair.<sup>349</sup> It's the person who has diabetes but has not been diagnosed so she lives as though she is healthy and in so doing damages herself all the more; or, the sinner overtaken by envy, not realizing that his normal everyday, envy tainted actions are destroying his soul. Not being aware that one is despairing is gravely serious. So serious, that Kierkegaard wished for stronger despair for this person. Roberts explains that in Kierkegaard's thought, becoming cognizant of despair puts one closer to God, because the person has now realized that he is not actualizing the self, and not properly relating to the world, and to eternity.<sup>350</sup>

Despair is therefore a choice that many are not consciously aware that they are making. Every moment of despair is self-inflicted. Even the moments when a person is unaware that she is in despair, the despair is still self-inflicted and it is always being experienced at the moment that despair is chosen. For Kierkegaard, despair is always in the present tense.<sup>351</sup> And with despair, there is always torment, even if the one in despair is unaware of the torment. This torment is one's inability to die, or rather the inability to have the self die. The one in despair is sick and unable to live apart from the shadow of the self, yet unable to die or have the self die in order to be separated from what the person is supposed to be.<sup>352</sup> Even when unaware, the person is still attempting to accomplish that which can never occur, namely, the annihilation of the self and therefore the obliteration of eternity. This failure is torment, but it is torment that is self-wrought by the one who refuses to relate properly to God, and torment that the one in despair seeks to be distracted from or to not acknowledge.

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<sup>349</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>350</sup> Roberts, *Kierkegaard's Analysis*, 58.

<sup>351</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 17.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., 18.

Why is it the case that not actualizing the self and not interrelating properly to God can cause such dire consequences for mankind? Kierkegaard suggests that humans are composed of both the finite and infinite.<sup>353</sup> This composition means that humans, as subjects, are made to relate properly to God; and when we attempt to kill the self, or ignore subjectivity, we ignore the infinite within us, or the eternity that we were created for. When humans merely embrace the finite, we miss the part of our composition that we are most meant to actualize and bring into light in the finite. This tension is the seed ground for despair. Without the infinite, humankind loses not only God and the self, but possibility as well. If there is only the finite, then in Kierkegaard's estimation, all that remains is to be a determinist or a fatalist. All that occurs does so due to fatalism, and the prospects of freedom, choice and hope are swallowed by necessity. Everything becomes either necessary, or trivial.<sup>354</sup> Perhaps here we can see a mild connection to the two types of boredom that we've mentioned throughout our study, with the deterministic framework, devoid of hope, being empty of meaning and leading to profound boredom, and the trivialities leading to trivial boredom.

However, fatalism is wrong and possibility is real. God Himself is necessary, the created order is not, nor what occurs in the created order. To have hope and possibility overtaken by despair is harmful, but can be cured by seeing that possibility does in fact exist. Sadly, this understanding leads to a second means by which someone can be in despair. Since we live in a realm not of necessity but of possibility, we live in a realm in which anything is possible. In possibility, everything is possible and therefore it is easy to get lost in possibilities. The one in despair in this manner can become so infatuated with

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<sup>353</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid., 40.

the possibilities that lay before him that he is over taken by his cravings (leading to fear, hope, etc.) or his melancholy (leading to anxiety).<sup>355</sup> When possibilities abound, and a person is not choosing to actualize their self, they can easily be overwhelmed thinking of all the good or bad things that might happen, or they can be trapped in the perpetually transitory nature of life. In either case, the lack of direction, the lack of focus in his or her life leads the one who despairs to a place of lostness.

This lostness does not have to be sudden, in fact, it happens rather slowly. “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, five dollars, a wife, etc.—is sure to be noticed.”<sup>356</sup> A person slowly loses herself in despair, and within despair as one loses oneself in possibilities, she begins to look at the other selves she thinks she could be, or could have been. She despairs in not willing to be herself, or not wanting to be a self, or in willing to be another self.<sup>357</sup> None of these are tenable, or possible. In willing to be something other than the self, she loses her individual identity and becomes part of the herd, or the general public. However, that is not what she was made to be. Nor is that what anyone actually can be. Kierkegaard said that he addressed all of his upbuilding discourses to the singular individual, not to the public, because everyone is to move from the public to the individual, because in reality there is no public, there are only individuals.<sup>358</sup> Individuals, who need to actualize the possibility of becoming themselves.

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<sup>355</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>358</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 10.

For Kierkegaard, in the realm of untethered possibility people soar in despair and in the realm of absolute necessity they are crushed by despair.<sup>359</sup> The latter phenomena Kierkegaard compares to a balloon, which ascends by throwing off weights, only in this case a person throws off the good, and in doing so sinks further and further into despair.<sup>360</sup> In either case, they live in a state of acedia, perpetually rejecting the work of actualizing the self; and in a perpetual quest, not to become a singular individual, yet to also be free of boredom. Roberts summarizes the issue well when he says that we cannot trust a sensate person to tell us about his or her own existence. That person is not even aware that he or she is in despair and can only measure life via enjoyment. This person does not fear despair, he can't fully grasp what it is; no, this person rather has a great fear of boredom, the cessation of enjoyment, and being uncomfortable.<sup>361</sup>

### *Spheres of Existence*

With a grasp of Kierkegaard's understanding of despair, we are at the doorway of being able to address boredom in his thought; however, there is one final piece of background information needed as we begin this discussion: The Spheres of Existence. As mentioned earlier, Kierkegaard's authorship consists of over 20 pseudonyms situated in different place within what he calls "existence-spheres," "life views" or "stages." Kierkegaard conceives of these stages as the necessary manner in which in which all people exist. Kierkegaard's most explicit presentation of the spheres comes through the mouth of Frater Taciturnus in his "Letter to the Reader" in the final section of the book *Stages on Life's Way*:

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<sup>359</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 42.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>361</sup> Roberts, *Kierkegaard's Analysis*, 61.



There are three existence-spheres: the esthetic,<sup>362</sup> the ethical, the religious. The metaphysical is abstraction, and there is no human being who exists metaphysically. The metaphysical, the ontological, is, but it does not exist, for when it exists it does so in the esthetic, in the ethical, in the religious, and when it is, it is abstraction from or a prius to the esthetic, the ethical, the religious. The ethical sphere is only a transition sphere, and therefore its highest expression is repentance as a negative action. The esthetic sphere is the sphere of immediacy, the ethical the sphere of requirement (and this requirement is so infinite that the individual always goes bankrupt), the religious the sphere of fulfillment, but, please note, not a fulfillment such as when one fills an alms box, or a sack with gold, for repentance has specifically created a boundless space, and as a consequence the religious contradiction: simultaneously to be out on 70,000 fathoms of water and yet joyful.”<sup>363</sup>

The first point to note in this passage is the assertion that the metaphysical is an abstraction, and that it is, but does not exist. In these brief comments on metaphysics, Kierkegaard foreshadows Heidegger (who we will discuss in the next chapter) noting that discussing what a person is, apart from “how” that person is, is esoteric, and an abstraction. Person X cannot exist outside of one of these three spheres of existence. In order to understand person X, or any person that exists, he or she must be understood within the spheres. As a person is, she is either an aesthete, within the ethic, or in one of the domains of religion. There is no person who exists apart from these spheres, and therefore Kierkegaard does not see the need, nor the point, of studying a person apart from their mode of existence, or perhaps to make use of Heideggerian terms, a person’s mood or attunement to the world. This Heideggerian terminology helps us focus on the fact that within the spheres, a person is oriented to the world in a certain manner, either animalistically, humanly, creaturely, or in a fully Christian manner. Human existence is

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<sup>362</sup> Most contemporary discussions of Kierkegaard’s thought use the term “aesthetic” as opposed to esthetic, and this work will follow that path.

<sup>363</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, vol. 11, *Stages On Life's Way: Studies by Various Persons* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), 476.

always embodied, therefore the human world is always embodied, and the quest to separate that embodied nature of human reality is metaphysical abstraction.

The second point to note is not merely that there are three stages, nor that the three stages are always listed as a triad (with only one exception), but rather that the three stages are always listed in the same order: esthetic/aesthetic, ethical, religious. This ordering seems to communicate a progression, in which one starts in the aesthetic, moves to the ethical, and then ends in the religious (in which there are two areas to reside); however Barrett is helpful in noting that the presentation above, and the prolonged discussion on the spheres in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments* are themselves written by pseudonyms, and therefore are not neutral by any means.<sup>364</sup> That reminder considered, Kierkegaard would not claim that any author, including himself, would write from a place of neutrality since that would be a metaphysical abstraction, and Taciturnus is a religious pseudonym speaking from within the final of the stages, giving him perhaps the best vantage point from which to discuss the three.

Barrett's note however, does give us reason to consider that perhaps the spheres are not completely distinct, but are instead perhaps overlapping. Crabtree asserts that the religious subsumes the ethical so that the ethical can be seen as the first part of the religious; however, the ethical throws off the aesthetic as opposed to subsuming it.<sup>365</sup>

That said, after Kierkegaard had turned to being a solely religious author, wrote (under a

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<sup>364</sup> Lee C. Barrett, *Eros and Self-Emptying: The Intersections of Augustine and Kierkegaard*, Kierkegaard as a Christian Thinker (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2013), 145.

<sup>365</sup> John Crabtree, "Kierkegaard's Coffee House" (MP3 of lecture, Gunterberg College, Eugene, OR, April 14, 2007), <http://msc.gutenberg.edu/audio/?audser=119>.

pseudonym) an aesthetic work, *Crisis in the Life of an Actress*, which did not cast the aesthetic in a negative light. Further, when describing the Knight of Faith, Kierkegaard uses the example of the Knight delighting in food in a manner befitting the aesthete, only in a redeemed manner. It is perhaps best to see the spheres as overlapping Venn Diagrams in which the majority of the aesthetic is thrown off when embracing the ethical, and almost the totality of the ethical is subsumed in the religious, perhaps with the religious even redeeming a bit of the aesthetic that was thrown off. The aesthete is consumed by bodily pleasure, the ethical person is driven by social and relational norms; neither of these are inherently bad things, but both of them are inherently poor at serving as the core aspect of life. In the religious sphere that which is good in the prior two is redeemed and enjoyed properly, not as the core aspect of life, but as something that the singular individual sees as a gift in which he is free to delight.. This understanding would seem to fit Kierkegaard's discussion of the Knight of Faith throwing off everything, knowing that it will be added back to him.

The third point to note, though it has already been discussed in the last paragraph to some extent, is the isolated mention of the ethical as a transitional sphere. The ethical sphere is the only one to be mentioned apart from the others, and to be mentioned out of order. In so doing, Kierkegaard emphasizes the unique nature of this stage of existence. The ethical is the dialectic sphere between the immediate, and the required.<sup>366</sup> It is the passageway that one travels through in order to leap to the religious. The ethical sphere's highest expression is a negative, because within the aesthetic, there is no reason to say no to something, or to be duty bound; however, without the religious, there is nothing to

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<sup>366</sup> Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way*, 477.

hold on to, or no ultimate reason to fulfill one's duty. In the aesthetic a person sees no reason not to do X. In the religious, a person sees a reason not to do X, but in the ethical, the person sees no reason to do X. Here, X is rejected, but with no clear reason as to why. It is for this reason that the ethical will be discussed the least in this work, because Kierkegaard seems to present it as the arena of social interaction, which is the estuary between the aesthetic sphere, and the religious spheres.<sup>367</sup>

The final point to note in Taciturnus' explanation of the stages, is what might be called the "essence" of each stage. The aesthetic is the stage of immediacy, the ethical the stage of requirement, and the religious the stage of fulfillment. This latter stage he points out is not fulfillment as in someone fills what is empty, but rather that one is fulfilled in all circumstances. Perhaps we can infer a word play in that repentance creates an infinite space so nothing apart from God can fill it, think Pascal's God shaped hole again, but when God does fill it with Himself, the person sitting on 70,000 fathoms of water can be joyful (the true meaning of Paul's word in Philippians 4:13).

The person embodying the aesthetic sphere, or life view, thinks only of immediate concerns, the ethical seeks requirements, but the religious finds fulfillment. Westphal is instructive when he writes, "These stages or modes of being-in-the-world are best understood as different criteria for what counts as the good life...So we might say that the three spheres (for they are not stages in the developmental sense) posit three different

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<sup>367</sup> If the aesthetic sphere is consumed by the way a person (mis)relates to herself and bodily pleasures, and the religious spheres are consumed with the manner in which a person relates to God, then the ethical sphere is aimed at how the person interacts with others; however, that interaction with others is determinate on the manner in which one interacts with herself, and with God, hence our use of the idea of stage as an estuary.

absolute points of reference respectively: I myself, my society, and God.”<sup>368</sup> First, again it is helpful to see the spheres not as a strict linear progression, but beyond that, to understand them as absolute points of reference. Westphal’s use of the term “good life” is helpful, for indeed, that is what everyone seeks. It is also helpful to consider that Kierkegaard believes any discussion of humanity apart from a framework whereby the good life is understood is abstract. The totality of Kierkegaard’s understanding of the person takes places within these three spheres with conflicting understandings of what the good life is.

People are made to find the good life in being fulfilled and satisfied in God; however, within the other spheres, they seek the good life, or satisfaction, in other things. These things ultimately do not satisfy, and within the experience of the lack of satisfaction, not only does despair arise, but this is also where boredom becomes a factor in Kierkegaard’s thought. We turn now to look at the concept of boredom in each of the three spheres of existence, and then to faith and love, as found within the religious sphere, as the antithesis of boredom.

### ***Boredom and the Aesthetic Sphere: Preliminary Issues***

Kierkegaard’s most extensive treatment of boredom qua boredom is in the voice of A, the aesthete, in *Either/Or I*. It makes sense that the aesthetic sphere of existence would be the one most concerned with boredom given that its depiction of the good life rests in the false promise of attaining the unattainable. As Hough notes, the aesthetic sphere of existence, like the other spheres, is a manner, or a way, in which a person is

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<sup>368</sup> Merold Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith*, Kierkegaard as a Christian Thinker (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 40.

located within the world. This manner of being located in the world dictates how the world is available to the person in a particular sphere.<sup>369</sup> As we shall discuss in the next chapter, this is very similar to how Heidegger will conceive of the concept of mood. Within the aesthetic sphere, the aesthete is positioned in the world in such a way that her overwhelming concern is the satisfaction of her desires, yet her great inability is the satisfaction of her desires. If the aesthete cannot obtain her desires, she experiences pain; however, if she does obtain her desire, then she loses her conduit to pleasure.<sup>370</sup>

Here we see the aesthete's great inability to find satisfaction. The aesthete is focused on the desire over the desired. As Hough concludes in her discussion of A and Johannes the Seducer, neither of these individuals see the world as inherently meaningful, so all thing, and people, become tools and distractions.<sup>371</sup> Here we are getting a bit ahead of ourselves; however, before looking at A's discussion of "The Rotation of Crops," it is important to understand that in the aesthetic sphere, things themselves lack meaning, only the pursuit of those things has meaning. It is often said that the destination doesn't matter, it's the journey; however, this trite aphorism ignores the fact that the destination colors the journey. In the aesthetic realm however, the "destination," be it a person, place, or thing, is merely an object, or a tool to distract the aesthete. If nothing has meaning, nothing gives lasting meaning, and nothing exists beyond the immediate.

With that said, we turn our attention to the first section of *Either/Or*, the "Diapsalmata."

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<sup>369</sup> Hough, *Kierkegaard's Dancing Tax Collector*, viii.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

This section of *Either/Or* is a collection of poems, or psalms, from the aesthete, considering the world, as he perceives it. The poems are full of apathy, and emptiness, a foretaste of Kierkegaard's assessment of the present age, and to some extent the nihilism found in Nietzsche. "I don't feel like doing anything. I don't feel like riding—the motion is too powerful; I don't feel like walking—it is too tiring; I don't feel like lying down, for either I would have to stay down, and I don't feel like doing that, or I would have to get up again, and I don't feel like doing that either. *Summa Summarum*: I don't feel like doing anything."<sup>372</sup> Everything is empty. Everything "nothings" me. This "being nothinged" by something, or by everything, is boredom. The feeling that one desires to do nothing is the great fear of the aesthete; however, it is the logical conclusion of the aesthetic life. If no decision matters, everything must be coated in a veneer of apathy, or approached with irony, in order to cope. Of course, Kierkegaard's intent was that when someone read a passage such as the one quoted in this paragraph, that that person would resonate with it and then begin to question why she is in a state in which this desire to do nothing made sense.

The above quoted passage indicates that the aesthete faces this struggle of finding nothing worth doing. A later entry, which bares the same name as the book in which it appears, reveals the issue to be much greater than temporarily finding no option interesting:

Marry, and you will regret it. Do not marry, and you will also regret it. Marry or do not marry, you will regret it either way. Whether you marry or you do not marry, you will regret it either way. Laugh at the stupidities of the world, and you will regret it; weep over them and you will also regret it. Laugh at the stupidities of the world, or weep over them you will regret it either way. Whether you laugh

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<sup>372</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, trans. Howard V Hong and Edna H Hong, *Either/Or Part I* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), 20.

at the stupidities of the world or you weep over them, you will regret it either way. Trust a girl, and you will regret it. Do not trust her, and you will also regret it. Trust a girl or do not trust her, you will regret it either way... Hang yourself, and you will regret it. Do not hang yourself, and you will also regret it... This gentlemen is the quintessence of all the wisdom of life. It is not merely in isolated moments that I, as Spinoza says, view everything [in the mode of eternity], but I am continually [in the mode of eternity].<sup>373</sup>

No matter the choice that one makes, it will be regretted. If a person marries, or doesn't, trusts a person or doesn't, eventually he is going to regret that choice. Going so far as to make a tongue in cheek statement about a person regretting taking his own life, but also regretting not taking his own life. Harries notes that the Diapsalmata as a whole is united by a pervasive mood that is characterized by "boredom, a sense of homelessness in the world, [and] nihilism."<sup>374</sup> This insight in particular can be shown in the conclusion of this last passage in which the aesthete sees himself not viewing life from the mode of eternity, but rather, viewing each moment as an eternity. In this move, Kierkegaard's aesthete takes the Augustinian understanding of eternity as an infinite "now" and instead makes "now" a perpetual eternity. Whereas the former is a state of continuous fulfillment, the latter is one of perpetual lack.

As opposed to the moment of eternity being perpetually satisfying, the moments of the aesthete's existence, which each feel like an eternity, are perpetually empty. It is for this reason that the aesthete constantly needs to find means of distraction, and therefore turns people and things into tools for that purpose. Ferguson explains that the one living aesthetically is in a state of perpetual expectation, ready if 'anything should

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<sup>373</sup> Ibid., 38-39.

<sup>374</sup> Harries, *Between Nihilism and Faith*, 18.



come up' and therefore everything is arbitrary.<sup>375</sup> The aesthete makes nothing of his life but a series of moments, and therefore continually hollows himself out.<sup>376</sup> As MacDonald describes it, the aesthete is emotionally numb to everything, and is attuned to his own emptiness.<sup>377</sup> That attunement is what causes the aesthete to see all things as meaningless, and again have need for distraction. That distraction, and the intentional pursuit of it, is what A describes in "The Rotation of Crops."

### ***Boredom and the Aesthetic Sphere: The Rotation of Crops***

A's initial thesis in "The Rotation" is that all people are boring, and that being boring is a bad thing. Not merely a bad thing as in it undesirable, but as in morally corrupting. A writes:

If, then, my thesis is true, a person needs only ponder how corrupting boredom is for people, tempering his reflections more or less according to his desire to diminish or increase his *impetus*, and if he wants to press the speed of motion to the highest point, almost with danger to the locomotive, he needs only say to himself: Boredom is the root of all evil. It is very curious that boredom, which itself has such a calm and sedate nature, can have such a capacity to initiate motion. The effect that boredom brings about is absolutely magical, but this effect is one not of attraction but of repulsion.<sup>378</sup>

Here we can see a bit more what is entailed in Kierkegaard's understanding of boredom. Kierkegaard and Pascal agree on much related to the nature of boredom, but there is a slight variance and nuance that slightly distinguishes them, or at least indicates that the 250 years separating them has led to Kierkegaard's view being a bit more impassioned. Whereas for Pascal, boredom leaves a person empty, and in that emptiness

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<sup>375</sup> Harvie Ferguson, *Melancholy and the Critique of Modernity: Søren Kierkegaard's Religious Psychology* (London: Routledge, 1995), 93.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>377</sup> McDonald, "Kierkegaard's Demonic Boredom," 64.

<sup>378</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/Or I*, 285.

they grow discontent and need distraction to keep them away from the emptiness, Kierkegaard's understanding, at least through the mouth of A is a bit more violent. Boredom is repulsive. Pascal's understanding is almost a rational deduction that boredom ought to be avoided, which causes the need to be distracted, but for A, boredom repels people, spurring them to motion. While boredom itself is a state of emptiness, the desire to escape it pushes people in all directions.

This repelling factor is why Kierkegaard sees boredom as the root of all evil. If you consider children, they are well behaved as long as they are enjoying themselves, but when boredom begins to sink in, they begin to misbehave. Even when they are playing and they misbehave, this is a different manner in which boredom might approach.<sup>379</sup> This statement is vitally important for Kierkegaard's argument going forward. Boredom, like a cancer, can grow undetected. Children having fun don't appear bored, and yet for some reason whatever the game, children often see the need to push the game, or the play, further, and in so doing they reveal that they are beginning to grow bored, or restless with the current status quo. For this reason A asserts that when looking for a nursemaid, it is important that in addition to all other skills that are required, she also be able to entertain the children. However, he also notes that it is in this situation alone that justice can be done related to esthetics. One cannot divorce his wife, dethrone a king, exile a clergyman, etc. because they are boring.<sup>380</sup> So while with children we can attempt to curtail the misbehaving that comes out of boredom, in these other instances, as a spouse, a citizen, a congregant, on down line, we are unable to. Boredom then seeps into every aspect of society, repelling, and thrusting people toward any means of distraction.

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<sup>379</sup> Ibid.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid., 286.

Kierkegaard's aesthete then, very cynically, and perhaps with tongue partially in his cheek, recounts the creation of the world. In A's estimation, the gods were bored and that is why they created humanity. Adam was by himself in Eden, and bored because he was alone, so the gods created Eve. The two of them were then bored together, and after having children bored as a family. As the world's population increased, people become bored in mass, and out of a need for amusement, built a tower so tall that they were dispersed around the globe, and yet they remained bored.<sup>381</sup> A goes on to discuss the fact that bread and games entertained Rome before it fell, and yet Copenhagen wants to fix its problems via economizing, as opposed to entertainment. The general thrust that A presents here is that boredom is a great evil to be avoided, and that people have always sought to flee from it and seek entertainment. A here speaks as a representative of the "Present Age" that Kierkegaard rails against as having been flattened and lacking depth. In this passage A reveals himself to be witty, but he lacks inwardness, and to be witty without inwardness is a waste.<sup>382</sup>

Why does A lack inwardness? Inwardness entails work. Returning to Aquinas, and to Pascal, inwardness entails depth, it entails responding to the demands placed on a person by friendship with God, or at least it entails being your actual self, not merely a projection, or false *moi* that one plays at for society. Inwardness therefore leads one toward the infinite, and the aesthetic sphere is consumed by the finite. We will see in later sphere's of existence that inwardness, particularly cultivating love and faith, are Kierkegaard's cure for the sickness of despair, and the problem of boredom.

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<sup>381</sup> Ibid.

<sup>382</sup> Kierkegaard, *Present Age*, 10.

The connection between acedia and boredom runs so deep that in his discussion of Kierkegaard, McDonald equates the two, noting that in a secular age boredom is not seen as a sin, but merely as a social malady.<sup>383</sup> He goes so far as to assert that “Kierkegaard’s analysis of demonic boredom as a sin, whose antidote is faith and love, is tantamount to conceiving of boredom as acedia.”<sup>384</sup> In the footnote of this statement, McDonald acknowledges that Goodstein also understands Kierkegaard as returning to boredom as acedia, but being critical of the move. However, both McDonald and Goodstein appear to be confusing a symptom with a cause. Earlier in the same work, McDonald writes, “Despair is the spiritual equivalent of what boredom is in the realm of the psyche.”<sup>385</sup> This appears to perhaps more accurately capture Kierkegaard’s understanding of boredom. As we shall see later, faith and love are indeed to cures for profound boredom, but not in the way that removing an appendix is the cure for appendicitis, but more in the way that drinking enough water is the cure for a headache. In the former the problem is directly solved. In the later, the problem is a symptom of dehydration, and once the dehydration is resolved, the headache disappears. A is bored because A is in despair. Boredom is not acedia, but acedia causes despair, which causes boredom.<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>383</sup> William McDonald, “Kierkegaard's Demonic Boredom,” in *Essays On Boredom and Modernity*, ed. Barbara Pezze and Carlo Salzani (New York: Rodopi, 2009), 61.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>386</sup> In a very real way, it could be argued that Kierkegaard’s despair is Evagrius’ acedia extrapolated to non-monks, but it would be more difficult to make Aquinas’ acedia a synonym for Kierkegaard’s despair. Aquinas sees acedia as a misrelation with God, while Kierkegaard sees despair as a misrelation to one’s self. This misrelation to the self however, stems from a misrelation with God, it is right to see acedia as the cause of despair with in turn causes boredom.

If the cure will turn out to be developing inwardness in the manner of cultivating love and faith, and the aesthetic sphere is focused on the immediate alone, what is the aesthete's possible cure for boredom? It cannot be other people, because he is clear that all humans are boring.<sup>387</sup> He believes that people are boring in different ways though. "Those who bore others are the plebians, the crowd, the endless train of humanity in general; those who bore themselves are the chosen ones, the nobility. How remarkable it is that those who do not bore themselves generally bore others; those, however, who bore themselves entertain others."<sup>388</sup> Notice that if a person does not bore herself, she will very likely bore others, and if she does not bore others, she will likely bore herself. This perpetual interpersonal mutual boring that occurs means that society is engrained with boredom. Note, however, that the one who bores herself, entertains others, and due to this fact, and this fact alone from what A presents, she becomes a part of the nobility. What this indicates is multiple things, some of which are beyond the scope of this work to explore, however, at a base level it does indicate that people prize entertainment above all else. By what right is an entertaining person seen as a part of the nobility? Being entertaining does not indicate one's capacity for wisdom, compassion, shrewdness, leadership ability, or anything else of value that one might want to pretend to seek in the nobility. No, instead one's ability to entertain merely means that the crowd, the endless trail of humanity, can live through her, can dream about her, can be amused by her.

Harries notes that in A's mind, the polarity of good and evil has been replaced with the polarity of the interesting and the boring.<sup>389</sup> If I am bored by all those around me,

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<sup>387</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/Or I*, 288.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>389</sup> Harries, *Between Nihilism and Faith*, 89.

I will laud as praiseworthy the ones who entertain me. However, I will do this only as long as they entertain me. In order for the nobility, or anything, to keep entertaining, they must continually be interesting. The bar for interesting though might be quite low. Harries explains that the interesting requires an occasion, however the occasions she supplies, are those of sweat coming down a conductor's forehead, or a neighbor coughing.<sup>390</sup> For something to be entertaining, it must be interesting, and in order to be interesting, it must keep one from thinking about his or her emptiness. We return again to Pascal's need for distraction and see that Kierkegaard has taken his understanding of projected false identity, and the need for perpetual distraction and has added meat to its bones. Perhaps it could even be concluded that those who bore others do so because they are not themselves, and those who entertain others, but bore themselves do so because they have become so estranged from themselves that they are almost a complete stranger to themselves. In the contemporary context, Stewart makes this point indicating that the projected image of a person on social media is not the full self because he is able to suppress his unflattering traits.<sup>391</sup> Kierkegaard might want to say that Stewart has stopped too early, and in reality, the people on those social media pages, are complete fictions.

The need for amusement though, in A's mind, is a good thing, or at least amusement itself is. A goes on to describe boredom as the demonic pantheism, which, when annulled, becomes the true pantheism, but the annulment can only come by amusement, therefore, one ought to amuse oneself.<sup>392</sup> Pantheism, the idea that all is God, carries with it an idea of fullness, but boredom is the demonic pantheism because it is

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<sup>390</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>391</sup> Jon Stewart, *Søren Kierkegaard: Subjectivity, Irony, and the Crisis of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 109.

<sup>392</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/Or I*, 290.

built upon nothingness.<sup>393</sup> In both cases, A is seeing that the true pantheist and the demonic pantheist see the world as infinitely “something” be that something as meaningful/full/significant, or meaningless/empty/insignificant. The bored person sees everything as empty, and nothing is of use. Harries notes here a connection with Heidegger’s understanding of anxiety, as both rest upon nothingness.<sup>394</sup> This connection will be explored in the next chapter.

For A, the demonic pantheism is replaced with true pantheism by amusement. He is clear that boredom is not cured by work. Work canceled idleness, because they are opposites, but the busiest workers are often the most bored, and if they aren’t bored it may well be because they do not know what boredom is; however, that does not mean that they are not bored, merely that they are ignorant of the topic.<sup>395</sup> Here A notes an important point that bears consideration. While it could be argued that technological advancement has created more leisure time by simplifying work, Kierkegaard here is noting the opposite issue, that in fact modernity has brought with it more work, and that while these workers are working incredibly hard, they remain bored. The boredom doesn’t come from a lack of work, or a lack of something to do; it comes from a lack of interest in what one is doing, or in the options allowed a person. Boredom is not about a lack of action, but a lack of emotional or intellectual connection to the action.

The concept of tedium, or *tedium de vita*, predates the Modern era, but is not exactly similar to boredom. Whereas the person who finds something tedious has grown tired of what she is doing, she is at most trivially bored by it, if it is right to use the term

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<sup>393</sup> Ibid., 291.

<sup>394</sup> Harries, *Between Nihilism and Faith*, 91.

<sup>395</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/Or I*, 290.

bored at all, because there is still something in it to illicit a reaction, or a desire of some sort. The thing that she has grown weary of does not leave her empty. The one out harvesting crops might be physically tired, physically sore; however, there is a seen connection between her action, and providing for her family. She is tired of having to do what she is doing, but the food that she harvestings is going to be dinner that night. The person living in modernist Denmark is not necessarily in this same situation. While the work that he is doing does provide for his family, the direct connection of how working in a factory leads to dinner for his family is severed, and therefore the action that is done is seen as less meaningful. The person that A is describing works, but does not see meaning, or fulfillment in that work; therefore, the boredom continues due to lack of interest.

This lack of interest is ultimately annulled by amusement. In amusement, the world goes from being infinitely empty, to being infinitely full.<sup>396</sup> But how does that amusement manifest? This is where A presents his strategy of the “rotation of crops.” A is careful though, because this phrase seems to indicate two possible strategies, one of which he ultimately rejects. In rotating crops, a farmer can either change out the soil, or change the method in which crops are cultivated. The former, A believes, is akin to pursuing an infinite number of experiences. If the crops won’t grow at this farm, move to a new one. I’m bored living in the country, move the city. I’ve tired of eating on porcelain, so switch to silver, then gold. A rejects this method of rotation saying that it “...cancels itself out and is the spurious infinity.”<sup>397</sup> Here a person never cultivates interest, a person just seeks unbridled diversion. He is swallowed up by the infinite that

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<sup>396</sup> Harries, *Between Nihilism and Faith*, 91.

<sup>397</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/Or I*, 292.



has sparked his boredom; he is overcome by the demonic pantheism. Perhaps at best he becomes Kierkegaard's "Apostle of Empty Enthusiasm" (his analogy for the citizen of England) who reacts with "Oh!" and "Ah!" at all things because the distinction between the important and the unimportant are lost on him.<sup>398</sup>

No, A's approach to rotation is not one that embraces infinity, but rather one that limits himself. He attempts to overcome the finite, by means of the finite. "The more a person limits himself, the more resourceful he becomes. A solitary prisoner for life is extremely resourceful; to him a spider can be a source of great amusement."<sup>399</sup> He goes on to discuss how, in childhood, trapping a fly and watching it can be a source of amusement, as can listening to water hit the roof. A's approach to try and overcome boredom is not to chase distraction, but rather to rotate what serves as a distraction at a given moment, opening up the world as an almost endless source of distraction. If a person can make anything interesting for a time, then boredom is annulled and put to rest.

Harries correctly sees the aesthete's bored individual as a nihilist. Nothing has a claim on him, and there is nothing for which he actually cares. Instead, the bored person is amoral, not even seeing the world making claims on him that reach the level of morality or immorality.<sup>400</sup> A's approach to rotating experiences to escape boredom lead to every desire being equally interesting. Watching a spider climb a wall, watching sweat go down a man's head, or watching a body walk by, all are of the same note. Hough notes that this puts A in a position in which nothing actually matters. A, in an attempt to

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<sup>398</sup> Ibid., 290.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid., 292.

<sup>400</sup> Harries, *Between Nihilism and Faith*, 93.

stave off the boring has created a leveled world in which all desires are cheapened.<sup>401</sup>

This leveling is what Kierkegaard sees in his critique of the present age as an age without zeal, without real desires.

In order for A's approach to work, there are some limits that cannot be changed, in particular in regards relationships. If the cure for boredom is to constantly shift that which one cultivates as interesting, friends and spouses will only be a hindrance. A believes that friends can do nothing but get in the way, and marriages are always unfulfilling and divorce is too much of a problem, so there is no way to change that which interests the ones involved<sup>402</sup> Relationships then are a barrier to overcoming boredom, meaning that people, as we have seen, have only instrumental value in one's battle with boredom. People are tools for amusement or interest, not others to relate to meaningfully. It is at this point that Judge William will push A incredibly hard. Ferguson notes that William's response in *Either/Or II* is about indicating how the genuinely aesthetic can only be experienced in the ethical sphere. Whereas the development of the inner life, and relationships, that A finds dreadfully boring and at odds with the rotation of crops, William in the ethical sphere sees as an "ever-varied source of pleasure."<sup>403</sup> This shift involved acknowledging that the person has much more control over what is boring than even A acknowledges in his rotation method, as well as acknowledging that boredom goes deeper than merely a lack of interest, but is a symptom of the sickness unto death, or despair.

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<sup>401</sup> Hough, *Kierkegaard's Dancing Tax Collector*, 48.

<sup>402</sup> Kierkegaard, *Either/Or I*, 295-296 (267-268)

<sup>403</sup> Ferguson, *Melancholy and the Critique of Modernity*, 97.

To the first of these, A sees that a prisoner in a cell is resourceful, and is able to cultivate interest in a spider crawling up a wall. Concordantly, A sees that life can be a series of occasions to which one can bring interest in order to stave off boredom. However, in *Stages Along Life's Way*, Kierkegaard discusses banquets and how they are a difficult affair. A person can hire the best chefs and musicians; however, that does not guarantee the skill with which they will either cook or play. It doesn't determine the demeanor with which people will approach the meal and the conversation. He concludes that what is needed for a good banquet is good luck.<sup>404</sup> However, it seems very much that what he is describing is a general mood. The cooks, the music, the decoration, it all speaks to creating a mood, however, if the guests are determined to not enjoy themselves, the banquet will be a disaster. All the features of the banquet are interrelated in creating a mood, however, one's individual mood, or the way that one approaches the banquet, can be resistant to the intended mood of the event, and therein ruin the banquet, both for the individual, and for other. Whereas A is right that people can bring interest to an occasion, what he is missing is that the mood that one has undergirding that thought will be of far greater import. A can bring interest to an occasion, but the need to do that stems from a life view which presumes that things and others are merely tools. A's problem of boredom comes from residing within the aesthetic life view.

To the second acknowledgement, boredom is a problem because a person is in despair and does not know it. McDonald posits that for Kierkegaard, boredom is a misrelation of the self that comes from not taking on the task of becoming the self.

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<sup>404</sup> Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way*, 24.

Without that task, things lose eternal gravitas, everything becomes light and arbitrary.<sup>405</sup> The infinite is dissolved; all that remains is the finite. In profound boredom, something, or everything, “nothings” a person. A’s response is to cultivate interest. However, the reason he must rotate that interest so frequently, is because artificially created interest, or shallow interest, can only distract at a surface level. He has no desire to address the root cause of boredom, which is despair, and as Kierkegaard will eventually assert, intensified despair, which is sin.<sup>406</sup> We have come to the end of the line for the aesthete. Either life must be perpetual distraction, with no weight, no transcendence, no infinity, or he must leap to faith and enter the Ethical Sphere, as we are about to do.

### ***Boredom and the Ethical Sphere***

Whereas the aesthete flees boredom by the cultivation of various experiences, the person who sees the world from the ethical sphere approaches the matter by means of commitment. In fact, boredom is not a concern Kierkegaard addresses for the person in the ethical sphere. This is not to say that there is not an indication that boredom exists within the ethical, but rather that it is not the cause of fear or scorn that A perceives. This difference in how boredom is perceived comes from the fundamental difference in the aesthetic and ethical spheres.

Harries notes that *Either/Or II* is a bit duller than part one, but that should be expected given that part one was comprised of an aesthete and a seducer, and part two is written by a judge.<sup>407</sup> The more reserved Judge William takes on the task of assuaging A’s fear that the ethical life is one of boredom, in part by saying it is the only way to

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<sup>405</sup> McDonald, “*Kierkegaard's Demonic Boredom*,” 63.

<sup>406</sup> Kierkegaard *The Sickness Unto Death*, 77.

<sup>407</sup> Harries, *Between Nihilism and Faith*, 111.

maintain anything of the aesthetic permanently. Whereas part two might be duller, it is because it does not need to be exciting. Change might breed excitement, but commitment brings lasting joy (insofar as anything within the finite can be lasting). This emphasis on commitment is why the archetypical association for the ethical life across Kierkegaard's writings is that of a marriage. Whereas A is so fearful of boredom that he cannot develop any deep relationships, Judge William pushes that by cultivating the marital relationship, one cultivates something of value.

In Judge William's mind, A's issue is his endless embrace of possibilities. He compares A to a clown with no joints, with no restraint, and then notes that it is unhealthy to always live in a state of endless possibilities.<sup>408</sup> One cannot live in the subjunctive, one must live in reality. "This is what makes marriage more interesting: the encounter with a real person is more interesting than the encounter with a fiction: this is why the aesthetic life took the form of seduction."<sup>409</sup> The aesthetic life focuses on immediacy, and therefore, sees boredom as a threat to be run from. However, doing this makes life an experiment, not wanting to have a fate, and without that fate, or the grounding of something beyond one's self, the emptiness of boredom is intolerable<sup>410</sup>.

Here we should again reaffirm that not all boredom is profound boredom. We are concerned in this work with profound boredom, i.e. the experience of life, the universe, and everything leaving a person empty, so that they are hollowed and shallowed out. The experience of trivial boredom has obvious connections to profound boredom, in that in both cases whatever is before a person leaves them empty, or elicits no response from

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<sup>408</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid., 114.

them. The difference being that trivial boredom is of no consequence. It bears much in common with *tedium de vita* mentioned earlier. It comes from being weary of something, or perhaps confused by it, or it not being your taste, whereas profound boredom is a weariness of soul, from lacking any meaning, hope, or purpose that might make anything in life elicit a response of some sort. Kierkegaard's aesthete does not appear to see a distinction between these types of boredom. That lack of distinction seems to, in part, help explain the fear that A feels toward boredom. The minor boredom might feel at growing tired of a friend's company does not appear to be any different than the fear of the banality of existence. Judge William disagrees.

The ethical person, instead of cultivating a myriad of possibilities, dedicates herself to one, with the duties and responsibilities entailed.<sup>411</sup> The key shift here is from the pursuit of experiences to the pursuit of people, or perhaps the pursuit of right relationships. The ethical stops short in that the right relationship with God is not yet pursued; however, that will be discussed in the next section. In cultivating right relationships with others, a person opens herself up to possible pain, and to possibly cause pain, but also to forgive and to be forgiven.<sup>412</sup> These actions forge depth, and from that depth the weightlessness of the aesthetic is negated. Consider perhaps the consistent tropes seen in television and movies where the man who lives his entire life seeking physical pleasure looks back on his life and sees that chasing amusement has left him empty; while the couple who has been married for 50 years are able to have a celebration of such depth that the former man could not fathom. The married couple's lives were far

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<sup>411</sup> Barrett, *Eros and Self-emptying*, 138.

<sup>412</sup> Jeffrey Hanson, *Kierkegaard and the Life of Faith: The Aesthetic, the Ethical, and the Religious in Fear and Trembling*, Indiana Series in the Philosophy of Religion (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 184.

from carefree, unable to chase amusement in the same way, but full of more delight. This is Judge William's counter to A, and Kierkegaard's critique of the aesthetic, including the fear of boredom.

What then does boredom look like in the ethical sphere? It is mentioned directly very rarely, only in *Three Discourses on Imagined Occasions*, the series of discourses published to coincide with *Stages Along Life's Way*, and then only a handful of times in the discourse *On the Occasion of a Wedding*. In this discourse, Kierkegaard, as himself, takes up Judge William's argument against A, and presents marriage as a superior way of existence to A's empty thrill seeking. The emphasis in this discourse is that marriage is a battle. Those lovers who enter into marriage are not celebrated as conquerors on their wedding day, but rather as contenders promised victory if they endure the long battle as a team.<sup>413</sup>

Kierkegaard warns though that in this battle, there are seasons of indifference and alienation. While the couple may well love each other, they lack an understanding of each other, and since there are daily opportunities to try and reconnect with one another, the opportunities are commonplace and therefore never used, and the couple becomes less and less open with one another.<sup>414</sup> This is where the battle is the hardest. Kierkegaard writes:

They were once so happy—oh, so happy—and this consciousness that ought to strengthen them, that at least ought to be always clear, weakens them. They lose the desire and courage to venture, and that vanished happiness acquires an exaggerated unhealthy glamour for the two lonely people. Time goes so slowly; a whole life lies before them. They are afraid to make the first confession to each

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<sup>413</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, vol. 10, *Three Discourses On Imagined Occasions* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 48.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

other that could unite them in powerful resolution. Boredom takes the place of unity, and yet they shun a divorce as sin, but life is long.<sup>415</sup>

Again, we see parallels to Kierkegaard's condemnation of the present age as one that is afraid to venture. That which is symptomatic of a bored society, is also symptomatic of bored individuals. We also see here an emphasis on time as a factor in boredom that was not encountered in A's work. This should be expected because for the aesthete, boredom is fled, and in constant distraction time is ignored, or perhaps better stated, killed. However, in the ethical, boredom is not fled, but endured. Due to this endurance, the nothingness and emptiness of boredom can be felt, and time, as Heidegger will phrase it, is lengthened. Time goes slowly, and life is long.

What then elicits boredom from the married couple in the ethical sphere of existence? In the above quoted passage, Kierkegaard points to the loss of happiness, which is then glamourized with an unhealthy nostalgia, making the present seem all the worse. Add to this mournful wistfulness that there is no escape, as it were, aside from death, and time itself seems long, seems empty. A few paragraphs later, Kierkegaard lists a series of possible areas in which the couple may find strife: employment, finances, emotions, but in particular he mentions repetition. "One person is despondent because the repetition around him makes him bored with what he has. Someone else's first happiness makes him impatient; now he compares, now he recalls, now he suffers a loss"<sup>416</sup>

Kierkegaard, through Constantin Constantius and an unnamed dialogue partner, possibly A,<sup>417</sup> explores the idea of repetition and recollection in his book, *Repetition*. A, the young

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<sup>415</sup> Ibid.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>417</sup> Anthony Storm, "D. Anthony Storm's Commentary On Kierkegaard," accessed October 2, 2019, <http://sorenkierkegaard.org/index.html>.



man, though he loves a woman is terrified of a life with her and believes he can only love her after leaving her and therefore through recollection. The idea of a life of repetition scares him.

Its important to mention repetition, though briefly, in order to understand that it could be argued that boredom in the ethical sphere actually manifests from someone returning to the aesthetic sphere. Repetition is replaced with recollection. While the love between man and woman has not disappeared, they await an event, or an occasion, to draw forth their feelings again.<sup>418</sup> The actions appear aesthetic; however, why such an assumption would be erroneous is the way that one responds to boredom. The aesthete runs, and indeed, if a couple divorces, it could be said that perhaps they have become aesthetic once more. However, the wedding is an invitation to a battle. The one in the ethical sphere is the one who endures, and who fights through the boredom due to the resolve to live a proper life. Where the aesthete flees, the ethical person endures by the power of resolution.

In the example of marriage, what is this resolution? It is the resolution, that love conquers all. This resolution performs miracles at wedding, but the couple must both hold to this resolution in order to endure what life put before them.<sup>419</sup> Due to the depth of, and the import of love, when a person is faced with the nothingness of boredom, and the lengthening of time, instead of running, or dismissing the repetition as though it were yesterday's news, the ethical person holds to the resolution, knowing that earnestness is

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<sup>418</sup> Kierkegaard, *Three Discourses On Imagined Occasions*, 53.

<sup>419</sup> *Ibid* .,62.

needed.<sup>420</sup> There are limits though to what earnestness can handle, because as the ethical person in his marriage is faced with repetition that leaves him bored, he is facing the need to not only endure, but to see the full manifestation of love conquering all. Constantin admits that repetition itself is too transcendent for him to give guidance on, because he cannot make a religious movement.<sup>421</sup> The ethical sphere is a doorway to the religious, it is subsumed by the religious.<sup>422</sup> In religiousness A, the tasks that a person lives her life by are no longer dictated by duties dictated by societal roles and relationships, but by the transcendent.<sup>423</sup> Many of the duties will look the same, but they will have a deeper grounding.

In the ethical sphere, the experience of boredom remains, but it is not fled, it is endured, it is fought with all the power finitude can muster, with the hope that right relationships and ethical duty will make boredom itself flee. However, while endurance rather than fear in the face of boredom may be a step in the right direction, boredom itself can only be overcome by love, which conquers all things; and to love in such a way, one must have faith. Faith and love both undergird the life of the singular individual, or the Knight of Faith, within the religious sphere of existence. We turn now to this final sphere to see the manner in which boredom can be overcome.

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<sup>420</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, Howard Vincent Hong and Edna Hatlestad Hong, *Fear And Trembling and Repetition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983). supplement from Fragments 330.

<sup>421</sup> Kierkegaard *Repetition*, 187.

<sup>422</sup> Crabtree, "Kierkegaard's Coffee House."

<sup>423</sup> Barrett, *Eros and Self-emptying*, 140.

### ***Boredom and the Religious Sphere: Faith***

The religious sphere of existence is different than the preceding spheres in that it has two sections: Religiousness A, and Religiousness B. The difference between these two sections rest on the nature of the God they interact with, and the response that causes from the individual. Stage A focuses on divine immanence, at the exclusion of the transcendent, and still can hold on to the work or duty based understanding of the ethical sphere, causing a sense of guilt. Stage B is the home of the God of Christianity. In Religiousness B, God is seen as transcendent and immanent, and the individual in this stage actually becomes the individual before God, in right relationship to Him, and therefore fully committed to Him. There is no guilt here, merely forgiveness and love, love that comes by faith. For our purposes, since religiousness B in many ways subsumes religiousness A, we will be referencing stage B when using the term religious sphere, unless otherwise noted.<sup>424</sup> Further, the discussion following will only be concerned with stage B.

According to Beabout, Kierkegaard's journals indicate that he viewed loving God as the cure for despair at least six years prior to writing *The Sickness unto Death*, four years before he penned *The Works of Love*.<sup>425</sup> Oddly, he never presents this idea in overtly explicit terms; however, it does manifest itself in his work. In *The Sickness*, Kierkegaard posits that the opposite of being in despair is to have faith.<sup>426</sup> This faith cannot merely be faith in faith, because that faith is ungrounded and therefore rooted in despair, but it must be faith in God. To merely have faith in anything, or for any reason

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<sup>424</sup> Brand Blanshard discusses this distinction in the chapter "Reason and Faith in Kierkegaard" in his Gifford Lecture Series book *Reason and Faith*.

<sup>425</sup> Beabout, *Freedom and Its Misuses*, 76.

<sup>426</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 49.

would not free one from despair, it would further push one into despair, because only faith in God leads to a proper relating to God and therefore to being the singular individual. So, the starting place for Kierkegaard is that one cannot be cured of despair, and therefore boredom, unless one has faith.

It should be noted that whereas Kierkegaard has become popular for the concept of the “Leap of Faith,” the phrase does not appear in his work. While he does mention a “leap” in the *Concept of Anxiety*, his main interaction with the concept of the leap of faith is in response to Lessing, who appears to have developed the concept, in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.<sup>427</sup> The importance of the leap is that it is volitional. For Kierkegaard, faith is an act of the will as opposed to an act of the intellect. This distinction has caused some confusion in reading Kierkegaard. When Kierkegaard, through the mouth of Johannes de Silentio, claims that “...faith begins precisely where thought stops...”<sup>428</sup>, some have taken this to mean that faith is contrary to reason and must always be blind; however, in reality, Kierkegaard here is not rejecting reason, he is indicating that faith goes beyond reason, which was an error the Hegelian understanding could not get beyond. Many of Kierkegaard’s contemporaries believed that the secrets of God could be known objectively, but in Kierkegaard saw that in reality, they must be appropriated subjectively.<sup>429</sup> Faith is “unreasonable” not in that it is anti-reason, but rather in that reason has limits, and faith exceeds them by means of the will.

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<sup>427</sup> Storm, “D. Anthony Storm's Commentary On Kierkegaard.”

<sup>428</sup> Kierkegaard, *Fear And Trembling and Repetition*, 53.

<sup>429</sup> Stewart, *Søren Kierkegaard: Subjectivity, Irony, and the Crisis of Modernity*, 103.

Hough phrases it this way, “Abraham’s faith cannot be understood because it is not a thought, or a belief, but a way of being in the world.”<sup>430</sup> Faith is a way of being, a way of seeing the world. Hence, though Kierkegaard did not coin the phrase “Leap of Faith,” it may be fully appropriate, or perhaps a “Leap to or by Faith” to indicate that the move to this mode of existence is not intellectual, but is volitional. One leaps into faith, or by means of faith, into another way of living. However, that does not mean there isn’t a process, nor that the intellect is not involved, merely that the choice is not one related to the intellect; rather, the intellect follows the will at this point.

The one who takes this leap, the one who lives by means of faith, Kierkegaard refers to by a few possible names, but in relation to being the exemplar of faith, this hero is the Knight of Faith. Hanson explains that the Knight of Faith is not merely one who makes a leap of faith, but that every step is a leap; the entirety of his movement is one of complete faith in God.<sup>431</sup> Kierkegaard, through the mouth of Silentio, marks the Knight of Faith as different from the Tragic Hero, or the Knight of Infinite Resignation, in that these do what must be done begrudgingly, or somberly, where the Knight of Faith sacrifices all, not merely from necessity, nor from duty, but from faith and hope.

Silentio, imagining meeting the long sought for Knight of Faith, writes:

“‘Good Lord, is this the man, is this really the one—he looks just like a tax collector!’ ...I examine his figure from top to toe to see if there may be a crack through which the infinite would peek. No! He is solid all the way through. His stance? It is vigorous, belongs entirely to finitude...no bourgeois philistine could belong to it more. Nothing is detectable of that distant and aristocratic nature by which the knight of the infinite is recognized. He finds pleasure in everything, takes part in everything, and every time one sees him participating in something in particular, he does it with the assiduousness that marks the worldly man who is attached to such things. He attends to his job...He goes to church. No heavenly

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<sup>430</sup> Hough, *Kierkegaard's Dancing Tax Collector*, 6.

<sup>431</sup> Hanson, *Kierkegaard and the Life of Faith*, 111.

gaze or any sign of the incommensurable betrays him; if one did not know him, it would be impossible to distinguish him from the rest of the crowd, for at most his hearty singing of the hymns proves that he has good lungs...On the way [home], he thinks that his wife surely will have a special hot meal for him when he comes home—for example roast lamb's head with vegetables...if she has, to see him eat would be the envy of the elite and an inspiration to the common man...His wife [has not made this meal]—curiously enough, he is just the same...He sits at an open window and surveys the neighborhood where he lives: everything that happens---a rat scurrying under a plank across the gutter, children playing—engages him with an equanimity akin to that of a sixteen-year-old-girl.”<sup>432</sup>

For the sake of space, sections have been removed from the description of the Knight of Faith, the dancing tax collector, as Hough calls him. For the one living in faith, life is such that all things, including aesthetic and ethical pleasure, are a delight. This ability to relish all things sets the Knight of Faith apart from the Knight of Infinite Resignation in that, while both do that which is required, the Knight of Faith does so believing that all sacrifices will be repaid, and all things added back to him. Westphal explains it that both of the knights say with Job, “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” but the Knight of Infinite Resignation stops too soon.<sup>433</sup> Even in loss, the Knight of Faith rejoices and trusts in God. This is why the archetype of the Knight of Faith in *Fear and Trembling* is Abraham, a man who left his home, had disasters in his family, and then was commanded to sacrifice his son, and through all that still believed that all things would be added back to him.

As seen in the passage quoted above, the Knight of Faith finds joy in the mundane. Plain food, children playing, a rat scurrying, everything is a source of pleasure, a gift. There is an obvious comparison here between A, the aesthete, and the Knight of Faith. A relies on the rotation method to find pleasure. He relies on his imagination, and because

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<sup>432</sup> Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 39-40.

<sup>433</sup> Westphal, *Kierkegaard's Concept of Faith*, 33.

imagination is endless, so too is the aesthete's pleasure when watching a spider crawl up a wall, or a bead of sweat run down a man's head; however, this is not the same type of pleasure that the Knight of Faith enjoys. A is in despair, and seeks any distraction to save him from boredom. The Knight of Faith on the other hand is not in despair, and is not fearful of boredom, because nothing bores him, everything is a delight. Whereas A sees boredom as a demonic pantheism, in which all things are empty, leaving everything as a tool to be used for entertainment or amusement, the Knight sees all things with the love that comes from faith and therefore not as tools to use, but as gifts to rejoice in and cherish. While A tries to protect himself from desire, the Knight's joy comes out of desire.<sup>434</sup> Here then we can see the intersection of the two prongs of Kierkegaard's cure for boredom. The one living the life of faith is no longer in despair, and therefore is free of boredom, and that freedom comes because she is filled with the love of God, and sees all things as the gift of God.

### ***Boredom and the Religious Sphere: Love***

What then of love? Clearly, it is not merely just any kind of love that overturns profound boredom, rather a particular type of love. Wagoner points out that much of what is called love by the world is primarily our attempt at fleeing loneliness.<sup>435</sup> We love as a means of excitement, to distract from boredom. In *Either/Or* Johannes the Seducer, in the aesthetic sphere, seeks love only for the moment of excitement and then ends love prior to it growing boring. His concern is that if love is mandated, then it is the death of

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<sup>434</sup> Hough, *Kierkegaard's Dancing Tax Collector*, 48.

<sup>435</sup> Robert Wagoner, *The Meanings of Love: An Introduction to Philosophy of Love* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 1997), 135.

freedom.<sup>436</sup> This concern will be addressed later, but at this point it is important to see the mindset that love is merely about excitement and can easily grow boring and be just as much despairing as the despair for which it is the cure. However, this is the love of the poets. Kierkegaard sees this as self-love, not true love.<sup>437</sup> The reason that this love drifts toward boredom, the reason this love falls into despair is not because love is broken, but because what the poets and aesthetes have called love is, at best, accidental, not essential, to love. The Knight of Faith, the one seeking Christ, knows what it means to actually love, and it is not the love sought by Johannes, it is the type of love that would satisfy Johannes and stop him from seeking false loves.

The love of the poets was called self-love, but even that terminology may be too favorable for it, because to truly love one's self a man must love God. To speak of loving yourself apart from loving God is to admit that you do not love yourself. In order to actually love one's self, a person must love God. It follows from the idea that God created people with a teleological purpose, and only in properly relating with Him can that purpose be realized. Only in such relation is the self actualized and only then does the person become the singular individual, who is also the Knight of Faith.

Further, to love one's neighbor is to encourage her to love God.<sup>438</sup> The greatest concern that a person can show another person is to encourage the other to love God the way that God has encouraged both the person and the other to love Him. This concern for the other comes from God Himself. The reason that a man is able to love his neighbor is not because he is a good man, but because God has birthed in him the ability to love, and

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<sup>436</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>437</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard's Writings*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, vol. 16, *Works of Love* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 19.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid., 127.



the love itself, that he has for his neighbor. God is the source of love, and the love that he has for his neighbor is to direct the neighbor back to loving God.<sup>439</sup> In this way, God is both the cause and the sustenance of the neighbor love relationship.

Since God is the originator of love, His absence indicates that what is held between two people is in fact not love. If God is absent from love, then that “love” is a defrauding of love.<sup>440</sup> True love can only exist in relationship with God, which can only exist when the eternal has been rebirthed within the person, and as faith replaces despair. All three of these are connected because they all entail the God relationship, which is the enemy of despair and boredom. Since God is love, and He is the source of love, the mere presence of love chases despair away. Love requires God.

If people attempt to love one another without God, what they have is a two-person arrangement. However, two-person arrangements are easily broken. If I love the other and yet the other decides to stop loving me, then the other is fine, and my love has become despair. Yet, love that can become despair cannot be true love. If my love can become despair, can stop being love, then what I have for the other is not love. Instead, the proper relation is to include God as the middle term in the love between the other and myself. God is Himself the source of love, and he is the sustainer of love, and He is love. With His inclusion in the arrangement, the love I have for the other is proper love, and if the other decides to break the arrangement, I do not lose, because I still have love. My love does not become despair, for I still love the One who is love and is the source of

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<sup>439</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid., 107.

love, and that secures my love for the neighbor in the face of my being rejected by him.<sup>441</sup> A love that includes God as the middle term is secured as actual abiding love.

When Kierkegaard asserts that God is the middle term he is making an illusion to syllogistic logic. In a syllogism, the middle term is the term that connects the two premises of an argument, and leads to the conclusion.<sup>442</sup> The middle term does not appear in the conclusion, but is that which is contained in the two premises, without which a conclusion could not come. Dalferth asserts, “God is neither a fact of the world nor the fact that the world is, but that without which there wouldn’t be any facts at all, nor a possibility of knowing the true nature of the world, nor a human life informed by this truth.”<sup>443</sup> God is not a conclusion; He is that which makes all conclusions possible. In this same way, when God is the middle term in love, He is that which connects the lover and the beloved, without which, there could be no actual love. Humans have within them infinity, but the love of infinity comes from God, and therefore God, as middle term, surpasses finitude, and allows the lover and the beloved, to love truly.

Further, when I love the other with God as the middle term, it allows me to love myself properly. No longer do I love myself as myself, but I love myself as the other as well. The other is the other to myself and I am the other to the other, but we are both the other to God. Therefore, my love for the other and my love for myself should be the same because I am to love the other as I love myself, and before God and the neighbor, I love myself as I love the other. In order to truly love myself, I must love God and I must love the neighbor.

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<sup>441</sup> Ibid., 305.

<sup>442</sup> IU Dalferth, “The Middle Term: Kierkegaard and the Contemporary Debate About Explanatory Theism,” *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook* 20 (2015): 86.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid., 88.

This neighbor love is commanded of me. It is not merely my right or my privilege to love my neighbor, it is my duty to love my neighbor. Earlier it was mentioned that in *Either/Or* Johannes saw this understanding of love as problematic; however, we have also seen that his understanding of love in general is problematic. What he thought would free him from despair actually was pushing him further into despair; even though had it been proper love, it would have been the cure for despair. Johannes' fear is misplaced because love that is not commanded invites despair, yet love that is commanded forbids despair.<sup>444</sup> Despair is not actualizing the self, yet love comes from that very actualization; and love that is commanded, is commanded by love. Love commands that one loves, and is so doing, forbids the possibility of despair. If love is not a duty, then love can be a mere feeling or preference. Love can be a whim, fleeting and devastating. However, when love is commanded, when it is my duty to love my neighbor, love becomes eternally secured.<sup>445</sup> The One who issues the command is love, and is unchanging. Unchanging love's command to love makes it the duty of those in proper relationship with Him to love and in that, love is secured and cannot be altered. Is it a privation that this love is unchanging? Does this make love stagnate? Kierkegaard asks, is changingness or changelessness a stronger power? Is that which can change perpetually, or that which is beyond change of a greater force? Is it not better for love to always be love because it is unchanging than for love to become hate because it has the power to change?<sup>446</sup> Clearly, the answer is that the unchanging nature of love makes it superior to the perpetually changing nature of false love.

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<sup>444</sup> Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 55.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>446</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

In this power of love we can see the exact manner in which love is the cure for despair and boredom. The person in despair either soars due to possibility, or is crushed due to necessity. In and either case, this person is trapped in boredom, because despair leads to boredom. However, love is a command, though it is not necessary. Surely, love is necessary for one to relate properly to God, but it is not necessary in that it is chosen by the one who loves, the necessity of love does not crush as the necessity of despair does. Love invites, it does not force. Love is given, and love gives, it does not usurp. Further, love exists in the realm of the possible, as do myriad other possibilities, but in the command to love, all non-love possibilities are eradicated. One cannot soar in despair if all non-love options are removed by love. Love walks on the field of the necessary, and the possible, and forges the middle ground between them where despair is forbidden and has no power.

The need to love and be loved in this manner is rooted in human nature.<sup>447</sup> As creatures, we were created to love. As we separate ourselves from love, we despair. As we ignore love's call, we become bored. Boredom and despair are not expressions of how life ought to be, but rather they indicate that things are not as they ought be. They indicate that the one who is bored lacks love. They indicate that the one who is in despair does not love God, does not love his neighbor and therefore does not love himself properly. Humans have a teleological bent to our existence. We are created to become our self, and inherent in that self, inherent in our nature is the desire and need to love. Despair is contra nature. If we embrace our natural desire for true Christian love, then the sickness unto death has been cured, and thusly, profound boredom is at its end.

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<sup>447</sup> Ibid., 154.

## *Conclusion*

In the 250 years between Pascal and Kierkegaard, modernity continued its slide into the epidemic of profound boredom. Kierkegaard's critique includes much that was seen in Pascal. However, he expands these ideas and focuses less on what might be seen as a positive aspect in boredom, namely, boredom as an indicator that something is wrong; instead, he focuses on the fear that boredom causes, and the battle with boredom in various stages of existence. In this chapter we considered boredom as it appears in the three spheres of existence: as an enemy to flee in the aesthetic, as something to endure in the ethical, and as something defeated in the religious. The one who defeats boredom, or perhaps allows boredom to be defeated, is the singular individual, or the Knight of Faith.

For the aesthete, and to some extent the person in the ethical sphere, the perpetual feeling of emptiness, the feeling that time is divested of meaning, comes from time having been unchained from eternity. Time was not made to be untethered from eternity, but society has done so as a way to create freedom.<sup>448</sup> By so doing however, society has not made mankind more free, but more bored. Mankind has not improved; the bar for satisfaction has been lowered and created the illusion of progress. What society has done is taken time and made it too light. Time now appears meaningless and worthless because it has been detached from infinity, and without the weight of infinity grounding it, time now floats like a balloon in the wind. The life of the one in despair is in perpetual need to distract oneself from the meaninglessness of life; however, the one for whom love abides will never pass away.<sup>449</sup> Love eradicates despair and overturns boredom by being love;

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<sup>448</sup> Pezze, *Essays On Boredom and Modernity*, 63.

<sup>449</sup> Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 314.

and in being love, it abides, which perpetually grounds meaning for the one who abides in love.

We turn now to explore further the connection between time and boredom in the thought of Martin Heidegger, as we look at the secular response to boredom in late modernity, or perhaps, in early postmodernity. It will be noted that much of Heidegger will sound similar to Kierkegaard; however, without the components of faith or God, and will return to the positive aspects of boredom mentioned in Pascal, only amplified as the dominant mode by which to understand the phenomenon.

## **Chapter Five: Heidegger's Response to the Problem at the Collapse of Modernity**

### ***Introduction***

Thus far we have considered the spiritual root of profound boredom in the sin of acedia, and have seen how that root took hold and was amplified by the secularization that accompanied Modernity, giving rise to profound boredom. We have also considered two responses to the rise of profound boredom, both from the Christian theistic perspective, one at the nascent of Modernity, and the other in the latter part of that epoch. In this chapter we will consider a third, and final, analysis of boredom, which stands unique from the other two in that it comes at the dawn of postmodernity, and from a secular, or "atheistic," perspective, though Heidegger himself might not fully agree with that analysis. If nothing else, he would agree that Kierkegaard and Pascal's understanding of God is ontotheological in nature, so he rejects that understanding of Christianity, meaning that though his philosophy owes much to Kierkegaard, his approach to boredom is markedly different.

There is a good deal of work that must be done in order to get to the place where we can fully understand what Heidegger is saying about boredom. Boredom is a fundamental attunement of Dasein that discloses the world in such and such a manner. In order to make sense of boredom then, we must first understand what Heidegger means by Dasein, and world, and then consider how attunement is central to the experience of Dasein. Then, we must consider how Dasein interacts with time, because boredom is directly tied to our experience of temporality. After this we will look at Heidegger's analysis of boredom in his *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. From here we will pivot from Heidegger's early and middle thought, to consider how this analysis of

boredom can be understood in light of his later thought, in particular in relation to the Fourfold, and to the rise of technology.

### *Dasein, Being, and World*

We begin our discussion of Heidegger's thought considering the concept of Dasein. In his *Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, Heidegger explains that he avoids terms like “human” or “man” to discuss what one would naturally call a human, because the terms bring with them baggage that stymies the discussion that he is undertaking. The understandings of mankind as either “a living being endowed with reason,” or as a “person” both presume a context of looking at the world that precludes helpful investigation, and to that end need to be abandoned. The former of these approaches is rooted in Greek thought, the latter, “personhood,” entails a Christian understanding of the endowments of the former, but seeing them as faculties that come from being made in God's image.<sup>450</sup> However, this understanding pre-categorizes what we call humanity, and as such will always lead the way in our investigation.<sup>451</sup>

Heidegger writes,

Human being was, in a manner cut to the measure of faith, defined in advance as being-created in the image of God. Apart from the Greek definition it externally adopted and rendered superficial, the Christian definition of the essence of human being is dependent on the idea of God which was added to the Greek definition and made normative for it.<sup>452</sup>

This understanding of humanity, which has dominated Western civilization, sees “personhood,” as a concept, as a consequence of Christian thought. This understanding

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<sup>450</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1999), 17.

<sup>451</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.



therefore needs to be removed. That is not to say that Heidegger is attempting to understand the concept of the person in a different manner, in fact he indicates that modern philosophy's neutralizing of the God relationship in personhood and replacing it with values and norms is just as problematic.<sup>453</sup> Heidegger rejects the Christian and ancient pagan nomenclature, because he thinks it already presupposes an answer to the investigation, but he rejects the Cartesian, or modernist approach just as adamantly, because it presumes and impossible neutrality not just in relation to the divine, but in relation to all things.

It also is vital to understand that Heidegger does not see his philosophy as atheistic. Kovas notes that Heidegger wants to demythologize the problem of God, i.e. remove God from the question of being, and keep theology and philosophy distinct.<sup>454</sup> The union of philosophy and theology is what Heidegger dubs "ontotheology" and this has problematically affected the way that we interact with the question of being, and indeed with a God, if there is one.<sup>455</sup> Therefore, one of Heidegger's first steps in understanding what we traditionally call humans is to remove that relationship to the divine. Note, this puts him at odds with Evagrius, Aquinas, Pascal, and Kierkegaard, all of whom see mankind's relationship with the divine as key and essential to understanding

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<sup>453</sup> Ibid.

<sup>454</sup> George Kovacs, *The Question of God in Heidegger's Phenomenology*, Northwestern University studies in phenomenology and existential philosophy. (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1990), 68.

<sup>455</sup> Heidegger discusses his thoughts on these matters at length in *The Phenomenology of the Religious Life*

what a person is; and indeed, that very phraseology is why Heidegger shies away from personhood language in this and his other early works.<sup>456</sup>

If then, “humans” cannot properly be called mankind, or persons, because it assumes a certain category of the manner in which they exist, and therefore predefines defines them, what term should they be called? The answer stems from the essence of this entity. For Heidegger, the essence of “man” is existence.<sup>457</sup> The term “person” entails an existence in which certain ways of being are already in place; however, the existence of this entity does no such thing, it merely states the fundamental, or ontic, reality, that this entity exists. It “be’s.” To this end, the early Heidegger replaces “human” and “person” language with the term Dasein, or literally “being there” or “being here.” For Heidegger, the core understanding of humanity is not a presupposed relationship with something greater, but rather, its own existence, and the manner in which that existence might open up to other existences.

To this point, Sheehan has suggested that the “da” in Dasein should be translated as “openness” rather than “there,” focusing on Dasein’s being open to possibilities.<sup>458</sup> This assertion is problematic given that either treats the indexical *Da* (here/there) as a metaphor, or it replaces a cause with its effect (one must be here to be open to certain possibilities). However, while Sheehan’s direct assertion may be problematic, his emphasis finds resonance in Heidegger’s thought as Heidegger posits that Dasein defines

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<sup>456</sup> It should be noted that throughout his writing, Heidegger will use the terms “human” or “person” to refer to Dasein, but it should always be read with an asterisk. This dissertation will do the same, primarily for the sake of the reader, and being able to vary word usage.

<sup>457</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time :: A Translation of Sein Und Zeit*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), 40.

<sup>458</sup> Thomas Sheehan, *Making Sense of Heidegger: A Paradigm Shift*, New Heidegger Research (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2015), 137.

itself in terms of possibilities.<sup>459</sup> Though the term “being” is most often associated with Heidegger’s thought, in a very real way, the term “possibility” ought be just as associated with him, perhaps even more tightly. However, before we get ahead of ourselves, we must ask, what does it mean to “be there?” Dasein is an entity among entities, yet it is unique in that it is a being for whom being is an issue.<sup>460</sup> Dasein is concerned with the fact that it exists, in a manner that other beings do not. As a Dasein interacts with beings, it becomes obvious that the Dasein is finite, and that finitude is fundamental to its existence.<sup>461</sup> As Dasein is finite, and other entities are finite, these entities interact with each other in differing ways inherent to their finitude.

However, this statement is not saying that all Dasein and all non-Dasein entities are the same within their finitude. They certainly are not. In fact, Heidegger is here emphasizing the uniqueness of Dasein as opposed to other entities. “A cat does not exist, but it lives; a stone neither lives nor exists but is present before us.”<sup>462</sup> It can be difficult to navigate what Heidegger is doing here, how can a cat live but not exist? Later in that same paragraph, Heidegger states that a bench does not exist, and it does not have a proper “being by the house” because that would mean that the house manifested itself as a house to the bench.<sup>463</sup> The house, the bench, and even the cat, exist in that they are beings, they are entities, or things, that have ontic reality, but they lack being, or ontological significance. They are the type of thing that physics can address, but there is no conversation to be had about meaning or relationships apart from Dasein. Dreyfus

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<sup>459</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 41.

<sup>460</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>461</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 6.

<sup>462</sup> Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, 127.

<sup>463</sup> *Ibid.*

phrases it this way when addressing the concept of religion, “The physical powers of iron are essential for making effective hammers, but they are irrelevant for making powerful crucifixes.”<sup>464</sup> Natural sciences can tell us how hammers work, but not what they are.<sup>465</sup>

These objects are present ontically, in that they are material things, but they do not exist ontologically; they lack being. A stone is a present entity, it has a hardness, color, weight, etc., and these belong to it as a thing, but apart from a being whose being is an issue for it, the stone lacks being, and therefore existence.<sup>466</sup> The stone is merely a physical object. This is the reason that a bench, house, or cat does not exist apart from Dasein. The physical objects are there, but that is all that they are. A stone is not a stone apart from Dasein. Heidegger summarizes his view thusly:

“Three claims may be added here:

1) Beings are in themselves the kinds of beings they are, and in the way they are, even if, for example, Dasein does not exist. 2) Being ‘is’ not, but being is there [es gibt], insofar as Dasein exists. In the essence of existence there is transcendence, i.e., a giving of the world prior to and for all being-toward-and-among intra-worldly beings. 3) Only insofar as existing Dasein gives itself anything like being can beings emerge in their in-themselves, i.e., can the first claim likewise be understood at all and be taken into account.”<sup>467</sup>

For Heidegger, “being” or “existence” is more than being physically present. An entity’s being is contingent upon the way that it relates to and is connected to itself and other entities. Since Dasein is the only being capable of noting these relations, or indeed to some extent creating them, being is contingent upon Dasein.

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<sup>464</sup> Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-world: A Commentary On Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), 262.

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>466</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, trans. Michael Heim (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 13.

<sup>467</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

We return here to the concept of possibility. “Dasein is intrinsically being possible.”<sup>468</sup> It interacts in a world of physical entities, and there is any number of ways for all these entities to interrelate. Dasein understands the world by projecting its being upon these possibilities.<sup>469</sup> These possibilities are determined by the “there” in which Dasein (being-there) is situated. That “there” provides the Dasein the entities and beings with which it can interact, and therefore the field of possible interactions upon which the Dasein can project its being. In this projection, the world discloses itself to Dasein, and indeed Dasein creates the world, and these physical entities now have being. In this existential analytic, Heidegger sees that Descartes’ cogito needs to be inverted, it is not that I think, therefore I exist; but rather, I exist, and in that existence, and my existing with other existing things, my thinking is driven.<sup>470</sup> This shift indicates Heidegger’s concern over against the concerns of modernity. Dreyfus notes that since Descartes thinkers have tried to prove the existence of a world of objects outside the mind, and Kant saw the lack of such a proof as scandalous, but Heidegger thought that the scandal was even making the attempt. The trouble comes from the Cartesian tradition which sees no distinction between the “world” as the totality of objects, and the “world” as the “...organized equipment and practices in which Dasein is involved, indeed, in terms of which Dasein defines itself.”<sup>471</sup> The concern is not whether or not a bench exists in a world of objects exterior to the self, but rather, how the world is organized, and how one interacts with and uses this entity. Heidegger does not think that one needs to prove the

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<sup>468</sup> Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 298

<sup>469</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 139.

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>471</sup> Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-world*, 248.

existence of the physical object that is a bench; rather, the physical object is a present physical actuality, but I give it being in the way that it is a part of the world, or more particularly, and more ideally, the way that it is a part of my world.

Here we see a further possible linguistic confusion. In the conversation thus far the word “world” has been used in multiple ways, a problem that Heidegger himself faced. Heidegger presents four possible definitions of the word “world” before narrowing his scope to two uses of the word. In some instances in *Being and Time* Heidegger uses “world” to mean the totality of beings present within the world; however, his primary use is that in which Dasein lives, which can be either the “public” world of multiple Daseins, or one’s private surroundings.<sup>472</sup> World then means either the objective world of physical “stuff” or the meaningful world of the Dasein who lives in said world. Dasein can never be seen as next to the world, Dasein always inhabits the world, and as such, the world is not an object to Dasein, but a part of Dasein.<sup>473</sup> Everything that a person encounters he is involved with in some manner. That which he is involved with becomes a part of the world of meaning in which he lives.<sup>474</sup> To this point Sheehan notes that when Heidegger says, “As existing, the human being is the world” he means that the world is the self “...writ large as a matrix of intelligibility.”<sup>475</sup> The self is always the self in a world, and the self can never be a self apart from the world.

Dasein is always in a world, inhabiting that world, and creating that world. Kovacs explains, “The World is a ‘result’ of meaningfulness for man; it is a network of meanings. The human being as There-being is structurally related to the World; human

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<sup>472</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 60-61.

<sup>473</sup> Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-world*, 44-45.

<sup>474</sup> Sheehan, *Making Sense of Heidegger*, 111.

<sup>475</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

reality is to-be-in-the-World. The World is not a thing. It is a phenomenon of encounter between There-being and beings; There-being is a World-building.”<sup>476</sup> Put another way, Dasein is always already in the world of physical stuff, and by virtue of her ability to interact with that physical stuff, she find herself not merely in a world, but in her world, or in our world. The world of physical stuff qua physical stuff has no meaning, or being. The world, or a thing in the world, is given meaning by Dasein in the manner in which she interacts with, and relates to, it. In actualizing, or projecting, possibilities onto the world of physical stuff, Dasein takes part in creating her world, and ascribing meaning to her world.

We must now expand our discussion of Dasein to take into account the fact that Dasein does not live alone, but rather, she is with others. Indeed, not only does Dasein find itself in a world with cats, benches, and houses, but also with other Dasein. In fact, this connection with other Dasein is perhaps the most important factor in understanding the concept of world, in that an individual Dasein does not understand the world in any manner that it chooses, but rather is being “formed by shared practices and absorbed in coping with the world.”<sup>477</sup> The manner in which Dasein interacts with the world comes via socialization, and Dasein interprets itself in relation to this socialization as well.<sup>478</sup> The world of physical stuff becomes a world of meaning by Dasein projecting itself upon the world, but what Dasein projects is limited in large part by the society in which Dasein finds itself. As a part of this society, Dasein inherits an understanding of that which is

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<sup>476</sup> Kovacs, *The Question of God in Heidegger's Phenomenology*, 62.

<sup>477</sup> Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-world*, 163.

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

correct, or proper. This societal framework becomes the matrix by which Dasein understands both itself, and the world.

Consider for example a classroom. Heidegger notes that when he walks into a classroom and sees the lectern, he does not see a stack of boxes made with particular angels, but rather a lectern from which he is to speak, and the students to a lectern from which the teacher will address them. However, if a farmer from the Black Forrest is led into the classroom, he may not see a lectern precisely, but he sees the place for the teacher. Heidegger contrasts these two with a man suddenly transplanted to Germany from his hut in Senegal. The man from Senegal, Heidegger proposes, would probably not see a lectern, but perhaps something to do with magic, or something one could take shelter behind to be protected from arrows and stones.<sup>479</sup> Setting aside what may be a rather condescending analogy, what Heidegger is getting to is that even in the way that one interprets a room, or a simple object, socialization is key. The lectern has meaning as a lectern only insofar as lecterns exist in a particular Dasein's world. Surely the physical "stuff" is present, but the lectern is a manner in which Dasein interacts with the world in light of socialization. Dasein has no control over the possibilities it will confront, nor the society into which it has been, or will be thrust. Heidegger calls this "thrownness."<sup>480</sup>

Dasein is thrown into the world, and left to make sense of it on its own. Within societies, Dasein is instructed in how to make sense of the world; however, the manner in which it is inculcated is merely that which other Daseins have done in the past, or what other Dasein deem valuable, and not that which the particular Dasein, or any particular

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<sup>479</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Towards the Definition of Philosophy: With a Transcript of the Lecture-Course 'on the Nature of the University and Academic Study' (Freiburg Lecture-Courses 1919)* (London: Continuum, 2008), 56-57.

<sup>480</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 169.



Dasein, actually sees as meaningful. Society teaches what “One” should be like, but this “One” is nobody.<sup>481</sup> Here Dasein finds itself lost in the “they” and must find itself in particular.<sup>482</sup> Heidegger states it thusly, “Everyone is the other, and no one is himself. The they, which supplies the answer to the who of everyday Dasein, is the nobody to whom everyday Dasein has always already surrendered itself, in its being-among-one-another.”<sup>483</sup> Put another way, in projecting upon the world what others have told Dasein to project, the Dasein loses itself and becomes part of the “they.”

This concern for becoming part of the they has strong resonance with Kierkegaard, and the need to become the singular individual, but perhaps of greater note here is the similarity to Pascal’s understanding of identity. If Dasein in its everydayness is projecting what is not authentic toward itself, but merely what other Dasein have determined ought be projected, but even they themselves are merely projecting that which they have been taught to project, then we are again at the threshold of boredom in Pascal’s mind, in that no one is actually being themselves, and everyone is being the moi. Heidegger’s ideas push this further because one’s identity is not merely who they are, but what the world they construct is. We can see here in a very preliminary manner why boredom will be so great a topic of concern for Heidegger, because it will not only effect the one who experiences boredom, but also the world that Dasein inhabits/constructs.

We are not yet at the place to discuss Heidegger’s conception of boredom, but understanding Dasein and world are vital to that discussion. As Heidegger’s thoughts evolved and progressed, his terminology shifted, as did his focus, but much of what is

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<sup>481</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time* (Oxford, UK: B. Blackwell, 1992), 8-9.

<sup>482</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 248.

<sup>483</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

established here remains present and informs both his transitional, and his later periods. We have thus far discussed what world is, and how world is created, as well as the socialized nature of Dasein's relationship to the world; however, we turn now to the manner in which Dasein projects himself upon the world. Or perhaps, the metaphysical tenor by which one attunes itself to the world so that one's interactions are colored by this affection. Heidegger calls this "Mood."

### *Mood and Attunement*

In common parlance, "mood" describes the general way that a person feels, or approaches events in the world. It's a person's general tone, or state of mind. Heidegger's use of the term takes this understanding, and expands it to a maximal level. Mood is a manner in which Dasein finds itself in the world, and is inherently connected to the concept of attunement. "What we indicate ontologically with the term attunement is ontically what is most familiar and an everyday kind of thing: mood, being in a mood."<sup>484</sup> Dasein finds itself in a mood, and that mood attunes Dasein toward the world in such a manner that the world discloses itself in a particular way. In this we see that attunement, and therefore by extension mood, is a fundamental way in which Dasein is Dasein.<sup>485</sup> Mood and attunement are fundamentally a part of Dasein's being in the world, because Dasein is always attuned to the world in a particular manner.

Dasein is always in a mood. It is not the case that Dasein puts on a mood, or enters a mood from a moodless state. Dasein is never outside of mood or not in a mood, but rather as a being in the world, Dasein is always related to the world in some manner,

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<sup>484</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>485</sup> Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 67.

and always attuned toward the world in some manner. This mood can change, it can be spoiled, but it is never not there. In fact, the transitory nature of mood Heidegger sees as proof that one is always already in a mood.<sup>486</sup> If on Monday the world appears a certain way to Jim, and then on Tuesday the world appears another way, that does not show that on Tuesday Jim has entered a mood, but rather that on Tuesday Jim's mood is a different than his mood on Monday. On both days the way the world appeared to Jim, or the manner in which he was attuned to it, was colored by mood. Occasionally, Dasein may experience an, "...often persistent, smooth, and pallid lack of mood..." but Heidegger says that this mood is not actually a lack of mood, but rather when Dasein becomes tired of itself, and the world is seen a burden.<sup>487</sup> Though Heidegger does not use the term, this description bears a resemblance to his later description of profound boredom as Dasein's fundamental attunement.

Mansikka restates Heidegger's understanding of moods as presuppositions for thinking action.<sup>488</sup> Moods are not picked, they are not rational, they are merely the way a person relates to the world. For our purposes it is helpful to understand a particular mood, boredom as, to use Cayne's terminology, a primitive self-discovery.<sup>489</sup> This discovery is of how one is positioned in the world. It is important though to understand that moods are not entirely personal. Dreyfus makes clear that moods cannot be understood as fleeting private feelings, but rather should be seen as a dimension of existence that takes into

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<sup>486</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 126.

<sup>487</sup> *Ibid.*, 126-127.

<sup>488</sup> Jan-Erik Mansikka, "Can Boredom Educate Us? Tracing a Mood in Heidegger's Fundamental Ontology from an Educational Point of View," *Studies in the Philosophy of Education* 28 (2009): 258.

<sup>489</sup> Ryan Coyne, *Heidegger's Confessions: The Remains of Saint Augustine in Being and Time and Beyond*, Religion and Postmodernism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 129.

account the culture and the social relations that Dasein inhabits.<sup>490</sup> Just as Dasein always finds itself already socialized, within the context of that socialization Dasein finds itself within a mood, and therein attuned to the world in a certain manner. Dreyfus compares moods to the weather. When the weather is sunny, objects appear bright and it is difficult to imagine them drab, and conversely on dull days, it is hard to imagine things as bright and cheery. In a similar manner, when a person is in a mood, the whole world appears to her in that mood. If she is frightened, everything is fearsome; if she is joyful, everything is of good cheer.<sup>491</sup> Sheehan presents the concept as being absorbed in the world.<sup>492</sup> By any measure though, what Heidegger is communicating is that Dasein is in the world, and in the world with other entities, and by virtue of where and how Dasein finds itself in the world, it finds itself in a mood, which attunes it toward the world in a certain manner. Mood colors the possibilities that present themselves to Dasein.<sup>493</sup> Dasein understands these possibilities by projecting itself upon them, for indeed for Heidegger that is what understanding means.<sup>494</sup> Further, understanding is always attuned.<sup>495</sup> Therefore, Dasein understands the world by being attuned to it, and projecting itself upon it, and doing so from the mood in which it finds itself. This mood is not asserted, but rather awoken within the Dasein, meaning it may be dormant for some time, but it still remains.<sup>496</sup>

King summarizes the changes that occur in Heidegger's understanding of mood in a rather helpful manner. In his early thought, *Being and Time* in particular, Heidegger

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<sup>490</sup> Dreyfus 172

<sup>491</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>492</sup> Sheehan, *Making Sense of Heidegger*, 161.

<sup>493</sup> Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-world*, 190.

<sup>494</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 277.

<sup>495</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 134.

<sup>496</sup> Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 60.

sees angst as the primary mood whereby one encounters being. A few years later, in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* Heidegger pivots to see boredom as the fundamental mood whereby one is attuned to the world. In both of these cases, one's mood has a strong temporal cognate (which will be important as we move forward); however, the later Heidegger did not see mood as solely connected to time, as he believed that in Plato and Aristotle's day the mood of philosophy was one of wonder, and in the modern period, the Cartesian mood of doubt was primary. King concludes this summery by launching his argument that happiness might be a deep mood as well, however, for our purposes, his work is helpful in establishing the variety of moods that appear in Heidegger's thought.<sup>497</sup> Though not King's intent in his summery, and an idea not stated directly by Heidegger, it is of note that as his thought changed over time, we see a presentation of mood that evolves in such a way that taking Heidegger's life's work as a whole, in western civilization, the mood of wonder was replaced by doubt, which led to angst, and most importantly, boredom. These latter two possess a temporal cognate, in that the manner in which Dasein is attuned to the world also is part and parcel of how Dasein is attuned within time. This temporal concern of boredom is the last preliminary consideration that we need to consider, and it is the topic to which we now turn.

### ***Temporality, Thrownness and Death***

The German word for boredom, *Langeweile*, communicates a lengthening of time. As such, time is central in understanding Heidegger's presentation of boredom. Time is

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<sup>497</sup> Matthew King, *Heidegger and Happiness: Dwelling On Fitting and Being* (London: Continuum, 2009), 20-21.

fundamental, for Heidegger, and must be seen as the horizon of understanding being.<sup>498</sup>

Time works as the background, or the theater, in which being is located. It is important though to understand that time here is not what can be called clock time, but rather a deeper, primordial time. Clock time serves a function, but it is not the most fundamental understanding of time, in fact, it is arbitrary.

A clock is used to measure time, and in so doing, it creates a structure for relating to cyclical repetition, but the manner in which the points in that measurement are divided is arbitrary.<sup>499</sup> There is a stretch of duration, but the grid that is placed upon that duration, seconds, minutes, etc. are not meaningful, they are just measurements that society agrees to use. A clock is able to indicate a now point, and indicate that one now point is prior to another; however, no now point holds primacy over another now point. In fact, the clock often confuses the issue of time in that the existence of the “now” is what gives the clock meaning. The clock is able to count a succession of nows, but the now itself is what actually matters.<sup>500</sup>

This counting of nows, this measuring, creates a public time, in which each Dasein interacts with time by the same “objectively present multiplicity of nows.”<sup>501</sup> This objectivity is artificial, and though Heidegger does not state it, there appears to be a corollary between this understanding of clock and/or public time, and his later thought on the resourcing of things into a standing reserve, i.e., being flattened and stripped of their meaning. In clock time, or public time, time itself is stripped of what it actually is in order to be made public and useable by a plurality of Dasein. This point in and of itself

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<sup>498</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 15.

<sup>499</sup> Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, 4.

<sup>500</sup> Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 254.

<sup>501</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 383.

may be of note for our discussion related to boredom, but it is not merely enough to understand what time is not, we must go further and explore what Heidegger understands time to be. Coyne notes part of the error in our manner of thinking is that in our everyday life we reduce time to space. We speak of time as long, or short. We conceptualize it as extended in some manner, as opposed to understanding it as a series of now points with no duration at all.<sup>502</sup> Indeed, if there were a duration of “now” it would be the case that a point in that “now” would be another, smaller, now, and then another, ad infinitum.

Heidegger makes use of this error in speaking when summarizing Einstein’s understanding of space-time, noting that space is itself nothing. There is no absolute space; rather, space is merely the bodies and energies within it. “Time too is nothing. It persists merely as a consequence of the events taking place in it. There is no absolute time, and no absolute simultaneity”<sup>503</sup> Heidegger draws our attention here to Aristotle and his view that time is that in which events take place.<sup>504</sup> Elsewhere he notes that time for Aristotle is connected with motion, and measured by motion, and the most pure form of motion is that of the rotation of the heavens, allowing one to understand that time has a certain sense of circularity.<sup>505</sup> This point is important in understanding that the motion connected with time is not necessarily that time is moving, but that Dasein is moving through time. As we have stated, Dasein is thrown into existence, and she is thus thrown into time. Indeed, Dasein’s mutual thrownness is why there is any public time at all.<sup>506</sup> In Dasein’s thrownness, it is Dasein, more so than time, which is moving. Heidegger states it

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<sup>502</sup> Coyne, *Heidegger's Confessions*, 163.

<sup>503</sup> Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, 3.

<sup>504</sup> Ibid.

<sup>505</sup> Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 237.

<sup>506</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 378.

this way in *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, “Time neither passes nor remains but it temporalizes itself. Temporalization is the primal phenomenon of ‘motion.’”<sup>507</sup>

Time relates to motion, but time is not motion. Rather, the movement of time is a phenomenon created by Dasein’s thrownness. This idea sounds odd in light of the everyday understanding of clock time; however, for Heidegger, at a primordial level, time is not about measurement or movement, but rather, about expectancy, retention, and making present.<sup>508</sup> We do not merely apprehend the future, the past, and the now by means of these three, but rather, retention is the origin of the past, making-present is the origin of the present, and most importantly, expectancy is the origin of the future. “Expectancy is not a mode of being conscious of time but, in a primordial and genuine sense is time itself.”<sup>509</sup>

Heidegger explains in his *History of the Concept of Time* that time is not a framework, or something that can be found outside Dasein, but rather that which makes possible Dasein’s “...being-ahead-of-itself-in-already-being-involved-in, that is, which makes possible the being of care.”<sup>510</sup> Dasein is thrown into existence and projects itself forward into and onto the world through that which it cares about. This care structure is the heart of Dasein’s world construction, which we addressed in the previous section, but it happens because of the temporal nature of time. Heidegger goes further to say not merely that time is temporal, but also that:

“Dasein is time, time is temporal. Dasein is not time, but temporality. The fundamental assertion that time is temporal is therefore the most authentic determination – and it is not a tautology, because the Being of temporality

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<sup>507</sup> Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, 198.

<sup>508</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>509</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>510</sup> Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time*, 319-320.



signifies non-identical actuality. Dasein is its past, it is its possibility in running ahead to this past. In this running ahead I am authentically time, I have time. In so far as time is in each case mine, there are many times. Time itself is meaningless; time is temporal.”<sup>511</sup>

There is much to unpack in this passage that is outside of the scope of this work, but what is of note is the inherent relation of Dasein to time, and to temporality, and the relationship of Dasein, time, and temporality to possibilities. Time is not about duration, but about care, relations, and possibility.

In light of the nature of primordial time, Boss is helpful in pinpointing the greatest error in our everyday understanding of clock time. In clock time, the past is seen as a present that has already occurred, and the future is seen as a present that has not yet come. The three dimensional nature of time is neglected in that two of the three aspects become merely a modified present.<sup>512</sup> The further problem is that not only are the past and the future seen as modified presents, but further, this understanding of time sees the present as the primary aspect of time. However, for Heidegger, temporality temporalizes itself primordially out of the future.<sup>513</sup> The present is not the primary aspect of time, but rather the future, and into this future Dasein is thrown, and Dasein projects itself. All three of the ecstases of time are co-equal in originality, but the phenomenon of the motion of time is one of the future coming toward Dasein, as Dasein returns to the past and dwells in the present.<sup>514</sup> The future is primary because it holds possibilities. As Dasein, I have been thrown into possibilities, and the past is a relation of possibilities that have been

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<sup>511</sup> Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, 20-21.

<sup>512</sup> Matthew Boss, “Metaphysics and the Mood of Deep Boredom: Heidegger’s Phenomenology of Mood,” in *Essays on Boredom and Modernity*, ed. Barbara Dalle Pezze and Carlo Dalle Salzani (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 98.

<sup>513</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 304.

<sup>514</sup> Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 266-267.

actualized, which has created a present in which I care for, and interrelate with, the currently actualized possibilities, as I anticipate and expect possibilities that I am moving toward.

Dasein is attuned to these possibilities, but there is always a possibility that is outstanding. There is an unfinished quality to Dasein, and at the moment that there is a lack of further possibility for Dasein, Dasein is annihilated.<sup>515</sup> This annihilation is because the completion of Dasein is death. In death Dasein ceases to be a being in the world, and lacks any future possibilities, therefore Dasein no longer is Dasein. Further, death always belongs to a particular Dasein. No one can die another's death, and no one cannot die their own death. Death is the only possibility that Dasein cannot fail to actualize. Death is the end, and is each person's ownmost finality, Dasein's final possibility.<sup>516</sup> Rather poetically, Heidegger describes this trajectory toward death thusly,

Understood existentially, birth never is something past in the sense of what is no longer objectively present, and death is just as far from having the kind of being of something outstanding that is not yet objectively preset but will come. Factual Dasein exists as born, and, born, it is already dying in the sense of being-toward-death. Both 'ends' and their 'between' are as long as Dasein factually exists, and they are in the sole way possible on the basis of the being of Dasein as care. In the unity of the thrownness and the fleeting or else anticipatory being-toward-death, birth and death, 'are connected' in the way appropriate to Dasein. As care, Dasein is the 'Between.'<sup>517</sup>

Prior to birth, Dasein does not exist, in that there are no possibilities, there is no mood, there is no world, there is no care. At birth, Dasein is thrown into the world with a set amount of possibilities, the final of which is death. In life, Dasein is constantly moving toward death, as a being in the world, attuned to the world via moods, constructing the

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<sup>515</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 219-220.

<sup>516</sup> Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time*, 308-313.

<sup>517</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 343.

world via care, and ultimately embracing the cessation of possibilities in death. The manner in which these possibilities, from birth to death are realized is time, and as time temporalizes it creates the phenomenon of time moving, which we count in clock time. However, time itself is not about the arbitrary passing of hours and minutes, but rather about the lived moments of relation as one projects himself upon the world. Time is about care, not measurement.

### ***Homesickness, God, and Boredom***

As we begin our discussion of Heidegger's understanding of boredom, we must return to a thread that has run consistently throughout this dissertation, namely, the Cartesian Shift. As we've discussed, Descartes' thought is a seismic shift in western culture. Heidegger, just as we have seen with Pascal and Kierkegaard, takes issue with Descartes' fundamental approach to philosophy. His rejection of Descartes rests on what he sees as the goal of the Cartesian, and the modernistic, philosophic enterprise. In his *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger writes, "Philosophy, especially as metaphysics, has indeed not yet reached the maturity of science. Philosophy moves on an inferior level. It has not yet succeeded in achieving what it has been attempting since Descartes (the beginning of modernity), namely to raise itself to the rank of a science, of absolute science."<sup>518</sup> We must note here first, that Heidegger affirms Descartes' position as the start of modernity, and second, that he sees a strong relation between philosophy and metaphysics, and he understands Descartes' goal as making philosophy a science.

As to the connection between philosophy and metaphysics, it should at this point not be surprising to see that Heidegger understands metaphysics to be the central

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<sup>518</sup> Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 2.

discipline of philosophy, putting him at odds with Descartes', and therefore modernity's, emphasis on epistemology as the central discipline of philosophy. Throughout *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* and many of his works, Heidegger uses the terms "metaphysics" and "philosophy" as synonyms, or as referencing the same activity.<sup>519</sup> This understanding of philosophy places Heidegger closer to pre-modern thinkers in many ways; however, with one very large difference, the belief in, or the conception of, God. We will address this issue very briefly in the coming pages, as it connects to the larger issue of the nature of philosophy.

After declaring that philosophy has yet to accomplish what Descartes has set out for it to achieve, becoming a science, Heidegger asserts that that goal is itself a "delusion," and the "...most fateful debasement of [philosophy's] innermost nature."<sup>520</sup> Philosophy is not a science, nor is it a worldview, but it is something else, something that Heidegger says stands on its own, and is "something ultimate." Descartes' approach then weakened philosophy. In modernity's attempt to attain certitude, philosophy was taken from what it actually is, and cheapened. Modernity set out to take that which is ultimate, and in reality grounds the sciences, and tried to make it a science. If then, philosophy is not a science, what is it? Philosophy is metaphysics, and in the words of the poet Novalis quoted by Heidegger, "Philosophy is really homesickness, an urge to be at home everywhere."<sup>521</sup> It may at this point seem unclear how, but this homesickness is the beginning of Heidegger's discussion of boredom. Prior to opening that door fully however, we must briefly discuss the nature of, and the absence of, God at this point in Heidegger's thought.

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<sup>519</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>520</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>521</sup> Ibid., 5.

As mentioned earlier, Heidegger's prolonged discussion of boredom takes place in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, which is a transitional work between his earlier, and his later thought. This position makes the work somewhat of an estuary pertaining to certain topics. As we begin to discuss boredom, it is helpful to realize that much of what comes next comes as a critique of life within modernity, and in many ways will be similar to Pascal and Kierkegaard's critiques; however, it will come from a secular vantage point. This is not to say that Heidegger's work neglects the divine. The later Heidegger, places a large emphasis on "the gods" or "The last God," but at this stage, God is not present, and that absence is intentional, or as Kovacs put it, "...the absence of God is a meaningful absence."<sup>522</sup>

Covering the early Heidegger's understanding of God is beyond the scope of this work, but the works of Kovacs, and Vedder, are very helpful in summarizing his thought. Unlike the thinkers we have addressed thus far, Heidegger's thought is non-theistic. I use term because as, Vedder notes, Heidegger's thought is neither theistic, nor atheistic.<sup>523</sup> The question of theism is not applicable in his philosophy. Philosophy (metaphysics) is ultimate, it comes before any science, and theology is a science. Mixing the theological and the philosophical produces an onto-theological God, a metaphysical God, who Heidegger sees as not truly divine.<sup>524</sup> The work of philosophy trying to prove that God exists, or locating a first cause makes no sense within Heidegger's thought, and only result in a God who cannot truly be God.<sup>525</sup>

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<sup>522</sup> Kovacs, *The Question of God in Heidegger's Phenomenology*, 51.

<sup>523</sup> Ben Vedder, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Religion: From God to the Gods* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 2007), 8.

<sup>524</sup> Kovacs, *The Question of God in Heidegger's Phenomenology*, 33, 42-43, 50-53.

<sup>525</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

While it is the case that onto-theology pre-dates Descartes, in modernity it becomes epidemic. It is within the modernistic quest for certitude that the Christian philosophic apologetic movement took hold, as a means of answering atheistic and secular thought; however, these arguments rest upon seeking a first and highest cause, yet given the epistemological framework of modernity, humans themselves are that first cause. Humans produce reality.<sup>526</sup> This understanding of modern thought lends credibility to the idea that modernity is itself inherently secular. We often speak of modernity as an agent of secularity, and the manner in which it secularizes comes from its very nature. While Descartes was far from a secular thinker, his philosophical approach is inherently secular. It removes the transcendent, it removes the ethereal, and those things are only restored, by virtue of humanity. When the modernistic Christian thinkers attempted to defend the faith against modern attacks, so often they did so by embracing modern philosophy, and in so doing secularizing their own thought. To this end we can agree with Vedder in stating, with an eye to the later Heidegger, that the disappearance of the gods has everything to do with the modern age.<sup>527</sup>

Vedder's assertion works well with Malpas' thoughts in his chapter in *Philosophy's Moods: The Affective Grounds of Thinking* in which he asserts that nostalgia is a product of modernity.<sup>528</sup> Nostalgia is a looking back, a want to escape not just the present time, but Modernity itself. This nostalgia, this looking back to a time that wasn't so epistemically fragile, fits with the assertion that philosophy is a homesickness. Philosophy desires to find a manner, or a way, in which one can be at home, not merely

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<sup>526</sup> Ibid., 116-117.

<sup>527</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>528</sup> Jeff Malpas, "Philosophy's Nostalgia," in *Contributions to Phenomenology*, ed. Hagi Kenaan and Ilit Ferber (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 90.

where they are, but in the world at large. For Heidegger, for this answer to homesickness to involve an onto-theological God would be unsatisfying, because it cheats the process of thinking by pre-supplying an answer, therefore, while he agrees with Pascal, and Kierkegaard, that here is a problem with modernity, and that profound boredom is an issue to confront, at this stage the divine is not, and cannot, be a part of it.<sup>529</sup>

What then is the issue of boredom? Heidegger sees that the philosophy of culture, or culture in general, has untied humanity from things of significance, and replaced them with a yawning indifference. The economy, politics, technology, etc. all seize hold of a man and keep him from moving, for having a role. This happens because we have become bored with ourselves. “Is man himself now supposed to have become bored with himself? Why so? Do things ultimately stand in such a way with us that a profound boredom draws us back and forth like a silent fog in the abysses of Dasein?”<sup>530</sup>

Heidegger goes further stating that this boredom is so prevalent, that it cannot be removed, or shook off, but only put to sleep. We want to know nothing of it, but it is always there is us, “With open eyes it looks into our Dasein...and with this gaze already penetrates us and attunes us through and through.”<sup>531</sup> Boredom is an attunement, a mood by which one is attuned toward the world. However, it is not merely an attunement, boredom is the fundamental attunement, the fundamental manner in which Dasein is attuned toward the world.

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<sup>529</sup> It is of course of note that both Pascal and Kierkegaard saw the issue with modern philosophy, and therefore approached defending the faith in ways that were not beholden to the Cartesian framework, and therefore not secularized. However, an analysis of their full apologetic is beyond our scope.

<sup>530</sup> Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 77.

<sup>531</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

Thus all the dominos set up thus far in this chapter begin to fall into place. Profound boredom is the fundamental attunement of Dasein. The German word for this attunement, *Langeweile*, literally means, “to have long time” or in the Alemannic usage “to be homesick.” Heidegger sees here a wisdom to language, and understands profound boredom to be a homesickness, and as we mentioned earlier, philosophy is also a homesickness.<sup>532</sup> Therefore, Heidegger moves forward with his discussion of boredom seeing it as a fundamental attunement of Dasein, and deeply connected to philosophy.

What then is boredom? In his early lecture, *The Concept of Time*, Heidegger refers to boredom as that which is used up and worn out. He also asserts, “Time never becomes long because it originally has no length.”<sup>533</sup> As we discussed previously, people misunderstand time by approaching it spatially. Since temporality is not a spatial mode of being, talking about the length of time is inherently flawed. Given the nature of the lecture that Heidegger was presenting, focused on the nature of time, taking some issue with boredom as the lengthening of time makes sense. However, in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger is speaking of the phenomenon of time. Boredom comes forth from the manner in which temporality temporalizes itself.<sup>534</sup> The temporalization of temporality causes the phenomenon of time moving, and in boredom, that movement is too slow.<sup>535</sup> The measurement of clock time doesn’t change, an hour remains an hour, but clock time is not helpful in measuring originary time. In boredom, time becomes drawn out; it moves sluggishly. This being drawn out manifests in two

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<sup>532</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>533</sup> Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, 14.

<sup>534</sup> Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 127.

<sup>535</sup> Ibid., 97.



ways: being held in limbo, and being left empty.<sup>536</sup> When the passing of time is elongated, it is elongated because that which I am participating in leaves me empty, or stops me from meeting a goal or an objective of some sort. This experience is possible for Heidegger because everything has its time, and outside of that time, things are out of synch.<sup>537</sup> King draws a helpful implication here for us in noting that only humans feel out of place, because only humans have a place.<sup>538</sup> Here then perhaps we can say that what Heidegger means is that only Dasein has a place, or a time, but as Dasein relates to the world, the things that she related to can be out of place for her, and that awakens the attunement of boredom. We see here then how important our earlier discussion of time truly was. If boredom is an attunement of Dasein, and time is fundamental to boredom, then time is fundamental to Dasein's attunement.<sup>539</sup>

While boredom is a mood that attunes Dasein, and all boredoms share similar attributes, there are varying extents of boredom. Duration says nothing of the extent of boredom, merely how long a person, according to clock time, as been bored.<sup>540</sup> The extent of boredom is not determined by duration, but by depth. Whereas Heidegger is referring, by his own admission, to profound boredom, there are three types, or three depths to boredom. One can be bored to a greater extent by being in the deepest boredom for five minutes, than in the shallowest boredom for five hours. We turn here to consider Heidegger's three stages of profound boredom: Bored-by, Bored-with, and it-is-boring-for-oneself.

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<sup>536</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>538</sup> King, *Heidegger and Happiness*, 11.

<sup>539</sup> Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 98.

<sup>540</sup> Ibid., 107.

### *Bored-By*

The first depth of boredom is “bored-by.” As the name indicates, in this boredom, there is a thing by which Dasein is bored. We must be careful here though as to what we mean. Heidegger speaks initially of a book, and sees that it could be badly written, or poorly constructed, and we would call this boring. We speak of the book as boring as if it is an objective character of the book, and when we do so, we mean to say that the book is tedious, or wearisome, and that it doesn’t stimulate the reader in any way. Yet, Dasein can feel the same way while reading a book that by all metrics should be interesting. Heidegger concludes from this that that boredom must not merely be objectively in the book, but must also in some way be related to the subject. But even this is not far enough, in that a book, objectively boring, must be read in order to bore, so even the objective qualities of boredom must be inherently related to the subject.<sup>541</sup> The same applies to a cheerful room, a laughing meadow, and a melancholy landscape; the room, meadow, or landscape, does not have the affect used to describe it, but it attunes the person in such a way to experience them as such. The same is true for the book.<sup>542</sup>

We see here how boredom is related to Heidegger’s understanding of world. In the same manner that we discussed earlier in which world is to some extent a projection of Dasein’s mood upon possibilities, and yet also that the world attunes the moods that cause the projection; we now see that boredom is itself a fundamental attunement whereby Dasein interacts with the world. When Dasein sees something as boring, that thing must be what holds it in limbo, and also leaves it empty.<sup>543</sup> Therefore, being bored-

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<sup>541</sup> Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 84.

<sup>542</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>543</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

by something indicates not merely something about the object doing the boring, but more so about the one who is being bored. Boredom is phenomenological in that if something is boring, it is boring for the individual.

Hammer is helpful, though perhaps overstated, when he notes that the introduction of clock time creates the conditions needed for bored-by to occur.<sup>544</sup> Clock time measures the phenomenon of the passing of time, and in bored-by, Dasein is desperately longing for time to pass. The one who is bored-by constantly looks at his watch because he wants to see that time has passed, and in passing time, he is really passing boredom, or rather boredom is being driven away as it drives time on.<sup>545</sup> Clock time however allows us to count the length of time that one is in boredom, and perhaps, as hammer suggests, allows this form of boredom to exist, in that duration can be measured.

In explaining this depth of boredom, Heidegger uses the example of a train station.<sup>546</sup> This example is still helpful, but living in a different time as we are, it may be more helpful to consider an airport instead. By and large, one does not receive push back when stating that an airport is boring. Rarely does one hear of a story in which a person talks about how enjoyable their time at the airport was. No, the airport is a place that one wants to leave, and if a flight is delayed they are said to be “stuck” there. Shouldn’t this be seen as odd? The airport has TV, it has Wi-Fi, and it has plenty of newspapers and magazines. There are various restaurants in each terminal and waiting areas, stores scatted through out (even small malls in some), masseuses, and some even have theme

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<sup>544</sup> Espen Hammer, “Heidegger's Theory of Boredom,” *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 29, no. 1 (2008): 207.

<sup>545</sup> Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 93.

<sup>546</sup> *Ibid.*, 90-105.

park type rides. The airport is full of things that outside of the airport, people find exciting, or comforting. The airport contains within it things that people intentionally seek for entertainment and satisfaction. How then can an airport be boring?

The airport is boring because of its nature. The purpose of the airport is to give Dasein a place to wait. Dasein does not go to the airport for fun, does not go for leisure, but rather goes in order to go elsewhere. In the airport Dasein finds herself making use of the TV, shops, and restaurants, not out of a want to enjoy them, but rather, out of a want to pass the time, or to stave off boredom. She's waiting. However, waiting is not itself boredom. Waiting can be suspenseful, or exciting.<sup>547</sup> It must then be a particular type of phenomenon that causes or accompanies the waiting. Unlike waiting for someone to arrive at a surprise party, or the punch line of a joke, waiting at an airport does not build anything within the individual, it does not fill Dasein in any way. No, it leaves Dasein empty, and perhaps most obviously for the airport, it holds Dasein in limbo. The airport bores us because, the airport does what we expect it to, i.e. it serves as a holding place until we can achieve our goal. Perhaps this makes the airport sound a bit more like Purgatory than it ought, but to some extent that connection might not be inappropriate.

The true understanding of bored-by though must be seen in the exceptions to this experience at the airport. The person who works at the airport and enjoys his job does not find the airport boring. Nor does the child who sees it as a new place to explore and play. The example Heidegger gives is the person who arrives right on time for departure (in our world we must imagine him bolting to the departure gate). Why would boredom not manifest here? Because boredom is related to time, and all things have their particular

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<sup>547</sup> Ibid., 94.

time. “If things evidently have their time in each specific case, and if we precisely come across things in their specific time, then perhaps boredom will fail to appear. Conversely: boredom is only possible at all because each thing, as we say, has its time. If each thing did not have its time, then there would be no boredom.”<sup>548</sup> The person waiting at the airport is bored-by the airport, because the airport holds them from the thing, or the time, that they desire, that will fill them.

What we mean here will be more obvious as we look at the two deeper stages of boredom, but it is worth saying here that in the bored-by, the present disappears. The one experiencing bored-by is being bored by something because the past and the future are what they desire. The person reading a boring book, or waiting at the airport, experiences the present, the now, as nothing more than a hindrance in obtaining the future. Present possibilities dissolves out of a desire for the future. Conversely, this is also the root of nostalgia, or perhaps more destructively, a mid-life crisis, in which the present no longer matters, it leaves one empty, as she looks back to another time, another set of possibilities to which she could be related. It appears safe to say that in this first stage of boredom, Dasein is bored because the only appealing possibilities are located temporally in the past or the future, making the present empty, and something at best to be endured.

Before moving to the next depth of boredom, two points of connection with our study thus far. First, Heidegger does not refer to this depth of boredom as trivial boredom, in that all boredom is a profound attunement, but each depth is more revealing, and more fundamental. That said, the descriptions used in this discussion can look like trivial boredom, or perhaps just a bit deeper than trivial boredom. In trivial boredom there is a

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<sup>548</sup> Ibid., 105.

particular thing that one is bored by. Often when we say that we are bored by it, we mean that we are weary of it, or have grown tired of, and it now leaves us empty. The distinction between trivial boredom, and Heidegger's first depth of profound boredom is that the person in the airport is not bored by one thing at the airport, or bored out of confusion at the airport, or even that he grows bored of the airport at the airport, but rather, he approaches the airport already bored. He approaches the airport wanting to be elsewhere, or more importantly else when. He is bored by the airport before the airport has the opportunity to not bore him. This depth may be the most shallow of Heidegger's boredom, it would be incorrect to understand it as trivial.

Second, in chapter two we discussed the concept of acedia as presented in Evagrius and Aquinas. Heretofore, we have interacted almost exclusively with Aquinas' formulation of acedia, but in our discussion of Evagrius, we did note a similarity between Evagrius' monk doing battle in his cell, and the man in Heidegger's train station (airport). In both cases, the one afflicted finds the time that they are in to be too long. They both desire to be else where, and to be doing something else, something that they believe will fill them. The difference between them is that, while the man at the airport is bored because he longs to be at another time, the monk is spiritually bored in that his service to God is not filling him and he longs for any type of distraction. Both men suffer from acedia, by Aquinas' definition, and both seem to be possibly suffering from profound boredom, but in the case of the monk, what is profoundly boring is not an airport, or his cell, but God Himself. In that situation, it appears that what Evagrius has called acedia might actually be an effect of acedia, namely profound boredom, but directed at the divine. The monk sorrows at the divine good, and therefore the work that he believes is

his service to God leaves him empty, like the man in the man in the airport. The monk's work no longer transcends, or points beyond itself, and is to some extent secularized, not being done toward God, but out of rote. If this is the case, then we can see that yes, profound boredom is in fact deeply connected to secularism, and existed prior to Descartes, but not in epidemic form. The epidemic form comes from the secularizing, and secularization, or modernity.

### ***Bored-With***

The second stage, or depth, of boredom is the "bored-with." This form, perhaps by virtue of being more originary, or more profound, is more difficult to understand than the bored-by. As opposed to the first form of boredom, in this deeper form of boredom, that which bores is indeterminate.<sup>549</sup> In the first boredom, the airport, or the book, are boring. Dasein is bored by them. In the second boredom, this is no longer the case. Here, Dasein cannot point at something exterior to himself and claim that it is boring him. Instead, Dasein is unaware of where the boredom has come from. Here Heidegger uses the example of a dinner party.

Let us say that you have been invited out for the evening. You go to the party and the food is delightful, the conversation and music enjoyable, the company pleasant, and by all matrices it appears that everyone, including yourself had a good time. However, upon returning home and seeing the work that was left unfinished in order to attend the party, and thinking toward the next day, it hits you, you were bored the whole evening.<sup>550</sup> What could possibly be the cause? Nothing, and that is Heidegger's point. There was

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<sup>549</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>550</sup> Ibid., 109.

nothing about the evening that might cause a person to be bored, and the events of the evening were such that you did not even think about yourself, so it could not have been that you bored yourself. There is no determinant thing that a person is bored-by, in level two, merely things that he is bored-with.

Where then does this boredom come from? Boss asserts that this second depth of boredom is found, not in an object, but in the casualness with which one approaches objects, or events. Whereas the person invited to the dinner party had work that ought to have been done, he chose instead to go to the party, he chose to do that which is much lighter, of less importance, that which could not “fill up” time. Instead of that which mattered, that which had meaning, Dasein embraced a casual approach to the world, not even attempting to fill time with meaning.<sup>551</sup>

Boss’ interpretation of the second form of boredom is of assistance in helping us situate this boredom not in things, but in how Dasein relates to them. As we have repeated many times, Heidegger’s thought is deeply concerned with possibilities. In the first form of boredom, the possibilities of the past and future become so important, that the present stops existing. Dasein is bored by that which leaves her empty and wanting other things that would fill her. In bored-with Dasein is held up and left empty not by the options provided, but by the way in which Dasein approaches options. Boss understands this as casualness, Lilly suggests that it's a lack of engagement. The person is physically present at the party, and given over to what is going on, but is not fully engaged or

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<sup>551</sup> Matthew Boss, “Metaphysics and the Mood of Deep Boredom: Heidegger’s Phenomenology of Mood,” 93-95.



present.<sup>552</sup> In both interpretations, Dasein is seen as not fully actualizing possibilities. In part this is why Hammer sees this version of boredom as connected to Heidegger's understanding of falling, or of inauthenticity.<sup>553</sup>

The varieties of interpretation seem to highlight how difficult it is to understand exactly what Heidegger is getting at with this middle form of boredom, particularly in relation to the other two. Heidegger lays out seven points of comparison between the first and second forms of boredom, highlighting the determinate and indeterminate natures of the two, culminating in the following conclusion, "In I, we have, as it were, the extrinsic arrival and advent of boredom from out of a particular environment; in II, the arising of boredom within and from out of Dasein on the occasion of a particular event."<sup>554</sup> To return to an earlier example, when I enter a cheerful room, has the room attuned me to be cheerful, or am I so attuned that the room appears cheerful? The former correlates to boredom one, the latter, to boredom two. In the case of both cheerfulness, and boredom, a person being in the second form can also possibly transform the attunement of those in the first form. Nothing can ruin a cheerful party quite like a bored person, and nothing can save a boring party, quite like a cheerful one.

Perhaps the best way to understand this form of boredom though is to return to the issue of temporality. Heidegger explains that in this boredom, the past and the future are cut off, and the now has no other possibility than to be the now. This now stretches itself out, not becoming a plurality of nows, or growing by absorbing other now points, but the

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<sup>552</sup> Reginald Lilly, "„fundamental Dispositions” in Heidegger's Thought," *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie*, 50ste Jaarg 4 (1988): 691.

<sup>553</sup> Hammer, "Heidegger's Theory of Boredom," 211.

<sup>554</sup> Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 130-131.

single now expands, until that is all there is.<sup>555</sup> In the first boredom, the present dissolves, and Dasein is bored looking to the past or the future. In this second form, the past and future are cut off, and all that remains is the now, the present. However, the present only has meaning in relation to the past and the future, and their absence drains the present of meaning. The possibilities of the now have little meaning since Dasein feels no forward trajectory from its thrownness. Boss' observation here is insightful, in that the person neglects her work to attend a party because the work has no value and the party is a nice distraction from it; however, the party also has no value, so all possibilities are apprehended casually. Boredom here comes from Dasein. A person who is feverish will experience every room they enter as either incredibly cold, or incredibly hot, by no virtue of the room, but because of the person's fever. This type of perception is true of the second form of boredom. Dasein is attuned to the world in such a way that the temporal trajectory of thrownness feels stunted, the past and future are removed, and therefore everything he interacts with will be empty, or in limbo, because it will lack the required depth to fully matter.

### ***It-is-Boring-for-Oneself***

We turn now to the deepest, most profound, boredom that Heidegger addresses. This third boredom is the grounding for the other two. Heidegger does not see these three types of boredoms as stages that one progresses through in the way that one leaps from the aesthetic to the ethical sphere of life in Kierkegaard, but rather as three separate, but connected and fluid ways of being. One can only find oneself in either of the first two boredoms, because boredom three is there to ground them. The first form of boredom

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<sup>555</sup> Ibid., 125-126.

does not cause the third form, but rather the third form causes the first, and the same with the second.<sup>556</sup> Both of these lesser boredoms reveal parts of the profundity of this deeper level, but they do not cause it, rather they are grounded in it.

Heidegger's initial presentation of this third boredom is lengthy, but is helpful in considering what he is addressing as a whole:

“The forms of boredom we have dealt with hitherto have already been characterized and designated as becoming bored by something in a particular situation, and as being bored with something on the occasion of a particular situation. And profound boredom? How are we to designate this? We shall try and do so, and shall say that profound boredom bores whenever we say, or better, whenever we silently know, that it is boring for one.

It is boring for one. What is the ‘it’? The ‘it’ that we mean whenever we say that it is thundering and lightening, that it is raining. It—this is the title for whatever is indeterminate, unfamiliar. Yet we are familiar with this, after all, and familiar with it as belonging to the more profound form of boredom: *that which bores*...[we are no longer saying we are bored, but rather] It is boring for one. It—for one—not for me as me, not for you as you, not for us as us, but for *one*. Name, standing, vocation, role, age and fate disappear as mine and yours disappear... This is what is decisive: that here we become an undifferentiated no one.”<sup>557</sup>

In his initial presentation, Heidegger makes clear that this profound boredom entails dissolution of Dasein's identity. Dasein is no longer I, or you, or part of a we or an us, Dasein is “one.” This one is undifferentiated. Heidegger's example of this depth of boredom is much less elaborate than the previous two, it is merely: “‘it is boring for one’ to walk through the streets of a large city on a Sunday afternoon.”<sup>558</sup> It is not a particular person walking through the city, but a hypothetical person, a “one.” This use is the same manner in which you might say, “One should never run with scissors.” This “one” is all people, and by virtue of being all people, it is no one individual.

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<sup>556</sup> Ibid., 156-157.

<sup>557</sup> Ibid., 134-135.

<sup>558</sup> Ibid., 135.

Further, Heidegger notes that in this boredom, the “it” is the same “it” used in “it is raining.” When a person says that “it is raining” she doesn’t mean by it that “the sky is raining,” because the sky is not, but she also does not mean that the “clouds are raining” which would be scientifically correct. No, the person who says that “it is raining” is making a statement about the manner in which the world currently discloses it itself, or the manner in which the present states of relation connect. “It is raining” makes a statement about the sky, the clouds, the temperature, the roads, Dasein’s need of an umbrella, etc. It is a statement about the possibilities that are presently before Dasein. Therefore, “It is boring for one to walk through the streets of a large city on a Sunday afternoon” is claiming that when this deepest boredom arises as Dasein is walking these streets, suddenly the totality of all possibilities laid before her melt away in some fashion, and she becomes an undifferentiated “one.” Without the possibilities that define her, her identity ceases to be, and to some extent there is a type of death, or annihilation, that occurs. This “one” is empty of anything that made her her.

Is it though that all possibilities melt away? On one hand, certainly, however, to be more precise, in this boredom it is not that all possibilities melt away, but rather that they equalize.<sup>559</sup> Nothing is of greater value, worth, or meaning than anything else. This approach to the world was seen in part in the second depth of boredom, but here it applies not merely to particular situations, but to the totality of existence. The reason that we have phrased it as such to say that all possibilities melt away is, as we addressed in our discussion of world, Dasein’s world is constructed out of what Dasein cares about, what he holds dear. When what he holds dear is devalued to same the level of import and

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<sup>559</sup> Ibid., 137.

meaning as that which he does not care about, or that which he does not hold dear, Dasein's world, and therefore Dasein's identity, melt away. Everything has become flattened, a concept that will become very important to the later Heidegger.

Let's say there man who is a father rightly and loves his daughter, and this same man is a dog owner rightly loves his dog. Perhaps he also has a fondness for his houseplant, and happens to rather enjoy a certain throw pillow, is excited for left over chicken wings that are in his refrigerator, and dislikes a certain rug. If his house were to catch on fire, there is a pecking order of things that he loves and cares about, and he obviously would save his daughter first, and if time permitted, the dog, and on down the list. However, what Heidegger describes here is a situation in which all those preferences and loves are flattened. The man cares no more or less for his daughter than he does for his dog, or his chicken wings. His identity as a father then is hard to conceptualize if he sees his daughter as of equal worth as a rug, and a houseplant. His identity has ceased to be, in that all things are a equal value, therefore nothing is on any actual value.

Profound boredom is the ground in which the other two boredoms are rooted, but there is a commonality in the other two boredoms that, as we should expect, is missing from this most profound one, namely, the passing of time. In the lesser boredoms, Dasein passes time as an attempt to overcome boredom, or shake it off, or put boredom to sleep; however, in this deepest boredom, there is no passing of time. There is no way to actualize possibilities, in that all possibilities exist simultaneously, so there are no real viable possibilities. This boredom overpowers Dasein, and yet Dasein is not opposed to it,

there is no want to fight it, in fact there is a compulsion in it, “a compulsion to listen to what it tells us.”<sup>560</sup>

Time is fundamental to Dasein. It is within time that the possibilities of the world are present. However, if there are no possibilities of value, or perhaps all possibilities lack value, then the passing of time is an expected absence. Zimmerman elucidates this feature of profound boredom stating that here the temporal horizon becomes so wide, that everything is undifferentiated.<sup>561</sup> Mansikka adds to this idea that in this boredom, time recedes into indifference.<sup>562</sup> Dasein becomes an undifferentiated one, and all possibilities are seen with absolute indifference. In this boredom, nothing matters.

Here we can see that while the passing of time does not occur in this deepest boredom, the fundamental attributes of boredom, being held in limbo, and being left empty, certainly do. Heidegger notes that being left empty is always possible when there is some expectation of being filled.<sup>563</sup> This emptiness comes from the lack of meaning that is presented in the world, and in Dasein’s temporal experience. Boss posits that in this depth of boredom, the emptiness of three-dimensional time is displayed, which reveals all possibilities.<sup>564</sup> Here time stops appearing as a succession, and appears instead as a horizon.

Perhaps here we can see Heidegger’s attraction to boredom, and his understanding boredom as a fundamental attunement of Dasein. Dasein is inherently temporal, and

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<sup>560</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>561</sup> Michael E. Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, and Art* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 31.

<sup>562</sup> Mansikka, “Can Boredom Educate Us? Tracing a Mood in Heidegger’s Fundamental Ontology from an Educational Point of View,” 261.

<sup>563</sup> Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 139.

<sup>564</sup> Matthew Boss, “Metaphysics and the Mood of Deep Boredom: Heidegger’s Phenomenology of Mood,” 102.

thrown toward its future as the actualization of various possibilities. This thrownness and the actualization of possibilities apprehended through the care structure creates the world, but also produces the phenomenon of the succession of events that appears as clock time. In profound boredom, that succession dissolves, and time is seen as a horizon. In the first boredom, the present disappears. In the second form, the present is all that exists, and the past and future are cut off. In this deepest boredom, all three dimensions of time evaporate, and Dasein is left with no inclination, no identity, no sense of motion, and empty of all meaning.

There is a strong parallel to be seen here with Heidegger's understanding of death. Death and profound boredom are the two situations in which Dasein finds itself null of identity, and null of possibilities.<sup>565</sup> However, this nullity comes in two very different ways. In death, Dasein finds its ownmost possibility. It is the possibility that it must actualize, in the instant it is actualized, all other possibly vanish. They vanish in that they cease to be, because Dasein has ceased to be, and therefore there is no longer a being to project itself upon them and actualize them. In death, Dasein's identity is annihilated because there is no longer anything to care about.

In profound boredom, a similar thing happens, but for the opposite reason. First, a noted difference between the two is that death is a possibility, and boredom is a mood in which Dasein is attuned toward all possibilities. However, in that attunement, Dasein's identity melts away. Perhaps we can even go so far as to say that Dasein's identity undergoes a type of death, in that the possibilities that she cares about are no longer cared about. In death, Dasein ceases to be because there are no possibilities. In profound

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<sup>565</sup> We could include prior to birth in this list as well, but that is not a topic on which Heidegger spends much time dwelling.

boredom, Dasein is overwhelmed by possibilities. It is not there are no possibilities, but rather that every conceivable possibility is of the same value, therefore life has no texture, identity cannot be defend in relation to anything, because Dasein sees no reason to relate to anything more so than anything else. In death there is nothing to care about, in profound boredom there is too much to care about, and no reason to choose one thing over the other. The child who wants candy and goes to a candy store, but has no access to candy because the store is closed, is no better off than the child who enters the store and, so overwhelmed by the possibilities, says, "Nothing looks good." In profound boredom nothing looks good, or bad for that matter. However, that is not a bad thing. Why does nothing look good? Because that which Dasein's world has instructed Dasein to care about no longer matters, but that opens the possibility of Dasein being able to pick something different. Something new. Whereas in death, Dasein ceases to be, in profound boredom, there is a manner in which Dasein's identity dies, but at a deeper level, Dasein is able to understand who she truly is.

Here we see a notable departure from Pascal and Kierkegaard. For both of these thinkers, what has been listed as the symptoms of profound boredom would be problematic. Both of these thinkers see a need to find a solution, and a way to escape this boredom, but Heidegger is not positive that is needed. Whereas Pascal and Kierkegaard, particularly Kierkegaard, would understand what Heidegger is describing as despair, Heidegger explicitly rejects the idea, stating with what can be presumed to be intentional irony, "Without an essential transformation of itself, in which it leaps over into another attunement, this profound boredom never leads to despair."<sup>566</sup> Notice, Heidegger does not

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<sup>566</sup> Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 140.



reject the possibility that the lesser boredoms might lead to despair, and in fact he would probably argue that Kierkegaard and Pascal are addressing the lesser two boredoms, but not this deepest form. Perhaps if this hypothetical conversation were to play out, Pascal and Kierkegaard would say that they were unable to address this level of boredom because their thought was not secular, and therefore they did not have access to a problem this extreme.

No matter how the conversation would go, Heidegger sees profound boredom as a positive, but not because of boredom itself but because of what it compels Dasein to do. Here Heidegger is again in line with Pascal and Kierkegaard seeing boredom as a springboard to action. Whereas with the former two thinkers, people were fearful of boredom because it made them confront their emptiness and their need of the divine, Heidegger sees this as a way forward into the moment of vision. When all possibilities, and relations, and situations, that give Dasein its identity are emptied of importance and meaning, and join all other possibilities, relations, and situations as being equally important and unimportant, Dasein now is compelled toward the fundamental possibility of Dasein's essence, the moment of vision.<sup>567</sup>

This moment is a particular moment, not a particular now point, but a moment in which time is ruptured, and Dasein looks across the horizon of time, past, present, and future, looking with a look of resolute disclosedness.<sup>568</sup> In this moment Dasein is compelled toward authentic action. While it is the case that all possibilities have become light, and nothing has meaning or weight, this also means that all possibilities are now open to Dasein, and therein, Dasein can authentically pursue those possibilities that it is

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<sup>567</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid., 151.

compelled toward internally, not externally. Dasein can be authentically itself, and not what it has had to be. Profound boredom for Heidegger is a passage toward Dasein's authenticity, a sentiment that he shares in common with Pascal and Kierkegaard, even if that passage looks different for the three of them.

The one final question to ask about this deepest boredom for Heidegger, is what is its cause? Yes, it is a fundamental attunement, but the first boredom arises by nature of something external, and the second as an internal response to various situations, but what causes this final, most profound attunement? As should be expected from a fundamental attunement, the cause of this boredom is temporality itself. "What bores us in profound boredom...is temporality in a particular way of its temporalizing."<sup>569</sup> This deepest boredom is so utterly profound because time itself is what bores, and it does so due to the possibilities that Dasein is connected and related to. Time is what leaves Dasein in limbo, leaves Dasein empty, and compels it to change to a more authentic manner of existence.

Here then we see a unified voice in Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger. Boredom is an emptiness, a feeling/mood of having no response to something, being "nothinged" by it, and from there needing to change. This phenomenon, as an epidemic of profound boredom manifested after the Cartesian Shift, and the birth of modernity. Further, Pascal and Kierkegaard posit that the only way to truly escape boredom is to be an actualized authentic self, or the single individual, in right relation to God. Heidegger, leaving God (at this point) out of his philosophy sees boredom as a path toward being authentic to oneself, in becoming aware of our being-toward-death and therefore our actualizing of those possibilities toward which we are naturally drawn. All three see modernity as a

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<sup>569</sup> Ibid., 158.

problem, all three see inauthenticity as a problem, and all three see boredom as a clue toward an individual needing to make a change. Heidegger, as a secular thinker, offers a secular response that Pascal and Kierkegaard would consider insufficient to fix the problem, but his work on boredom has expanded our understanding of the topic immensely, and has opened a path toward a possible synthesis between the three thinkers, that promises to be a fruitful resolution toward the epidemic of profound boredom. To follow this path we must turn from the transitional Heidegger, to the later Heidegger.

### ***The Later Heidegger, Technology, and the Fourfold***

At the end of our discussion on mood we referenced a shift in Heidegger's understanding of the topic as we enter his later thought. The extent of this shift is explained well by Freeman when he states that in the later Heidegger there are a small number of moods that are fundamental to each epoch of history. It is not that they characterize it, nor are they a worldview, no they are the atmosphere and source of all thought and action that occurs within it.<sup>570</sup> Thus far we have considered mood primarily as an aspect of individual Dasein, and how Dasein interacts with the world. However, here in Heidegger's later thought, mood takes on a larger scope in which epochs have moods, not merely individuals. This manner of thinking is helpful in light of what has thus far been discussed concerning Heidegger's understanding of boredom. Though our discussion has been focused on the individual Dasein, Heidegger's thought in his transitional works, seems to lend itself to already have been thinking toward what appears

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<sup>570</sup> Lauren Freeman and Andreas Elpidorou, "Affectivity in Heidegger Ii," *Philosophy Compass* 10, no. 10 (2015): 681.

in his later works such as *The Question Concerning Technology* and *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*.<sup>571</sup>

If it is the case that Freeman is correct in his analysis, then considering boredom as an epochal mood is inherently natural within Heidegger's thought. If he is not correct, it is still valid for two reasons. First, in his lecture *What is Philosophy?* Heidegger asserts that doubt, in the vein of Descartes, was the mood of the modern age, and that the current age was unclear, but that coldness may be applicable.<sup>572</sup> Our discussion of boredom thus far, not merely in Heidegger, but in this work in total, seems to situate boredom as concurrent, if not with doubt, with coldness. Indeed, the suggestion that coldness was the mood of Heidegger's day resonates with Pascal's statement 300 years prior that "The eternal silence of these infinite spaces frighten me."<sup>573</sup> Second, even if it is not enough that boredom seems to run concurrent with doubt and coldness, it is also the case that the manner in which Heidegger discusses boredom in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* is very similar to the manner in which he describes mankind's relation to technology in his later essays, which he again sees as a consequence of Descartes' thought.

Nietzsche's nihilism, which Descartes would have abhorred, is, for Heidegger, directly a consequence of the Cartesian Shift. "Nietzsche's doctrine which makes everything which is and how it is a 'property and product of man' merely carries out the

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<sup>571</sup> Ibid., Freeman discusses this within the body of his essay, and also within his second and eleventh footnote.

<sup>572</sup> King, *Heidegger and Happiness*, 20.

<sup>573</sup> Pascal, *Pensées*, 64, L201.

furthest unfolding of Descartes' doctrine, according to which all truth is grounded on the self-certainty of the human subject."<sup>574</sup> Zimmerman explains,

In effect, Descartes started the process whereby humanity came to conceive of itself as the God-like source of reality, truth, and value of all things. Descartes enabled humanity to interpret the world as a picture (*Bild*), the reality of which was assessed according to how the image stood in relation to the standards of the productive measuring subject.<sup>575</sup>

As we've discussed earlier, Descartes' thought made epistemology the central discipline of philosophy, and in so doing, made mankind the arbiter of truth and reality; again, not Descartes' intent, but still the consequence of his thought. The key consequence for our purposes here comes in the idea of world picture.

When reflecting on the shift that comes from Descartes' work, Heidegger says that the essence of the modern age is visible from the fact that man has freed himself from the bonds of the Middle Ages, "in freeing himself to himself."<sup>576</sup> In this freedom, man has become the relational center of that which is, but this is only possible when the comprehension of that which is changes. Here Heidegger asks what the essence of the modern age is, and reveals that when asking this question, we are asking a question concerning the modern world picture.<sup>577</sup>

By "world picture" Heidegger does not mean "a picture of the world," but rather "the world conceived as a picture."<sup>578</sup> It is impossible to compare the modern world

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<sup>574</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Volume IV: Nihilism*, in Nietzsche, trans. Frank A. Capuzzi, David Farrell. Krell, and Joan Stambaugh, vol. 3 & 4 (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 86.

<sup>575</sup> Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity*, 171.

<sup>576</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture." in *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper Perennial, 2013), 127.

<sup>577</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>578</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

picture with either the medieval or the ancient world picture, because the latter two do not, and cannot, exist. The modern world's ability to conceive the world as a picture involves a position for man in which man must stand in relation toward all things as an objective, so that he can measure, execute, and master that which is.<sup>579</sup> Heidegger sees this as a distinct manner of existence that did not exist in the medieval or ancient periods in which mankind did not see the world as something to subjugate, but rather something that discloses itself to mankind, or something whereby God might disclose Himself to mankind. In both cases, mankind is the receiver of truth and reality, not the author.

It should be clarified that this assertion does not contradict Heidegger's earlier understand of Dasein's involvement in the construction of world, because in that situation, the objective and the subjective intermesh. Dasein is interrelated to the world in a way that the individual in this depiction of world picture is not. The early Heidegger's Dasein seems to coincide more fully with the picture of the medieval or ancient world in which the world discloses itself, and Dasein relates to that disclosedness, more so than the assertion of dominance predicated here. To that end, Heidegger asserts, "The fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world picture."<sup>580</sup> The modern age is dominated by, and indeed comprised of, the approach to the world which entails humanity's removal of itself from the rest of the world, positioned in a privileged position of objectivity in which the world is separate from the person, and therefore easily used and handled by the person. Instead of being a part of the world, I observe the world. The difference is between the person playing in the Superbowl, and the person watching the Superbowl. The problem being, that one does not necessarily need to

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<sup>579</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>580</sup> Ibid., 134.

participate in a sporting event, but by nature one is a participant in the world. The world picture pushes against that inherent reality.

Returning to Zimmerman, he notes that Heidegger saw film and photography as technological instruments used to make everything wholly present and available for use; and concordantly, he saw television as an inevitable tool that would make it possible for the whole of humanity to witness the same event at the same time, from the same perspective.<sup>581</sup> Even in light of Heidegger's early thought we can see how this would be problematic, and highly inauthentic, however, within his later thought it leads us down a path toward what appears to be societal boredom.

"All distances between time and space are shrinking."<sup>582</sup> Heidegger begins his essay *The Thing* with these words, and goes on to explain that technology has allowed man to reach overnight places he might have never been to, and to learn things that he might never have learned. Things that should take one a significant time, now take minutes. Places far away are presented on film, and seen from the comfort of a person's home. During his lifetime, Heidegger saw the television as "The peak of this abolition of every possibility of remoteness..."<sup>583</sup> today it seems that the internet has surpassed it. In either case, the noted issue is that all distances are being eliminated. The question then arises, what happens when everything is equally near, or equally far? At that point, everything would be lumped into a universal distancelessness.<sup>584</sup> Why is this problematic? The loss of nearness.

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<sup>581</sup> Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity*, 86-87.

<sup>582</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Thing," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 2001), 163.

<sup>583</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>584</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

Note the similarity here to our discussion of profound boredom. In profound boredom, the value of every possibility equalizes, and a person's identity dissolves. What the later Heidegger is describing is this on a massive scale. The person at his computer has equal access to information about what is happening down the street, and that which is happening 2000 miles away. If he prefers a certain type of weather, he can travel the globe and have summer be winter in a matter of hours. Or he can adjust his air-conditioning and do something similar without leaving the house. When a man moves, he can choose to meet his new neighbors, or, thanks to phones, social media, and webcams, just maintain his old relations. The spatial distance no longer matters, and no longer assists in or limits the construction of the individual's world. In profound boredom, one is awash in the undifferentiated possibilities presented in temporality; the modern man is awash in the undifferentiated possibilities of an aspatial existence. This latter phenomenon is not truly distinct from the former, and in fact, promotes and exacerbates it, but on an epidemic scale.

Technology allows for the physically distant to be brought into proximity; however, that does not mean that what is brought into proximity is made near to the one it is brought to. In Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death* he notes that the telephone allowed a person in Maine to talk to a person in Texas, but it was soon discovered they had nothing to talk about.<sup>585</sup> This lack of anything to talk about reveals a lack of actual nearness. There is no shared concern, no shared experience. The weather is different, the local news is different, everything is different. Postman sees this as the birth of popular culture. If Maine and Texas now can speak, but they have nothing to talk about,

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<sup>585</sup> Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, 20th ed. (New York, N.Y., U.S.A.: Penguin Books, 2006), 65-69.



something must be developed for them to discuss. Something must be generated that can be equally near, equally important to all people, everywhere. Postman's insight is exactly what Heidegger noted decades before, the television brings things proximately near, but not actually near. Everything is equally close, but nothing matters.

To understand nearness, Heidegger uses the example of a jug. He sees the jug as a thing, not in the modern sense of a thing as an object, but in the sense that a jug is something that things. "The presence of something present such as the jug comes into its own, appropriately manifests and determines itself, only from the thinging of the thing."<sup>586</sup> Here Heidegger makes particular use of the word "thing" by appealing to "one semantic factor in the old usage of the word...namely, 'gathering.'"<sup>587</sup> A thing is what it is by nature of how it gathers the earth, sky, divinities, and mortals. The thing brings the four together in doing so brings them near. A jug gathers these four, the fourfold, in itself, and the manner in which it does so makes the jug a jug, and makes the jug a thing. The jug is a thing because it is near to me, near not merely in proximity, but also in care, in value, and we could even say in being. It is not merely one among a number of other jugs, it was made at a particular time, by a particular person, of a particular material, to be used for a particular thing, and so on and so forth. This fourfold is what allows a thing to be what it is.

The key piece or the fourfold, the gathering of earth, sky, divinities, and mortals is the mortals. All four elements of the fourfold condition, participate in, or are gathered

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<sup>586</sup> Heidegger, "The Thing," 175.

<sup>587</sup> Ibid.

together by things, but mortals are also in the fourfold by dwelling.<sup>588</sup> By dwelling, the mortals preserve the fourfold. They are both a part of, and within the fourfold. They condition, and are conditioned within. They do not exploit the earth or the sky, they allow them to be what they are. This mindset is in direct conflict with the idea of commodification, which came out of World War II in which all things, including people, became consumable resources, standing reserve, and therefore lost their thingness.<sup>589</sup>

Heidegger is clear that the divinities are not idols, but beyond this he is not overtly clear as to what he means by the gods.<sup>590</sup> Mitchell provides a thorough and helpful discussion of the divinities in his work *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger*, which concludes with the emphasis not being on the divinities themselves, but rather on the meaning they provide. “Meaning is how we are marked by what lies beyond ourselves.”<sup>591</sup> The divinities are not gods in the traditional or classical sense, not the metaphysical God of ontotheology that Heidegger excluded from his philosophy, but rather a locus of meaning for a person or a people. In this vein, Young suggests that perhaps this fourfold can be seen as a twofold in which earth and sky are understood as nature, and the divinities and the mortals are understood as culture.<sup>592</sup> The keys still remains however that mortals dwell, mortals have their home on this earth, within the fourfold relationship. When that is removed, things become objects.

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<sup>588</sup> Martin Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 2001), 148.

<sup>589</sup> Andrew J. Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger*, Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2015), 36-37.

<sup>590</sup> Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” 148.

<sup>591</sup> Mitchell, *The Fourfold*, 210.

<sup>592</sup> Julian Young, ed., “The fourfold,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 375.

The thing/object distinction follows in a series of such distinctions that run throughout Heidegger's work. We discussed the ontic/ontological to some extent in the first part of this chapter, and have made a few references to ready-at-hand/present-at-hand,<sup>593</sup> and joining these we now see thing/object. In all three cases the key to the distinction is care. Something ontically exists, it is present-at-hand as an object. However, when it is a thing that matters to an individual, like a hammer for a carpenter, then the hammer is not merely an ontic object, it has being, it is a part of her world, it is not merely present, but ready-at-hand.<sup>594</sup> The nearness of the ontological, the ready-at-hand, and the thing all relates to the manner in which it matters to the one relating to it. If something does not matter, it is merely an object, something that is merely present. The concern with technology is that when physical distance is erased, everything becomes present at hand, and when all things become present, nothing is ready-at-hand, and all things become objects. Nearness is lost, and all things become what Heidegger calls, "standing reserve," that which is seen as consumable resource, but not something of meaning or value.<sup>595</sup>

Malpas explains that the loss of nearness that technology brings also brings with it a loss of place, and therefore a homelessness.<sup>596</sup> When a movie, or a television show, or the internet present something, it presents a particular picture, a particular vantage point that is seen as THE vantage point. All other factors are removed from the experience. All

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<sup>593</sup> For sake of time/space this important topic has been left untouched and will only be included in this summery

<sup>594</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 59-71.

<sup>595</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology." in *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper Perennial, 2013), 33.

<sup>596</sup> Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), 297.

other conditions and elements are sanitized, shallowed, or flattened. When one takes a virtual tour of the Louvre, the immensity of the structure, the history, the crowds, the other sensory experiences of the works of art are all removed and what is presented is a sterilized perspective that is aimed at being universalized, not individualized. One does not interact with the Louvre from her perspective, but rather from the internet's perspective, which she shares with millions across the globe. Her perspective is prescribed by the internet, as is everyone else's, meaning there can be no relation between their individual perspectives, but all that exists is one monolithic perspective, forced upon all viewers.

With that which is a great distance away brought near, that which is physically near may matter less. All possible things become objects, and therefore the individual is adrift, the mortal does not dwell, the person is homeless, and therefore the person should also be understood to be homesick. Here we then come full circle because this homesickness, can easily be both philosophy and boredom. How then can we homeless, and homesick people in the modern world have a hope of overcoming the epidemic of profound boredom?

### ***The Refilling of the Pervasive Emptiness with Meaning, Faith, and Love***

The epidemic of profound boredom is an inherently secular problem, and an inherently modern problem. That is not to say that things that are called boredom today did not exist prior to modernity, but with a different, and perhaps more accurate name; and trivial boredom, appears to have been an inherent part of human existence for millennia. Even profound boredom may have manifested in the rare instance of a secularized individual or practice. However, the epidemic of profound boredom, the

perpetual emptiness one feels from a life, and a society, untethered from the transcendent in, which all things, the world, time, and life itself appear empty, or elicits no response is a uniquely modern condition that appears after the Cartesian Shift. Descartes' project in his *Meditations* was an attempt to discover a new foundation on which all beliefs, including the belief in the divine, could be built. The manner in which he conducted his thought experiment led to a reshaping of the nature of philosophy in which epistemology replaced metaphysics as the central discipline of philosophy, and the need for absolute certitude became crystalized.

This shift in thinking gave birth to modernity, which became an agent of secularization. As we discussed in chapter one, the works of Goodstein and Taylor together build a strong case that the embracing of modernistic ideals served both to secularize individuals as well as society, and to create the epidemic of profound boredom. These two developments happened together in such a way that there appears to be a connection between the two, a connection that Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger all appear to note in their own ways.

At the start of modernity, Pascal sees the problem with the Cartesian philosophical framework, as well as the immediate ramifications of a mode of thinking resting upon perpetual doubt and conceiving of the human primarily a thinking thing. This mode of thinking leaned into the sinfulness of man and cultivated an inclination to create a false projected self, which we have called the *moi*, as well as a deep sense of *ennui*. At the time of his discussion on the matter, Pascal saw the modernization of thought and society leading to a need for perpetual distraction to stave off the boredom that was creeping into existence. In his mind, the only cure to this boredom was to lean

into that which is of eternal value and submit oneself to Christ and therein shed the false self and become the true self.

We saw a similar line of thinking two hundred years later in the work of Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard's treatment of boredom is more full by virtue not only of his much greater literary output, but also his being raised in a society completely engulfed in the Cartesian/modernistic framework. Kierkegaard sees boredom as the great fear of mankind, particularly his aesthete. The aesthete sees boredom as something to be escaped. The emptiness of boredom causes questions, it pushes one to ask about the deeper meaning of life. The weightlessness of things cannot satisfy, meaning that a person must perpetually distract herself in order to escape the emptiness of boredom, and the pondering that can come from it. In the ethical sphere we see a person, not seeking to be distracted from boredom, but instead to endure it. This person fights boredom, but not in hopes of winning, but in hopes of enduring through it. Instead of escaping boredom, he becomes its willing prisoner. We see the freedom from boredom in Kierkegaard's religious sphere of existence, particularly in the character of the Knight of Faith, the Singular Individual, who has, by faith, been filled with the love of his creator.

In this chapter we have seen Heidegger wrestle with boredom, initially as a fundamental attunement, a mood that attunes individuals toward the world in a particular way. In his three forms of boredom we see an increasing depth to boredom, the deepest being a state in which all time, identity, and care melt away. Much like Pascal, and Kierkegaard, this is seen as a positive in that it elicits a change from the individual toward true actualized selfhood. However, in the later Heidegger we see a situation in which all defining particularities of things and persons are removed and everything is

flattened and turned into the standing reserve. In this manner it appears that the profound mood of boredom is no longer merely an individual attunement, but rather a societal attunement, an epochal mood, which stems from a lack of dwelling, and a lack of meaning. Heidegger's proposed response to this issue is a reclaiming of possibilities, a pulling back from an overreliance on technology, but most importantly, allowing things to be things. Or rather, being attuned to the world, and time, in such a manner that there is meaning.

How though does that meaning occur? Heidegger's understanding that meaning comes by virtue of what a person cares about ultimately seems to have to fail given the fact that this meaning is transitory. If what has meaning is that which goes beyond, that which transcends the individual, then if the individual is the source of meaning, it ultimately cannot keep the individual, or society from falling back into, or reawakening, the inherent modernist problem of boredom. Yet here we see a possible way out of the problem.

Heidegger understands Dasein as standing in relation to all existing things, and those things standing in relation toward Dasein. In that relation between these things, world is constructed. The later Heidegger seems to expand on this idea seeing all things existing within the fourfold conditioning of the earth, sky, divinities, and mortals, with mortals living within the fourfold, as well as being a part of the fourfold. In both the early and later Heidegger, the idea is present that all existing things condition, or have an effect, on all other things to which they relate. In this way we can say that all things place demands upon all other things that they relate to, and in this manner of understanding

Heidegger's thought, we find our connection to the root of our problem. All things place demands upon us, but there is one set of demands that we flee.

Thomas Aquinas did not write about boredom, indeed, he lived prior to the epidemic of profound boredom; however, he did address the spiritual root of profound boredom, acedia. Acedia is not boredom, it is sorrow at the divine good, or the work that is entailed by the divine good. When one looks at the goodness of God, the blessings of God, and the demands or requirements that God places on us for our transformation and growth in holiness and sanctification, and responds by fleeing sorrow, this is acedia. Since God created humanity to experience His love, and to internally love Him and love others with His divine love, any mode of existence that flees this will be too light. Any system or approach to the world will crumble. The finite cannot bear the weight of the infinite, and humanity was made to embrace and to be embraced by infinite love. Any approach to the world that divests humanity of this dependence on God, and its status of being a creation among creation will ultimately lead to emptiness, and therefore to boredom.

Here then we see the connection between the spiritual root of acedia and the epidemic of profound boredom. Individual and societal acedia, sorrow at the divine good, or sorrow at the demands placed on us by divine friendship, leads to a rejection of the one who satisfies our needs and is humanity's true source of contentment. This rejection ultimately makes use of Cartesian thought (though again, not his intent) in order to remove the transcendent as a dimension of existence and therein to flatten the world. This flattening is what Pascal noted immediately, and what Kierkegaard, and Heidegger, expanded upon.



As we live in a time in which Heidegger's concerns about technology are being validated daily, and in which humanity's need for perpetual distraction, as noted by Pascal, seems to be manifesting exponentially, the cure for profound boredom cannot be more technology. It cannot be Kierkegaard's aesthete pursuing relationships or variegated affective experiences. It cannot be Pascal's contemporaries seeking fortune, and diversion in games of chance. No, the answer to silencing a society engulfed in perpetual distraction is to embrace the one from whom it is trying to be distracted. The pervasive emptiness of profound boredom can only be filled by coming to God by faith, that we might be embraced by, and transformed by His love, into one who is infused with His goodness, who then sees all things as a gift from the creator, and therefore inherently meaningful and valuable.

## Chapter Six: Closing Thoughts

In this dissertation we have covered a lot of ground. We have considered the work of five thinkers over the span of 1500 years, and presented a theological and philosophical case that the problem of profound boredom is a secular problem, i.e. a problem faced within the secular sphere, with spiritual roots, i.e. sorrow at the divine good. We looked at the evolution of the concept of acedia from the monastic tradition of Evagrius, to the scholastic work of Aquinas. Here we saw that at core, acedia is looking at what God offers His creation, and the friendship that humans can have with the divine, and instead of responding in joy and love, a person responds with repulsion, running to any distraction as a means of fleeing God.

We then looked heavily at Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger, writing at three different points within modernity, and noting that over time, the treatment of the topic expanded and grew, and profound boredom became a larger and larger issue that needed to be addressed. Each of these thinkers presented boredom in a particular way, but they have a unified voice in their rejection of the Cartesian philosophic method, and the modernist enterprise that it birthed and fed. In the combined thought of these thinkers, we saw boredom associated with a lack of authentic identity, a lack of meaning, an emptiness, a lengthening of time, and something of which to be frightened, predicating perpetual distraction as an escape of confronting what boredom might tell us about ourselves, our lives, and our society. We concluded our argument positing that what boredom is itself telling us, is that time is empty, and life lacks meaning, not because at base secular nihilism is true, but just the opposite. The escape from profound boredom cannot be distraction; rather, it must be proper union with the divine.

As always, there is more that can be said. The scope of this work did not allow for some closely related questions to be fully addressed, and rather they are assumed, or presented as the case based on appeals to proven authorities. The topic of modernity in general, its origins, evolution, and history, provide a helpful background in understanding that to which Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger, are responding. To that end, a more full treatment of Descartes' thought, as well as the context of secularity could be helpful. Further, being unable flesh these concepts out as fully as anticipated (indeed, they would be dissertations unto themselves) dictated that the claims of this work be softened because there was neither time, nor room, to fully argue that boredom is inherent to modernity, and that secularism is inherent to modernity, and that boredom is inherent to secularity. In lieu of this full argument, appeals to Taylor and Goodstein, who have already done this work, were used. Instead, we made the weaker claims that modernity acted as an agent of secularization, that modernity produced features that led to boredom, and that profound boredom is a secular problem.

Further, there is a linguistic component that, while not essential to this work, could be helpful in understanding the evolution of the concept of boredom in general. Throughout this work we have discussed *acedia* extensively, and *ennui* and *langeweile* to a lesser extent, and have been able to complete our argument. However, literature in boredom studies also often address *tedium de vita*, spleen, and melancholy, frequently mistaking them for boredom. Their exclusion is primarily due to our focus on profound boredom, and these three words/phrases address concepts that are either located in trivial boredom, or more closely related to sadness/depression. While there is a connection, the connection is not one that is strong enough to have predicated inclusion.

Even though the amount of literature covered in this work is vast, the focus has been somewhat narrow. All thinkers considered have been within the western, Judeo-Christian tradition, and the totality of the argument has worked within this framework. However, in the same way that many have critiqued Pascal's Wager for only considering two eternal options, there is work that could be done considering our argument from other traditions. Erica Brown has written considering boredom from the perspective of Judaism,<sup>597</sup> there is a growing body of work on Islam and modernity, and the Qur'an has passages that lend toward Islamic work in the area.<sup>598</sup> Further, the discussion that has been presented from our three modern western thinkers related to boredom and emptiness could nicely juxtapose with eastern traditions, particular in light of their emphasis on emptying one's mind, and eventually being emptied back into the whole of existence. However, at best, these studies might lead us to conclude that boredom is overcome by connection with "a God" or with the cosmic or the divine essence, no matter the face the divine wears. It does not seem that one could argue that the divine could wear a secular face, and therefore a secular utopia like that of Marx or Feuerbach would be able to overcome profound boredom. Indeed, if it could, this study would probably not have a problem to address.

Another area of profitable study would be putting this discussion of boredom in conversation with the concept of depression. Many of the descriptions used in this

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<sup>597</sup> Erica Brown, *Spiritual Boredom: Rediscovering the Wonder of Judaism* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights, 2009)

<sup>598</sup> For example: Bennett, Clinton. *Muslims and Modernity: An Introduction to the Issues and Debates*. New York: Continuum, 2005.; Leonie Schmidt, *Islamic Modernities in Southeast Asia: Exploring Indonesian Popular and Visual Culture*, Asian Cultural Studies: Transnational and Dialogic Approaches (London: Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd., 2017)

discussion could possibly be used to discuss depression as well, but not all of them. As society has secularized, psychology has taken on many of the roles that spirituality general, or the clergy in particular, had filled previously. This status means that those disciplines are addressing this affective issue apart from the transcendent, which is the status of the one in profound boredom. There would be an excellent discussion to be had putting Kierkegaard's understanding of despair, and our understanding of profound boredom, in conversation with contemporary psychological finding related to depression, in order to see if there is a causal connection, or if they are mere corollaries.

Two final areas that I see for future work: First, the divine and boredom. In the introduction, and in chapter three, we briefly address the possibility of both divine boredom, and boredom in the eternal state, but there is more that should be said. Bernard Williams makes the argument in *The Markropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality* that eternity necessarily predicates boredom because all categorical desires will eventually be used up<sup>599</sup> Here there is much to say about the renewal of categorical desires, the refilling of them, and most importantly, the delight in finding complete satisfaction in having your desires met. This discussion is beyond the scope of the present project, but as a sequel, would be helpful in fleshing out how engaging in divine human friendship fills time with faith, love, and meaning.

Second, and perhaps more pastoral, the question of what boredom indicates in the believer's life. It would be easy to conclude from this work that no follower of Christ experiences boredom. But that is not the case. People within the church struggle with

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<sup>599</sup> Bernard Williams, "The Markropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality," in *The Metaphysics Of Death*, ed. John Fischer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 73-92. 73

acedia, and therefore with boredom, but perhaps in a different manner, and in a way that needs to be addressed not philosophically, not purely theologically, but pastorally. As such, these considerations would not be appropriate in this work, but would be a helpful application of it.

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