Can We Have a Kierkegaardian Self Without God?

Kierkegaard, Bernard Williams, and Ground Projects

By Istvan M. Dekany
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Abstract

This dissertation will explore Kierkegaard's notion of the self, primarily in his work *The Sickness Unto Death.* While Kierkegaard claims that it is impossible for an individual to become a full self without God, this paper will show that the necessary role that God plays in self-development can be fulfilled without references to God, allowing full self-development in a secular context. As such, focus will be placed on the need for objective values and unity of the self as described by Kierkegaard, while highlighting how an iteration of Bernard Williams's view of ground projects may fulfill the necessary role Kierkegaard ascribes to God.

Key Words: *Kierkegaard, The Self, Bernard Williams, Ground Projects*

Section 1: Introduction

The self and its development is a complex issue which is relevant to most people's lives in some capacity. The works of Søren Kierkegaard focus to a significant degree on this topic, among others, and provide a robust examination of what a self is, what it means to be a self and what it takes to know our selves, existing in the world. Kierkegaard's thought is heavily religious in nature and he gives a detailed account of a person's relationship to God, and both the self and its development are intimately tied to this relationship. While I do not wish to downplay the prevalence and significance of God in the works of Kierkegaard, I want to explore whether authentic self-development can be achieved in the sense he claims without the necessity of God. As such, I will argue that Kierkegaard's description of the self is perfectly intelligible without God, and its development can likewise be carried out without references to God. After identifying the primary ways in which God is deemed necessary for proper and full self-development, I will explore whether any other concept can be used to fulfill the role God provides in self-development to an adequate degree. Specifically, I will be looking at Bernard Williams's Ground Projects, due to its qualities which are similar in nature to Kierkegaard's ethical sphere, the foundation of his notion of self-development.

In the second section I will explore the self as Kierkegaard defined it. In *The Sickness Unto Death* Kierkegaard defines the self as the correct synthesis of a set of relations representing the limitations and potential of an individual. Incorrect relation between these causes despair, and it is the task of an individual to become a self and avoid this despair. Kierkegaard asserts that a correct relation is impossible without an 'outside third', namely God. This formal definition of the self is supplemented by the idea of 'stages' of life, which sheds light on the demands made upon the self by this definition, as is illustrated in *Either/Or* and some of his earlier texts. This task and its demands are further highlighted in the struggle between choosing the self in acceptance and creation. I argue that this self need not be considered in Christian terms that Kierkegaard specifically works through, and while it

may not seem to be the case at first glance, it is formally intelligible without reference to God, thus opening the potential to pursue authentic self-development without God. None the less, God appears to remain necessary for this pursuit.

In section 3 I will be looking at why this is the case. I will examine what Kierkegaard believes is necessary for the development of the self just described, and without considering it essential, examine the role of God in this self-development. For Kierkegaard, in order to avoid despair, we need a connection to eternity. We need something unchanging and transcendent like God in which we can ground value that also provides us with meaning and direction in our lives and in our self-development. Kierkegaard further argues that this value needs to come from the Good, or God. As he writes, for pagans suicide was acceptable, and thus it was not judged. But judged as a crime against God, it becomes a wrong. This is made as a point against not being conscious before God, that all values are related back to God, being akin to "glittering vices" without Him. (The Sickness Unto Death[1] (SUD) p.46) In order to avoid our choices, and consequently our selves becoming arbitrary, we need a source of value that is absolute. This needs to come from outside the individual and be objective in order to have any authority over him, allowing him to preserve his self as temporally consistent and to further preserve his commitment to this value as a duty over time. Kierkegaard also argues that the Good is the only thing that can provide unity for the self, and perhaps more significantly, argues for the importance of this unity in self-development. I maintain that all these which are necessary for authentic self-development and possible through God (as Kierkegaard asserts) come down to an absolute source of value-something that remains unchanging and binds us to a life view through which we can accept the selves we are all the while allowing us to shape our selves as individuals achieving the right kind of synthesis of the limitations and potential of the self.

Having identified God's role in the formal aspects of self-development, in section 4 I will look

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[1] For translation used, see references section

to Bernard Williams's Ground Projects to be an adequate fulfiller of that role. The idea of Ground Projects as Williams describes them seems to lend itself well to this role at first glance. Ground Projects are by nature identity-conferring, provide clear objectives and goals to an individual, the right kinds have a quality of the eternal and as they are highly personal these projects possess a great motivating factor. While they do not directly elicit a surrender of the will to God, since they are considered duties and perceived to have value in and of themselves, they do impose restrictions on our will, and require us combating self-denial to be the selves in line with the obligations they provide in a similar sense. In section 4 I will examine these qualities of Ground Projects and how well they actually lend themselves to provide those essentials to self-development that, as I argued in the previous 2 sections, are provided by God. I will be closely examining some key objections in terms of these important issues to Kierkegaardian self-development, and refine Williams's original idea to best suit this development. As such, I will show that the idea of ground projects can, in principle, fulfill the role of God and allow the possibility of authentic self-development. .

From this, the overall argument structure is as follows:

1. Despite appearances that the Kierkegaardian self is inherently reliant on God, this is not the case. The full conception of this self can be understood and fulfilled without the need for God in theory.

2. Given this, Kierkegaard makes a compelling argument of why God, as an ontologically real transcendent source of value and giver of the self, is necessary for this development. This is because of the notions of an objective Good and a strong sense of eternity which together provide unity and structure to the self, allowing the opposing aspects of the self to achieve synthesis and avoid despair.

3. There is a system; (I will be looking specifically at Ground Projects) that is likewise able to accomplish the goal of authentic self-development in line with Kierkegaard's definition of the self and his arguments on how to achieve this, through suitably fulfilling the role of God described in 2.

Section 2: The Task of Becoming a Self

Søren Kierkegaard sketches a picture of the self in his works that is one of the most difficult but most worthwhile things to achieve. The self is complex, rooted in the overcoming of despair, and draws heavily on religious, specifically Christian ideas. In this section I will explore these ideas of the self, and attempt to show that the self does not have to be defined purely through a relationship to God, and that its foundations can be understood from a secular standpoint. I will demonstrate that while the self may at first glance appear to be one that is defined through religion, as Kierkegaard describes it the self in itself does not have any religious foundations. Rather, Christianity is introduced as a necessity for the fulfillment of that self, not the foundations of what it means to be a self as such. From this standpoint I will explore the possibility of attaining true Kierkegaardian selfhood without God in the next section.

2.1: The Self Defined

Throughout Kierkegaard's works there is a distinct theme of self-development. The work that most heavily focuses on the more formal definitions of what it means to be a self is *The Sickness Unto Death* (SUD). It is in SUD that Kierkegaard most explicitly defines and sketches what the idea of a self is and the various forms of despair that arises from an individual's lack of this self or lack of awareness of this self. While the term is never explicitly defined as a singular notion, several definitions and explanations are given which together form an idea of what Kierkegaard means by this, and help inform the rest of his authorship.

"A human being is … in short, a synthesis" (SUD p.13). According to Kierkegaard, a human being is the synthesis of opposite aspects of the self, present in each individual. As they are opposite,

they often conflict within that individual causing despair and preventing them from becoming a self. These opposite 'aspects' of the self must be brought into a correct synthesis; a relation that simultaneously acknowledge and support both in equal measure. This synthesis must not prioritize one aspect over another, but integrate them both into the self as a relation between them and what established this relation (SUD p.13). Kierkegaard defines the self as a relation between opposite aspects of a self, namely infinitude/finitude, temporality/eternity, and possibility/necessity (SUD pp.13, 35). All of these concepts take on specific meanings for Kierkegaard, which he elaborates on through examples.

As he describes, infinitude comes when all humanity and concerns thereof are only reflected upon in the abstract, as only ideologies, conceptions and examples, but not the concrete finitude of any individual case or life lived. While a greater or 'big picture' conception of goals and tasks is useful, regarding them only as that causes the infinite part of the self to overshadow the finite. As an example Kierkegaard uses our quest for knowledge. Kierkegaard warns that if self-knowledge does not accompany knowledge then despair of infinitude follows, for the person becomes too absorbed in the knowledge for its own sake without living the humanity of that knowledge and concretely applying it (SUD p.31). In essence, if what we learn never gets applied to the lives we lead, if we never acquire self-knowledge in knowing our capacities and our limitations, then the knowledge we gain in abstract terms will never be fully utilized and lived, and our finite nature will be ignored for the grand imaginings of theories and ideologies which never get translated into action. Its opposing pair, finitude, is the concrete day to day aspects of one's life. It tries to overcome infinitude upon "attribution of infinite worth to the indifferent", or finite objects. Or even worse, they do not assign any real worth to anything in particular at all (SUD p.33).They are absorbed in worldly finite affairs, they do not have a self "for whose sake they could venture everything". Or in other words, they do not regard anything as greater than themselves, or their finite accomplishments. They lack all manner of ideals and abstractions for and against which what they do matters (SUD p.34).

With embracing only possibility, there is despair, for the self only focuses on potential and the different ways in which the self can be constructed. If none of those possibilities are actualized, then the self has no necessary state and becomes a sea of maybes. Failure to heed the limitations in one's life and imposing necessities for structure results in the despair of possibility, where everything is possible but nothing is really meaningful because it isn't a necessary aspect of one's person. "[I]n the possibility of itself the self is still only… half itself" (SUD p.37). Pure necessity likewise brings despair. If possibility is neglected the individual will not be able to assume or even conceive his full potential, instead succumbing to hopelessness in regards to bettering themselves or their circumstances. Without possibility, everything is already decided and there is no hope of change and betterment, or there is the complacency of inaction in the thought of already attained values.

The temporal/eternal issue is not discussed by Kierkegaard in SUD to a great extent, and I will address Kierkegaard's elusive meaning of the eternal in the next section. But briefly, eternity can be viewed as a quality of the self that is "transcending temporal dispersion" and achieves "*unity* through time", "without becoming merely abstract" (Glenn, 1987, p.9).

"A human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self" (SUD p.13). Kierkegaard first and foremost defines the self as spirit. However, his definition of what a spirit is is ambiguous at best. When Kierkegaard says human being is spirit, it is understood in two ways: first, spirit is a human being which is capable of despair and overcoming this despair (SUD pp.15, 16); in other words a relation whose task it is to establish a positive synthesis and rest transparently in the power that established it (SUD pp.13, 14). Second, in a more volitional sense, spirit is a self that is different from the external world and has become aware of this, having accepted the goal and task of becoming a true self. Spirit is the consciousness of the opposite aspects of the self, acknowledging them as parts of a synthesis. It is taking up a point of view which is aware of the eternal within the self and looks at the world and the self through this perspective, accepting the problem of proper synthesis through this

awareness (Hannay 1987, pp.33, 34).

Spirit thus may be qualified as a perspective, or more precisely awareness of the self. The example of the devil is given in SUD, one that is pure spirit. However, the devil has exactly the opposite God-relationship to what is advocated; ergo, one can assume that the God-relationship is not the primary factor in becoming/being spirit, but rather "the devil's 'absolute consciousness and transparency', and the fact that in him there is therefore 'no obscurity which might serve as a mitigating excuse', that earns him the description 'pure spirit'" (Hannay 2003, p.68, SUD p.42). Spirit is the recognition and awareness of infinitude, eternity and possibility within the self as outside of immediacy and externality, all the while becoming aware of the limitations that are imposed on the self viewed through this new perspective. The self in this sense is first the potential for a correct relation and synthesis (which is not yet an authentic, full self) and second it is a self which has accepted the task and is actively working towards the realization of this potential.

Through the synthesis it is revealed that a self has to be a relation. In fact, Kierkegaard posits the self as a complex array of relations. First, "the self is a relation that relates itself to itself (SUD p.13)." The self is viewed as the relation between its constituents as described above, but also between itself in self-awareness, and a relation between it and other selves or other things including that which established the self (Westphal, 1987, p.44). The relation itself is the self, and this relation needs to be a 'positive' one. A self needs to be grounded in something outside it in order to be a 'positive third' (SUD p. 13). The 'third' is the relation itself, which relates itself to itself in self-awareness. And when this relation is positive is what Kierkegaard defines as the self-proper. It becomes a positive relation if it is bringing the aspects of the self into a harmonious synthesis as described above. If it is established by itself, then it dictates its own terms of the relation which results in a negative unity in trying to reconcile through choice and will alone, the conflicting natures of the self. As Mooney describes it, such a unity is a negative one because it is a mere aggregate but not constituting a working *as* a whole

(Mooney, 1996, p.91). It becomes an aggregate, a mish-mash of goals and values because every endeavor undertaken by the self is forced into unity without regards to the self's limitations and facticity. There is no overriding direction and restraint. If it is established by another, then a proper relation to that other will make the relation of the aspects of the self a positive relation, which accepts the self as is given "rest[ing] transparently in the power that established it" (SUD p. 14). This positive relation, therefore, can only come through a relation to an outside other that established the self.

Establishing a positive relation and bringing about the self, acknowledging it as spirit, should not be conceived of as an end result of the struggle to become a self. "[E]very moment that a self exists, it is in a process of becoming" (SUD, p.30). Selfhood for Kierkegaard is a task. An ongoing condition that is not resolved, but maintained and lived. As Hannay puts it, "...spirit posits the synthesis as a *contradiction*; spirit "sustains" the contradiction, it doesn't resolve it." (Hannay 1987, p. 35) The self is essentially a striving for the self, or more precisely the striving for the relation of the self that will bring about a harmonious synthesis, or a 'positive third relation'.

Finally, this self will be fulfilled and accomplishing the task of authentic self-becoming as described when "...the self rests transparently in the power that established it" (SUD p. 14). As the nature of its relation suggests, the self must be completely aware of itself and aware of its debt to the outside power that established it, and accept this self in full and in good faith. We can think of the example of the devil again. The devil is said to be pure spirit. He has acknowledged and is aware of all aspects of the self, and recognizes and acknowledges the power, God, which created it. He has all the makings of being a true self, except the final one. He does not accept the self that established it, does not rest in the power that created it, but rather rebels against it. Thus, he is in endless despair over this and himself, unable to become a true self. Resting transparently, then, means full self-acceptance of our self as a person with both limitations and freedoms that are part of the synthesis that makes the self, including the acceptance of the particularities of the individual with all their history, failings and

accomplishments done through an honest, self-critical evaluation of the self and its relation to an outside source of value.

2.2: How to achieve this self

Kierkegaard's definition of the self and its structure is supplied concurrently with the idea of despair. Despair is a condition which reflects an individual's failure of being a self. Kierkegaard defines despair as "the mis-relation in the relation of a synthesis that relates itself to itself" (SUD p.15). Redefined, despair, at its core, is the incorrect relation of the opposite aspects of the self. Because the self is defined as a relation there is always the possibility for mis-relation, or despair, and the only way that one can be sure that one is not in despair is by having become aware of despair and its possibility and subsequently overcoming it (SUD p.24). Despair manifests itself in different ways, but all can be traced back to two basic kinds: the despair to will to be the self and the despair in not willing to be the self.

Despair in not willing to be oneself or the self is wanting to be someone else, and essentially wishing the individual's circumstances were different, or the self had the power to change those circumstances. This person never becomes a self. Here the self "identifies having a self by externalities" (SUD p.53). In this sense one is conscious that there is such a thing as a self, but not conscious as to one's actual self. This becomes worse upon reflection, when the self is isolated from externalities. In this way, despair is self-inflicted in starting to understand that immediacy and external activities are not enough for the self but it despairs that the self itself is not enough as it currently is. Such a person recognizes the self, but fails to fully separate it from externality. He does not abandon the self, for he knows this is not possible, but despairs over the way it is (SUD pp. 54, 55).

Despair in wanting to be a self is different. As the goal or telos of a life is to become a self, it

seems odd that wanting to become a self is likewise tied to despair. This happens because Kierkegaard defines the self as being given by another. As the self is established by a power outside that self, God in his case, wanting to be a self primarily opposed to this 'given' self is despair. This is the despair of defiance or "the futile attempt to shirk one's spiritual destiny." (Hannay, 2003, p. 81) While of course the self has possibility and infinity which gives it flexibility in becoming, this form of despair neglects the necessary and finite aspects of the self which may impose limitations on its perceived absolute freedom. Ignoring these aspects, as were given by an establishing power, fails to create the relation that brings about synthesis as Kierkegaard intends.

So how is one supposed to overcome despair, becoming a self that Kierkegaard describes? This aspect is also discussed by Kierkegaard, but perhaps to a lesser extent. The self must have unity and rest transparently in the power that established it. What this means in practice is that the self must have something which grounds it, something towards which the self strives in unity, informing all aspects of one's life. This absolute power that grounds the self is God.

The reason for this is twofold. First, it has to do with the specific demands exerted by universal principles and the limited potential of human beings to fulfill those demands. Kierkegaard mainly had Hegelian social order in mind, but this extends to every kind of human notion that is not regarded as objective and absolute. The self requires awareness and acceptance of itself as outside externalities, and without the ability to fulfill these demands of society or convention, becomes incapable of self-acceptance. This leads to despair in defiance or avoiding the self in weakness (SUD p 53, 67). Second, it is because universals, such as social conventions are abstract and ultimately make the self indefinable. Through their intersubjectivity, they cannot be the kind of authority over the self that allows for its continued cohesion. As Kierkegaard says, when the self does not rest transparently in God, it "merges in some abstract universality (state, nation, etc.)" (SUD p. 46). Furthermore, these values are shared and limit individuality and responsibility which are inherent in becoming a self.

This is overcome, as Simon Podmore highlights, by Kierkegaardian selfhood being defined in a way where unconditional self-acceptance is found through a relation to an 'Absolute Other' (Podmore, 2009 p.176). Spiritual development is the realization of both the need of a unifying telos that grounds the self, and that the external cannot be fully known and controlled. In other words, an individual's self and identity is established through the relation to this absolute other and not the outcome of individual desires of the will (that cannot be satisfied all the time) which both fails to unify and separate one from the external.

As despair is always over the self, the obvious answer to this lies in wanting to be the self that one truly is. The answer lies in self-choice. This notion was first introduced by Kierkegaard in *Either/Or*, by the pseudonym of the Judge, the advocate of an ethical existence. "The person who choses himself ethically has himself as his task, not as a possibility, not as a plaything for the play of his arbitrariness" (Either/Or II [2](E/O II) p. 258). Here Judge William is advocating the first steps to becoming a self, as described later in SUD. One must acknowledge and accept the existence of a self, and the need to become that self. For this, a choice has to be made to break with immediacy and ground the self in unity by accepting the self that is given. For the Judge this indicated a social identity and responsibility towards the community. While Kierkegaard later went on to argue against the sufficiency of these endeavors in the building of a self (Stages on Life's Way [3](SLW) p.435, 441, and SUD p.46), the Judge none the less introduces and explains a crucial idea behind self-choice.

Absolute freedom in choosing the self is not what is understood as self-choice. Choice, in the sense of 'choosing anything' to centre our lives around, fails to acknowledge necessity in our selves leading to despair. As Michael Tilley notes, "The self is not created, but it is chosen among a host of other possibilities; the identity of an individual is developed by taking up a particular understanding of the history of the individual and directing one's life according to this historical portrait." (Tilley, 2011,

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[2] For translation used, see references
[3] For translation used, see references

p.5) Or as the Judge would say: "the *I* chooses itself, or more correctly, receives itself" (E/O II p. 177). When a person accepts accountability for the self that is given to him by circumstance, is when he truly choses himself. What it means to choose oneself is essentially to be "rationally reconstructing a historical position in order to justify it" (Tilley, 2011, p. 7). This does not, however, mean that the self should just be passively accepted in light of circumstances. Choosing the self amounts to a 'break from immediacy' and reflecting upon the self that is given; evaluating, accepting and taking responsibility for values and the identity that one receives.

The self may be shaped, and not entirely accepted in a passive manner, but both the limiting circumstances and the establishing power (whether this is God or not) must be acknowledged and the self-accepted and understood in order for it to rest transparently outside of despair- the despair to will to be a self. Ultimately, both choice and receptivity play a role in relating the aspects of the self: choosing, in having central unity of the self through identity and individual projects, and receiving (as in accepting) in the influence and our 'debt' to an establishing power (Mooney, 1996, p. 101). The self is in relation to itself when all its different motivations/principles etc. which the self authors (choice) are related to those very principles which in turn author the self (reception) (Mooney, 1996, p. 100). For instance one can take the example of someone in a particular country. Because of the country's history, this man is brought up in a culture with a greater sensitivity to discrimination. He may fully recognize and accept this (self-acceptance), and as it deeply resonates with him, it influences him to become a civil rights lawyer (self-shaping). This, then, brings him further towards his cultural identity. Alternatively, he could see this sensitivity to these issues as a detriment. He accepts and takes responsibility for who he is in terms of his citizenship, but may choose to oppose legislature bearing this cultural sensitivity. In either case, acceptance of our selves influences our choices and further shapes ourselves in line with the choices we make, as through all this the two factors remain connected to one another.

2.3: Is the self necessarily Christian?

Kierkegaard's work and his subsequent conception of the self are overtly Christian. He argues that we receive the self from God, and through Christianity and awareness of our sins we can cultivate a proper relationship with God through which we may become a self, resting transparently in God. There is no denying that the picture Kierkegaard paints puts God and Christ the God-man at the centre of self-becoming. In his writing, however, there still exists a separation between what the self is, and how that self is achieved. I argue here that, there exists a definition of the self which is fully intelligible without Christianity, where the emphasis on the necessity of God is instead placed on the task of achieving this self, not in the defining features of the self as such. Kierkegaard relies on the idea of God as an absolute source of value that provides unity, and is ultimately a giver of the self. The Judge believes that the ethical allows the unity of possibility and necessity, of having an "exemplary self" (E/O II p.259) of possibility be merged with actuality. Through making an ethical choice, one accepts the duties of an ideal identity, and in the pursuit and commitment to this duty, this ideal self, possibility, is merged with the actual self, necessity, achieving synthesis. Kierkegaard however argues that the unaided self cannot accomplish this. As is noted by Glenn "affirmation of our true selves is ultimately dependent on a 'condition' that can be given only by God" (Glenn, 1987, pp. 14, 15). Indeed, "The self is the conscious synthesis of infinitude and finitude that relates itself to itself, whose task is to become itself, which can be done only through the relationship to God" (SUD pp. 29, 30). Therefore, God is not part of the self per se, but rather Kierkegaard argues that the true self cannot be accomplished without this 'condition' (the relation to the absolute) being given by God. He expresses this idea more in *Philosophical Fragments* in his discussion of the A and B hypotheses of how we can relate to God. According to hypothesis A, we must meet and rise up to the infinite standards and perfection of God. Since we are unable to do this, we are left with hypothesis B; God must lower himself down to our

level to provide this condition to make the relationship possible (Philosophical Fragments [4](PF) pp. 29-31). Through the God-man, Kierkegaard argues, we are able to look at the human example of God's ideal towards which we can strive. While Kierkegaard admittedly does not offer up alternatives, one could conceive this condition to be 'given' by existence or life of a particular sort, or certain ideals and values which would allow for a self to be a true self. Whether this can actually be done through a secular life is then up for question. But the point stands in that the self as defined is none the less kept separate from the conditions which are needed to actualize that self.

As noted earlier, Kierkegaard defines the self in part through despair, and achieving it in overcoming this despair. Therefore, his definition of despair necessitates that it and the self be conceived on grounds that aren't inherently Christian. Kierkegaard defines despair in two separate ways; a positive description in defining it as a mis-relation of the self (SUD p. 15), and a negative one, that which is not Christian faith, or inconceivable without Christian faith[5]. The first one does not rely on a Christian definition, or idea, therefore it is perfectly intelligible without referencing God or religion, while the second one by itself does not necessitate Christianity. Gordon explains it best: "[Kierkegaard] is asserting that there are two and only two basic ontological states in which man exists: despair and Christian faith" (Gordon, 1987, p. 241). Despair is the disunity of the self that can only be unified through Christian faith. Emphasis even in this sense is placed on unity, with the unity of the self being the opposite state of despair, with Christianity, again, being the methodology in achieving that unity leaving open the possibilities for alternate methodologies. If this unity can be achieved without Christian faith, then a person may be cured of despair without Christian faith. His argument that you will linger in despair (whether realizing this or not) if you do not have Christian faith would not hold. (Gordon, 1987, p. 241); therefore the argument here should be structured by saying that Despair is [such] and the proposed (and perhaps only) way to avoid it is Christianity because [condition x].

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[4] For translation used, see references
[5] (Kierkegaard defines despair as sin (SUD p.77) and later claims, once again following from Luther that "whatever does not proceed from faith is sin" (SUD p.105).)

However, if this condition can be met any other way, then despair in Kierkegaard's sense holds, but there may be a number of different answers to it.

Kierkegaard none the less claims that it is God that gives us the self. However, the self is not defined by this relation at its core. In his opening, Kierkegaard refrains from mentioning God, instead choosing to use the abstract "another" or "power" (SUD pp.13, 14). It is only afterwards that he starts using God *as* the establishing power. God was by no means an afterthought, but even Kierkegaard defined the set of relations in the beginning of his work that is the self in its most basic aspect before explaining the role of God in the establishment of that self.

The idea is "existential derivation" (Magurshak, 1987, p.213); where the self comes from, as it is not wholly created by virtue of total freedom. Rather, freedom comes from one's recognition and acceptance of this derivation, whatever this may be. This cannot just be passive social etiquette, for one will lose the self in following the crowd, being unable to express the universal as an individual (Magurshak, 1987, pp.213-214). Man is always derived, and to be a self it must rest transparently in the power from which it is derived. The emphasis firstly should not be what this power is, but rather resting transparently; having accepted and being able to clearly understand and be at peace with all aspects of the self, both those that are freely chosen, and those that were "established" from outside. This need not be given by God for the self to be complete.

Mooney describes this reception of the self as that in which certain values that are chosen (or more precisely accepted); give way towards responsibility to one's cultural, historical background. Our culture and upbringing in this sense, he argues, are likewise attributed as an establishing power. "The responsible self will answer for things it has not chosen, by virtue of who and where it is." (Mooney, 1996, p.23) Accepting an established self is taking responsibility, on an individual level, for the historical and social background of my community. This establishing power can more abstractly be called the values derived from circumstance. Recognizing an establishing power can be recognizing

and accepting the limitations that are placed on our lives, and the values which in turn shape our selves.

As a bottom line, the self can be defined without God while still maintaining everything that Kierkegaard claims about the self, about despair, its defining features and about development, through looking at it from a point of view which Kierkegaard does not offer, or more precisely does not address. What ends up forming is a picture of the self that is Kierkegaardian in nature, but allows for the benefit of flexibility in coming to terms with the self from different viewpoints.

2.4: Last Words

I have attempted to sketch a view of the self as described by Kierkegaard in *The Sickness Unto Death*, while arguing that this self is perfectly intelligible without a Christian viewpoint. After highlighting the features of a life that would satisfy Kierkegaard's definition of the self, I started to explore whether God was a necessary aspect of this. In the next section I will explore why Kierkegaard thinks God is necessary

Section 3: The Good and the Absolute

In the previous section, I described what it means to be a self according to Kierkegaard, concentrating primarily on his work *The Sickness Unto Death*. While Kierkegaard claims that the self is defined as originating from God, I have argued that on this reading, the self that Kierkegaard defines can be conceptually envisioned without inherently needing God, instead claiming that the emphasis is that an individual can only carry out becoming a full self as his task with the help of God. In this section, I will explore why this is the case, elucidating in the process what is required by an individual to carry out this ongoing task throughout their lives. I here argue that the most important considerations for proper self-development are the notions of eternity, unity and objective value, and all these culminate in the acceptance of an absolute 'good', or absolute source of value, which Kierkegaard believes to be God.

3.1: Eternity

In the previous section it was noted that the self was the synthesis of the finitude/infinitude, possibility/necessity, and the eternal and the temporal. The first two pairs are described more heavily in SUD, while the latter notions of eternity and temporality are not discussed in great detail. This does not mean that it is less important, however. In *Purity of Heart* (PoH) Kierkegaard explicitly talks about man's relationship to the eternal. "Only the Eternal is always appropriate and always present, is always true. Only the Eternal applies to each human being" (PoH[6] p. 33). Everyone is in relation to the eternal, because by nature, man has an eternal aspect. The important thing then becomes cultivating the right kind of relation with this eternal.

So what is the eternal? The eternal, for the purposes of our relationship with it and the proper synthesis of it in our selves, does not have to be something that actually lasts forever, or exists

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[6] For translation used, see reference section

colloquially 'for all time'. Anthony Rudd highlights the most relevant notions of eternity to Kierkegaard's self. In the weakest sense, he explains that eternity is our capacity to reflect or our ability to "stand back, to consider our pasts and contemplate our possible futures" (Rudd, 2012, p.164). I do not believe that this weakest sense is adequate for self-development. It encompasses our self-awareness that we and our lives are more than just moment to moment, but it does not go further than that. It does not ground the self in any value, nor does it in itself provide unity; there is no sense of connection to anything eternal or unchanging as previously mentioned. Rudd's own view of a Narrative Self seems to likewise go further than this. The second notion of eternity that Rudd mentions is far stronger. Eternity in our lives is the connection to eternal objects or values (Rudd, 2012, p.165). While nothing physical in our lives is eternal, there are ideas, concepts and values that are, and in relation to these an individual can develop a connection to the eternal. The third and strongest sense of eternity that Rudd mentions is to live in time "with the expectancy of eternal salvation": for Kierkegaard eternity for human beings was very real in the form of personal immortality, but it need not go as far as he did. Rather, as Rudd suggests one can view it regulatively, as if looking back from eternity in order to take up the right mindset for our relation to the good (Rudd, 2012, p.166).We can express eternity in moments in time and there are ideas and objects which exist in an atemporal sense which bring about our connection to the eternal. The eternal is the culmination of all of time that is represented in time by the moment (more on this later), but is none the less a transcendence of time. In *The Concept of Anxiety* (CoA), Kierkegaard talks about time and the eternal's connection to it. He defines time as an "infinite succession" and the eternal "is the present in terms of an annulled succession" where "there is no division into the past and the future" (CoA [7]p.86). The eternal represents the "fullness of time" in its entirety within a single moment. It is not part of time, but it represents the whole of time. The eternal stands outside of time, whereby it informs temporal pursuits as a whole through an eternal perspective.

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[7] For translation used see reference section

In a very key sense the eternal is linked to the unchanging. Through the eternal, human beings, who are normally temporal creatures of change, have security and connection to the unchanging. This point is brought up in *The Expectancy of Faith* when Kierkegaard talks about the way in which the individual can have a stable reference point in their lives. "By what means does he conquer the changeable? By the eternal." (*Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*[8] (EUD) p.19) Kierkegaard makes the point that faith in something temporal is foolish. Since it is subject to change, it is subject to letting you down. But faith in God, who is eternal and unchanging, gives security to one's faith, because if one found that it was worth having faith in at one time, the eternal remains the same, being worthy of that same faith through time (EUD pp.24, 25). The person may change and grow as they go through their lives, but through the connection to an eternal value, they maintain integrity and a sense of continuity through time. In this sense, the eternal is a constant through which the individual remains the self that he is even though his dispositions, circumstances, and projects might change within a temporal context. It gives the individual stability through which the external outcomes of his actions do not wholly influence his self (focusing instead on the actions themselves done for the sake of a transcendent Good), a point Kierkegaard makes later in PoH (PoH p. 199). Thus one can define an eternal 'object' as one that is unchanging and lies outside of time thereby providing unity to a life lived by relation to it.

Once a person acknowledges himself as spirit, he becomes aware of this eternal quality. Thus, the eternal becomes a perspective of the individual through which he lives temporally. This is what the eternal means in the first sense that Rudd talks about. "If there is, then, something eternal in a man, it must be able to exist and to be grasped within every change." (PoH p.36) This is man's relation to the eternal; a change in attitude and perspective. The self becomes (in part) the task of the self for the identification, acquisition and repetition of awareness of eternity through time through a moment of awareness.

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[8] For translation used, see reference section

It is the kind of commitments which Judge William advocates in *Either/Or* that enable one to experience the moment. As Dreyfus explains it, "the eternal is… expressed in one's life". All events of one's life will "be interpreted in the light of the content given the self" in a moment through one's unconditional commitment to something that transcends temporality, and eternally defines the individual (Dreyfus, 2008, p. 18) This moment can roughly be defined as "the fullness of time" in which eternity is made temporal (PF p.18), as the moment is "commensurable with the content of the eternal" (CoA p.87) and through repetition relived constantly. This is highlighted further by Connell referencing the commitment of a wedding vow, in which one rises above temporal desires and the self "respond[s] instead to the idea of obligation, to the memory of the vow it took" (Connell, 1985, p. 149) by holding the duties and obligations of that vow above these desires (Connell, 1985, p.150). The self is unified through time from an atemporal, eternal commitment to another and to the vow one took, expressing the eternity of such a project through time. This connects to the second conception of eternity discussed by Rudd. The marriage vow becomes an eternal, atemporal value that we relate to temporally. This stronger notion of eternity is necessary because it is this idea that further connects to the conception of selfhood as a task. The self becomes through having and relating to an unchanging, atemporal value (or absolute good) that one relates to in a moment of commitment and confrontation that is constantly repeated and recollected in time as part of the ongoing task of the self of achieving synthesis between the temporal and the eternal.

Already one can get a sense of why God is deemed necessary for us relating to the eternal. While rarely offering a direct argument, Kierkegaard does attempt to highlight qualities of God which appear to make him the primary and perhaps only viable candidate for this. Kierkegaard claims that an individual cannot achieve a true synthesis without eternity, because a 'third factor' is needed for the synthesis of any contradiction, such as the conflicting aspects of the self (CoA p.85). Because of the nature of time as a succession, the only way to relate to it as a whole is to capture the "fullness of time,

but the fullness of time is the moment as the eternal" (CoA p. 90). Although infinitude and finitude as well as possibility and necessity can be actualized and brought into synthesis through choice, proper self-reflection and relation to the ethically recognized others of one's community, Kierkegaard deems the a third necessary in case of the eternal because, as is noted by Pattison, "we will be unable … to find a third synthesizing factor within the human subject" for the eternal and the temporal (Pattison, 2005, p.72). As temporal creatures, "only the eternal can ground the moment of awakening" where we can achieve "transtemporal coherence", (Pattison, 2005, p.73) through which we recognize the eternal as something transcendent through which our lives as a whole can make sense.

God is then posited as the eternal object[9], because He is an eternal criterion for man. Deede argues that:

"When God becomes the criterion, man becomes aware for the first time of what is really meant by the eternal, the infinite, and possibility, and furthermore he becomes aware of how far short he falls of this criterion (i.e., of his sinfulness), thereby realizing the impossible infinite qualitative difference between God and man and being forced to confront the God-Man, either in belief or in offense."

(Deede, 2003, p.40)

God is the example of what it means to be eternal, and he (more precisely the God-Man) provides the ideal for which we should strive, all the while realizing we can never quite reach it. One can add to this, as I've mentioned previously, that God by His very nature is unchanging (EUD p.25) providing the stability and continuity that is supposed to be afforded by the eternal. One could argue that in Christianity, God became human in the form of Christ, which would mean God changed. However, God's fundamental nature did not change in Christ, he merely changed the way in which he is related to

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[9] God is of course more than this, but it is this quality that primarily makes God a necessity in self development

and understood by human beings.

This notion necessitates at least the second conception of eternity mentioned by Rudd. That in this sense God is the eternal object or value that we must relate to. But as our lives and our self-development happen within time, we cannot regard it with the eternal perspective while we are living it. We can recognize transcendent values and incorporate them, and perhaps even go as far as Rudd suggested in living *as if* our lives will be revealed from an eternal perspective, but none of this seems to necessitate an eternity in the strongest sense.

Ultimately, our conception of our selfhood as a task gives us a connection to the eternal. While I recognize that Kierkegaard viewed the eternal in the strongest sense, I believe that that is not necessary. In being unchanging and outside of time, the eternal boils down to a transcendent absolute which is most reminiscent of Rudd's second conception of the eternal, that is held and strived for irrespective of our temporal selves and circumstances. This absolute is then, unchanging and outside of time, but is related to within time through the 'moment' in recollection and repetition, informing our lives giving us an eternal perspective in everything we do relating to an object of eternal value which grounds and unifies the self towards the 'Good'.

3.2: The 'Good':

Purity of Heart is primarily concerned with the unity of an individual, and the individual's connection to the 'Good' through willing one thing. The unity of the will, focused on a single supreme Good allows a person a connection to the eternal (through providing an eternal object to which one can relate) and the avoidance of despair in maintaining integrity and not devolving into multitude through the willing of many different things simultaneously. In willing but one thing (also implying willing it the correct way) the self avoids falling into a multitude and avoids internal tensions. Further, as Kierkegaard

writes: "Shall a man in truth will one thing, then this one thing that he wills must be such that it remains unaltered in all changes, so that by willing it he can win immutability" (PoH p.60). This immutability comes from the fact that one cannot will one thing that is not the Good, because that is a delusion since in the good all things are united. He notes that this is so because everything is changing about the man and his surroundings. In other words, as the man becomes different, he always has the potential to will something different due to the changes within him. The Good however, when willed in the proper manner is always willed for its own sake, therefore always willed despite changes to temporal goals and desires (more on this later). These three points highlight what appear to be the main reasons for the need for the 'Good' and the main criterion in self-development. The Good (and what is arguably necessary for self-development) then becomes an objective criteria within man by which his choices are directed and given weight. In willing the Good, the person has connection to the eternal, has objective grounds that gives his will focus and direction greater than the self could do on his own, and provide integrity and unity to the individual by willing one thing, thus avoiding internal strife and contradictions within the self.

3.3: Objectivity and the Good

The Good must be an objective criterion that lies outside of the person and should be able to have the kind of authority over him that becomes the 'giver' of the self. The emphasis here is not on the nature or the existence of the good, but that that good can be something other than God in self-development.[10] Through his relation to this objective criterion as the "third", as Kierkegaard called it in SUD, a person can achieve a positive relation within himself. The argument here is that the self that rules over itself rules over nothing for the self is not grounded in anything unchangeable; "rebellion is legitimate at any

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[10] I will later also argue that this good need not be a transcendent entity or form of all goodness, but rather a more minimalist view of the good in particular things

moment" (SUD p.69) so the self becomes arbitrary because it is based on itself, and "imaginarily constructed virtues" (SUD p.69). By the eternal values of God, however, there comes a clear focus towards an objective value outside the self. This argument has two aspects: First, through this source of value, a person's choices and decisions cease to be arbitrary, because they are guided by something outside himself which motivate his actions further than his will alone. And yet, it is the will of the individual that ultimately guides him towards the Good. Through acknowledging and willing the Good, a person recognizes authority over himself, avoiding choices purely for their own sake, or the sake of some temporal, fleeting goal. Second, the self that changes its mind constantly, so to speak, is one that is incapable of making the choices and commitments through which it relates to the infinite/eternal/possible aspects of its nature (such as those advocated by the Judge).

The 'Good' is used rather vaguely by Kierkegaard in PoH, but could arguably be referring to God, simply the eternal, or taken in a Platonic sense as the transcendent form of goodness. Functionally, taking his earlier point about becoming arbitrary into account, the Good can be thought of as any objective source of value that wills a moral good above evil in full self-awareness and responsibility. Davenport puts this as the "formation of a good will" which for Kierkegaard is not just that an ethical duty or responsibility is accepted, but that such is accepted and the Good is willed over evil (Davenport, 2001b[11], p.296). What this means is that an objective guiding principle that is geared towards the eternal and morally correct action is needed for proper self-development. Rudd adds the criticism that without a central universal moral principle (which the ethicist has) that applies to everyone (which the ethicist in some sense does not, since such principles arise from his socially accepted identity which is subject to change) the ethicist will run the risk of collapsing back to aestheticism. Thus the religious life, bringing with it a central principle that applies to everyone, presents itself as a solution (Rudd, 1993, p.131). Without objectivity in values, there is nothing

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[11] Henceforth Davenport, 2001b will refer to the article: Towards an Existential Virtue Ethics: Kierkegaard and MacIntyre. For full reference, see references section

compelling us to continue following them necessarily, running a risk of a kind of relativist point of view through which we do whatever happens to suit us at the time, reminiscent of the aesthete in *Either/Or* structuring his life around avoiding boredom. This amounts to meaning that our choices (even the ones considered ethical) are ultimately reversible, or grounded in something reversible.

This is precisely the reason Davenport points out that the ethical principles we uphold, in Kierkegaard's sense, are not simply chosen to *be* the ethical, but rather 'discovered' and appropriated into the individual's life. The absolute choice is not one by which moral authority itself is chosen in the ethical, but it is through the choice that it "comes to evidence" that there is such a thing and what it may require (Davenport, 2001a[12], p.87). As the ethical good becomes an authority over the self, the self finds that the choices and commitments it makes in pursuit of it have lasting consequences and further inform the agent's life, meaning the choice is no longer "arbitrary with respect to earlier ones" Davenport, 2001a, p.98). One can take the example of an athlete who is representing his country in a sporting event. He makes the choice of pursuing this goal and gets selected over many others. Along the way he starts having second thoughts about his desire to do this. However, upon reflection he realizes that having gone this far, it is his duty to represent his country to the best of his ability, and he chooses the ethical good of responsibility and commitment. He makes choices based on his initial one to start on this path, but within the background of the ethical obligations thrust upon him through this responsibility of representing his country to the best of his ability. As such, he chooses to continue working hard and become the athlete he feels it is his duty to become. All of this in part contributes to the self he is becoming. His choices are not arbitrary, because they come from both his initial choice (which he in some sense doubted) and the authority of the discovered obligations (which keep him on his path). Nor are they purely a matter of obligations and deepest cares, because they are a consequence of free choices and in turn the consequences of those choices.

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[12] Henceforth Davenport, 2001a will refer to the article: The Meaning of Kierkegaard's Choice between the Aesthetic and the Ethical: A Response to MacIntyre. For full reference, see references section

Haim Gordon, in his challenge to Kierkegaard's solution to despair, makes a point to note that Kierkegaard further argues for the axiological dependence on God; that without God the self would not be able to achieve these syntheses, because it needs an ultimate outside measure or criterion. Gordon argues that "[I]n becoming oneself a person develops a relation to transcendence" (Gordon, 1987, p.250), however he does not agree that it necessitates God in self-development, only an idea of transcendence, such as the eternal objects talked about earlier. Indeed, whatever that transcendence is: love or beauty as Gordon posits, the abstract self, or justice in some form of ethics, a relation can be formed through which the self can relate to itself. This transcendent idea is essentially what God is, but made into an ontologically concrete form. And with the notion of the God-man, this ontologically concrete form is humanly and temporally accessible in our lives.

3.4: Unity and The Good

As mentioned before, in order to be an authentic self, one must have a relation to an outside 'third', which I have argued is the 'Good', something transcendent. This is needed because through this relation we achieve unity and consistency in our lives and selves. One can think of two types of unity, through which our selves are structured in time: first, unity through time, or a kind of temporal coherence and consistency of identity, and second unity of the self in the moment, or internal consistency.

Unity throughout a life and *through time* comes about through meaningful commitments and willed repetition. When one commits in the ethical sense, one's character is shaped by that commitment. Rudd explains this in terms of a narrative structure: "To understand any action is to situate it in a context which renders it intelligible, and that context is itself rendered intelligible by the wider narrative of the agent's life to which it contributes" (Rudd, 2001, p.138). As Davenport further explains; through this sense of repetition, the future is grasped in terms of our ethical commitments and

goals (Davenport, 2013, p.243), which are informed by recollection of how and why we adopted them. This, however, is still from a fixed temporal perspective. This repetition itself brings us back to the infinite/finite distinction of the self, because not all willing can help with unity- some are 'fantastic' abstracting personality and emphasizing some aspect of the self outside a synthesis. By focusing on attempting to gain some ideal that one has constructed of their own selves, then one no longer engages in the temporal pursuits that are supposed to be the grounds for realizing those ideals (Davenport, 2013, p.240.) This is why it becomes so important for the unity of the self to have a reference to something outside of the self and outside of time, something eternal or transcendent that becomes its guide.

Unity of the self in the *moment* is achieved through having internal consistency and priority of values within the self. Through willing a single thing, one will always know the correct thing to do, if it is for the sake of that thing. The good in the form of the transcendent eternal unites all values under a single cause. This is the main point of PoH. "The person who wills one thing that is not the Good, he does not truly will one thing" (PoH p.55). Only the Good is unity. This is further echoed by Rudd when he highlights what he believes to be the limitations of the ethical sphere: Plurality; by which he means the ethical does not have a single goal in which to find its unity (Rudd, 1993, p.117). Unity for Kierkegaard comes from willing the Good, but in a sense more importantly, willing the Good in the right way. Much of PoH focuses on this, and it reveals the common themes of the eternal and the notion of objective values that also contribute to this unity and the formation of the self. As I mentioned before, willing the Good the right way is important, and Kierkegaard provides some guidelines to this effect; one must will the good absolutely (PoH p.121), have full commitment to the Good (PoH p.104), and it must also be willed for its own sake (PoH p.72).

Ultimately, willing the Good as the single overriding thing in one's life eliminates internal conflict. All is done for the sake of the Good, and through this, our goals, projects and values do not enter into contradiction for they are all either informed by or done for the sake of the Good. It also

helps the person remain consistent and eliminates the problem of arbitrariness through perspective changes in the person's life. No matter how much our views may be changed in our lives, if what we do is always directed towards a transcendent good, they remain connected, and in some sense unified.

God is well suited for this unity in much the same way as it has been previously discussed. Kierkegaard states that without acknowledging God as its source, the self is in despair because it becomes indefinable (SUD p.46). The main concern in terms of unity is that Kierkegaard does not believe that a person can grasp their lives as a whole from an eternal perspective within time, which does not allow the perception of the life as an eternal whole. "For him [Kierkegaard], I can only have a sense of my life as a whole—only hold it together as a coherent unity in time—if there is a standard beyond time in reference to which it can be judged." (Rudd, 2008, p.505) God does provide such a reference point, even if human beings only have access to this though our relationship with Him. God, and Jesus specifically by example, provide a single unified eternal presence; in God there is "oneness and unchangeability" in both his fundamental nature and the example which he presents (Connell, 1985, p.159). Repetition of the God-man in one's own life gives rise to the self's unity (Connell, 1985, p.185).

3.5: Last Words

Looking at eternity and the Good in the works of Kierkegaard, it can be seen that in a very important sense the self needs an absolute source of value. This is because in order to become a self, a person needs to have internal unity and consistency, a way to prioritize his values and commitments, and have an authority over himself which guides his self-development and motivates him to correct ethical action in willing the good over evil. In connecting to an eternal object, a person is able to achieve these and carry out the task of becoming a self which accepts and chooses itself as given, as

well as relating to others and him in harmonious synthesis. In the next section I will argue that a version of Bernard Williams's ground projects can become this eternal factor that can take on the job of this source of value provided by God in Kierkegaard.

Section 4: Ground Projects and the Self

In the second section I've attempted to unravel Kierkegaard's description of what it means to be a self. Kierkegaard's self is a set of relations together in synthesis through further relation to an outside third which allows these contradicting elements to be simultaneously expressed by an individual. After exploring what the self was and ways in which it can be brought about by a person, I have noted what I took to be the key qualities that an 'outside third' must have and why, in order to allow the relation which brings the self into synthesis. In this section, I argue that there is an iteration of Bernard Williams's Ground Projects that possesses those qualities and is able to bring about the Kierkegaardian self in much the same way as Kierkegaard intended without the theological presupposition or necessity of God as the ontologically real specific 'Good'.

4.1: Ground Projects

Bernard Williams first talked about Ground Projects as an idea in opposition primarily to utilitarianism. He lamented utilitarian doctrine's de-emphasis on personal connections and agent-centred value in decision making. The idea, therefore, stresses individual engagement with moral dilemmas, but more importantly, a subjective first personal perspective when it comes to decision making. We do not act solely out of our duty to do so, but rather what truly motivates us is our personal connection to that duty, and a person's ground projects are precisely those that explain this call to action. Williams never gives a full, straightforward definition of what he means by Ground Projects, but he does provide sufficient explanation and examples to get a clear picture. Ground projects can roughly be defined as a "set of projects which are closely related to [a person's] existence and which to a significant degree give a [subjective] meaning to his life" (Williams, 1981, p.12).

But how do these projects come about? Williams argues that prescribing a particular moral law

seems to be in favor of indifference, or in other words our actions will be done purely through obligations and not through our connection or desire as such. Because of this, it does not seem to acknowledge, in terms of existing in time, the particularly relevant and often very influential nature of personal attachment in our moral and everyday actions (Williams, 1981, p.2). As he states, emphasis should be on the "individual character and personal relations in moral experience" (Williams, 1981, p.5). Our projects come about through our individual relationships, desires, and values from what is arguably the 'given' aspect of the self, such as the abilities we happen to be born with, the time and place and the cultural context which influence us that are outside of our control. Based on who we are, our personal history and our circumstances, we come to care about certain things. Recognizing these and taking responsibility for who we are, is the first step in choosing the self in the Judge's sense in *Either/Or*.

From these cares, values and desires, which develop within a person, that person inevitably identifies with some on a deeper level. Williams makes the distinction here between Categorical and Conditional desires. Categorical desires are desires that inform one's life and values and are not contingent on one's own specific existence as an individual; for example certain desires which one is willing to die for and consequently what a person lives for. They are desires which are thought to be independently valuable from one's actual experience of them being valuable (Williams, 1981, p.11). Or as summed up by Okumu; categorical desires are ones that "form the condition of one's existence, while conditional desires hang on the assumption of existence" (Okumu, 2007, p.21) For example, one may desire playing video games or going hiking, but if the person died these wouldn't matter. On the other hand, the person may also desire saving an endangered species, which he would regard as valuable with or without him, making it a categorical desire. As such, his self and values are structured in part around this categorical desire. And he is, through seeking their success, as Williams would say it "propelled forward" (Williams, 1981, p.11) into the future by them. On the other hand the success of

playing video games, while desirable and enjoyable, would not have such an effect. Conditional desires wouldn't matter if he person stopped existing, but categorical desires matter even in the absence of that individual, and thus, they form a part of who that person is and provide grounds for his continued existence in wanting to bring about those desires.

These categorical desires are what give character to a person, and what ultimately constitute his ground projects; projects without which the self is no longer what it is, that provide greater meaning than the self could give to itself on its own. It is these projects which become an absolute defining part of who a person is, and thus give him an unchanging and bottom line sense of value in his life. These categorical desires by their very nature also have a sense of transcendence and allow us to express the infinite and the eternal aspects of ourselves. Ground projects fit well into Kierkegaard's picture, at least on the interpretation and particular focus that I have been arguing for, because as Calhoun says: "[Williams] was, in particular, concerned with securing a space for individuals' partiality to their personal, identity-constituting projects against the seemingly relentless demands of morality." (Calhoun, 1995, p.242) In Williams's terms this was a mitigator against moral obligations in the sense of practical conclusions of reasoned deliberation to uphold some general rule or principle (Williams, 1985, p.175). In other words, un-flailing demands that are made on us by principles within the moral structures we accept. But what is particularly relevant here is that it is because of this personal element that ground projects, much like the absolute of God, seem to stand outside of the universal system, and place in some sense the unity, integrity and personally discovered values of the individual, and absolute direct relation to these, as above the universal demands of that system.

Ground Projects, through their personal nature and motivational significance which addresses the individual directly allow these projects to give the same kind of unmediated relationship to the Good which Kierkegaard alludes to in *Fear and Trembling* with the direct relationship of the individual

to God. (*Fear and Trembling*[13], p.85) Ground Projects do not gain significance for us until we engage with them and accept them to be valuable as individuals, not just as they may have been given to us from outside.

While no single project can become everything to a person, lest he becomes prone to a fanatical devotion, Williams argues that a person will likely develop a 'nexus' of projects based on these categorical desires. "There is a nexus of projects, related to his conditions of life, and it would be the loss of all or most of them that would remove meaning" (Williams, 1981, p.13) This nexus will constitute those things that a person holds to be of absolute value, which in turn inform the entire value structure of an individual, forming the absolute other that is the giver of the self, and the outside 'third' that the self can relate to.

Ground projects are absolute, because they are the utmost values that a person holds on to and structures his life around, in a similar way to God in Kierkegaard. In Kierkegaard all values ultimately come from God. In the absence of God however, where do the values in Ground Projects come from? Ground projects confer value on to a life and are themselves the source of this value, and whether they have value prior to this view by the individual, is not relevant to that individual's self- development. They are believed to have absolute value through reflection and evaluation (more on this later) as evidenced by the life of the individual in granting them meaning and identity through that individual relating to these projects. These projects could even be held above universal morals; they define the person and can be related to in an unmitigated, direct way much the same as God. As such, they create obligations for a person which supply structure and unity, as well as authority over the person. As Okumu notes, Ground Projects allow for personal attachments to particular endeavors in time (adhering to the finite and temporal parts of our selves and lives) all the while providing a categorical definition of the person in which it becomes united and coherent outside of time (Okumu, 2007, p.23). Through

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[13] For translation used see references section

keeping with these particular projects, a person's will has focus and his life choices and responsibilities are always informed by the value structure that is imposed by these projects.

4.2: Analysis of Ground Projects and Selfhood

I have provided a preliminary look at Ground projects in the way Williams described them, and how they can be used to shape the self. It isn't difficult to see, however, that there may be some issues that would prevent Ground Projects from adequately fulfilling the role of the 'outside third' necessary for self-development. In analyzing Ground Projects, essentially I will be looking at Ground Projects' ability to make lasting, non-reversible choices, posit authority and value in relation to the good, and give a structure to a life that allows the resolution of conflicts in the demands and obligations of everyday life. It should further allow and reinforce unity, reconcile the tensions between the self and allow for self-acceptance even in the face of seemingly insurmountable demands by our objects of value. Being able to accomplish all of this would make Ground Projects be able to facilitate the self-awareness and awareness of the self as spirit, provide an establishing power and outside relation to the self, through which it can rest transparently in full self-acceptance as a synthesis.

4.3: Objectivity: Rudd and Value Realism

In the previous section I have argued that a relation to the Good as an objective source of value is necessary for self-development. Ground Projects as I've described them, however, are highly individual and as such, can encompass a variety of value structures. Williams himself did not endorse any version of the Good in his explanation of Ground Projects. This is because Williams argued against moral obligations arising from a set of absolute principles. While Kierkegaard has a sense of morality as a relation to the transcendent value and towards that which is good, Williams' conception of morality

deals with it as an absolute of obligations and effective constraints on what a person "must" do as a matter of course to uphold this highest form of obligation, arising from a particular, derived set of principles. It is at this point I want to make a distinction between Williams's notion of Ground projects and mine. I believe that the two concepts of the Good and Ground Projects are compatible and when combined and reapplied to the Kierkegardian framework can fulfill the role of God in self-development. Even though Ground Projects are defining and bottom line, they don't have to be objective, or actually represent values in a realist sense, holding as values for everyone. Because of this, they are reminiscent of the arbitrarily held endeavors of an aesthete, like Johannes the seducer from *Either/Or,* who clearly identifies with a particular project (seduction of women) and while he understands it as being valuable to *him* he does not regard it as objectively valuable or having value in and of itself. He makes no judgment on its worth one way or another. And it is in this notion that the Good can be applied to the framework of Ground Projects. If Ground Projects are always done *for* the Good, they remain in relation to it and infuse value criteria on them that is outside of us.

Although Kierkegaard used the Good in a stronger Platonic sense in *Purity of Heart*, this does not need to be the case. As Rudd points out; "to be a self (…) is to relate oneself to things that are worth relating to. But all of this seems compatible with the view that the Good has no existence distinct from the particular more or less good things" (Rudd, 2012, p.141).While Williams was particularly against moral obligations as he understood them, Ground projects themselves confer obligations of a different sort, which is compatible with the notion of the good (which Williams does not endorse). A "must" can come from personal desires not simply out of an absolute, ultimate duty (Williams. 1985, p.189). In my interpretation it is these obligations from our ground projects that constitute the foundation of our values. And in taking these values to be for the good, or believing them to have value in themselves, these obligations will go further than mere desires.

I agree that it is not enough to just have certain ground projects. Those projects need to be

related to in a correct manner. Calhoun points out that Ground Projects, if they are to be held seriously, must be endorsed not just identified with. "Standing for something is not just a matter of personal identification with certain values; it is also a matter of insisting on the endors*ability* of those values." (Calhoun, 1995, p.246) The distinction here is that when one identifies with a value, one only looks at what one desires or what one believes she has the best capacity or capabilities for. Calhoun illustrates this split with the example of a homosexual man, who, like many in his time, treated homosexuality as a disorder. He submitted himself to psycho-therapy repeatedly in order to cure his disorder, but quit prematurely every time. He repeatedly professed that he couldn't accept his homosexual lifestyle, refusing to endorse it all the while living it none the less. But at the same time because he did not identify with the goals of his therapy or the alternate lifestyle despite endorsing it, he was unable to stay in therapy (Calhoun, 1995, pp. 243, 244). While this example puts the two at odds, it does illustrate the difference between identifying and endorsing a point of view, or in my case, a ground project. The crucial aspect of endorsement comes in valuing one's own principles as something which others should regard as valuable in some sense; standing for and by them. This only goes as far as endorsement though, or in other words, we as individuals *believing* that our projects are objectively worthwhile or have some degree of value in and of themselves, not that they actually do. This presents the question then of where values come from. At this point I would mention that I'm not arguing against value realism, but against value realism's necessity in self-development. I will come back to these issues shortly.

First of all, Rudd in particular makes a compelling point about the necessity of an objectively real source of value. He maintains that the self via Kierkegaard depends on a triple telos. First it is my telos to become an authentic self. This is done through pursuing particular projects and making meaningful choices in time, which become my second telos. And third, these projects must be for the Good, which does not have to be an ontologically distinct entity, i.e.: God, pleasure, happiness, moral

duty etc. but can be thought of in a more minimal sense of those particular things which we believe to be valuable in themselves (Rudd, 2012, p.46). In terms of Ground Projects, this would essentially mean that I achieve my first telos of becoming a self by accepting and holding fast to the nexus of projects that I see as the defining feature of my values (which I maintain are towards the good as my third telos), and pursue them for their own sake which defines my relation to them as an outside third. From this I am able to achieve my telos of correctly pursuing the task of becoming a self, as Rudd states.

This idea goes back in part to Rudd's treatment of the tension between self-shaping and self-acceptance. In brief, self-shaping refers to an individual's ability and inclination to direct and influence her own dispositions, cares and character. Self-acceptance, on the other hand is the view that the self is what it is, based on genetics, society, upbringing etc. Despite there being common characteristics and experiences that we all may share, this self through all these given facticities is specific and different to each particular individual, and on the self-acceptance view the job of the individual is to discover and accept this true self. Rudd notes the tension between these two views, and, along with Kierkegaard, recognizing a truth to both views' attempts to resolve this tension by arguing that we can accept that there are specific normative standards that we must live by, and shape our selves in accordance with the obligations that these standards impose upon us. (Rudd, 2012, pp.32-33)

He argues that if we are to hold some value seriously in an ethical manner in a way that relates to the Good, we must believe that it has value for its own sake. This value cannot be self-assigned, or at least it cannot simply be what we will or desire (Rudd, 2012, p.92). The reason for this is twofold: first, if it comes from the self then it can be changed by the self at any time resulting in arbitrary reversible decisions which prevent becoming an authentic self (too much self-shaping). Second, it can't just be something we realize in ourselves, something that is just a fact about us either as part of our biology, or our psychological makeup as resulting from our life history/circumstances. As Rudd explains there is no normative component through which they really serve any further purpose in shaping my self or my

actions (too much self-acceptance) (Rudd, 2012, p.32). The good for which we strive, needs to be an ontologically real, objective value in order to allow self-shaping along with this self-acceptance. "What one has to accept is oneself as one should be- not one's empirical character as it happens to be" (Rudd, 2012, pp.48,49).

The objection or idea can be put forward that a proper development of the self requires there to be an outside, ontologically real objective value to measure against, that guides the self, provides authority and allows the self to appropriately reflect on its values and be able to truly shape itself all the while accepting the criterion through which it may, and should, be shaped in willing the "good", or transcendental value. There is free choice and self-shaping in deciding what we do with our lives, but there is a clear 'givenness' to the self in the normative constraints of what that self *should* become. This is why Rudd believes that an objective criterion is necessary.

This objective criterion is not simply created, but rather, as the Judge claims in *Either/Or*, is chosen in the sense of being recognized as the right one. "The *I* chooses itself, or more correctly, receives itself". "He does not become someone other than he was before, but he becomes himself. The consciousness integrates and he is himself" (E/O II p. 177). Again, value judgments of good and evil must be recognized. Not just that something has worth, but that it has worth because it is good (Rudd, 2012, p.76). Or more precisely, it has worth not because I decided that it does, but because I recognize that it does. Choices can only avoid being arbitrary if they are based on values, which is necessary for meaningful choice. As such, I make the choice to live by the values that I hold, because I recognize them worthwhile.

As far as it goes, I agree with Rudd that values cannot simply be whatever we happen to desire. However, I do not believe that these values need to be objectively real, but simply have a formative objective quality that allows our values to thrust genuine obligations upon us in self-development and the way we live. Essentially, our actions still carry a weight of right and wrong, but they come from a

sense of what we end up regarding as valuable in choosing our Ground Projects. This isn't because these values necessarily have objective value, but rather because they are perceived to have it; we see them as being valuable in themselves, and should be for everyone, not that they necessarily are. Our Ground Projects give us a sense of identity and value, and we can evaluate and judge ourselves based on this while always trying to relate to the Good in the sense of doing what we see as valuable in its own sake. I argue that the notion of individuals *believing* that the values which they hold are objective is sufficient to create the kind of authority and measure of value in their choices and actions which Rudd argues is necessary for self-development. Where Rudd significantly disagrees, however, is in his defense of values realism.

Rudd brings up the case of Jo Jo made by Susan Wolf in her argument against the free will and moral responsibility of an apparently deranged individual (Rudd, 2012, p.92). Jo Jo is a dictator that has been brought up to value cruelty towards others. He is very self-aware and reflective, and judges and evaluates the self that he is. He carefully considers his values and his life and self, but due in part to his upbringing he reaches the conclusion of the value in being cruel towards others. Rudd's point from the Jo Jo argument is that in order to be selves, we must be *real* self-evaluators, and the only way to do that is if we can be successful in "getting things right" (Rudd, 2012, p.93) which requires objectively real values to compare against. It is essentially a way to evaluate my values, which Rudd argues is necessary because of our need to be responsible selves always striving for the good. (In terms of ground projects it would mean a criterion through which we determine which ground projects are actually valuable.) This further assumes a natural capacity for discovering the proper good (Rudd, 2012, p.91). The question then arises in what is a self-evaluator?

Rudd states, based on Charles Taylor's idea of a 'strong evaluator', that an evaluator is someone who is able to suppress some and endorse other values: "literally, the evaluation of my *self*[14]" (Rudd,

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[14] My emphasis

2012, p.82). It requires "Conscious reflection of my desires", and identification or deep personal connection to these desires. We find that "we care about some things" prior to reflection which is part of the given self for which we must take responsibility à la Judge William (Rudd, 2012, p.85). Perpetual evaluation of values might lead to infinite regress but again, even Rudd mentions that it is the perspective that is important; it "matters to me because I experience it as being of value" and when I commit to these values "I experience, on serious examination, that they are worthy of that commitment" (Rudd, 2012, pp.89, 90). It has to be something which I believe to be worthwhile; not simply my strongest inclination (self-acceptance), and not something arbitrarily chosen (self-shaping). Rudd explains this with the example given by Schechtman of the fifties housewife, where a woman is struggling with her desire for a career, even though her culturally motivated values of raising children and being a homemaker were historically seen as enough for a fulfilled life. Since she desires both equally, Rudd argues her values and subsequent self-evaluation have to be ones which "provide her with standards for assessing her desires" (Rudd, 2012, p.90). Ground Projects and their commitments if properly endorsed (in the sense previously described); ultimately represent our values through this kind of reflection and consideration. The commitments which they entail give the person a strong standard for assessing general desires as well, much like Rudd claims is necessary. As far as the evaluative aspects of a person go, there does not seem to be a difference. If there are values, then they always try to evaluate themselves in a way to get closer to them, and if there aren't, then the person none the less does the same thing, and the evaluation in both cases will depend on the individual's capacity and circumstances. All that actual objectivity brings to the table is epistemic question and truth value, but nothing for self-development specifically. And yet, it is through this evaluation that we are always trying to "get things right". Our self-evaluation is intimately linked with this notion.

But getting things right in this way likewise seems to raise a few questions. Rudd seems to argue that Jo Jo is only going through the motions of self-examination, because he cannot actually get

closer to what is *actually* right, therefore he is not a real 'evaluator' since the definition broadly speaking that Rudd gives of genuine evaluation is "one that can succeed in getting things right" (Rudd, 2012, p.93). If there is no objective good then he cannot have genuine self-evaluation because he can't succeed in getting closer to what is actually right. However, later on even Rudd makes the connection between evaluation and the rightness of actions as "I cannot but regard my evaluations as attempts to *get things right* (or at least, attempts to get closer to being right)" (Rudd, 2012, p.95). The point is, as Rudd says Jo Jo cannot get closer to what is actually objectively good through self-examination/critical reflection if there is no such thing. But does he have to? It seems that it may be enough to say that self-reflection of the same kind that is supposed to lead a person to the objective good, can lead a person to their 'objective good' or more precisely, what seems objectively valuable for them, not what is objectively valuable as such. As long as that is the case there are grounds for self-evaluation in trying to get to and doing things in terms of that perceived good, whether any distinct good exists, as long as it is in pursuit of what is good and worthwhile giving the same grounds for evaluating our values. The immanence and the transcendence of one's person can still be put to balance. Rudd argues that Jo Jo can't actually get things right, but in terms of his own values and reflection, he is getting things right and more importantly; he is always attempting which I believe is the important aspect for self-development and evaluation.

Through this we can say that getting things right in a way requires a real value, but in a way it does not. In Jo Jo's example there are two cases: In the first one there are ontologically true values, so in his evaluation he is looking at both sides and trying to get it right. He considers what he identifies with most, and attempts to get things right by orienting towards those values. But more importantly, reflection and self-criticism will allow him to determine whether he *endorses* these values, not simply identifies with them. If he does, then endorsing those values is a way for him to have the right intentions, through trying to orient him towards the good. Not simply continuing in acts of cruelty

purely because he happens to discover upon reflection that he enjoys them, but he actively endorses these regardless of whether he does so. If being cruel is correct than he would be right to do this, if it was not than he would be wrong to do this.

In the second case suppose that there is no ontologically real value. What changes in the *evaluation itself*? Jo Jo is still trying to get things right; the values he considers provide him with standards that allow him to assess his desires, he truly sees something worthwhile in them and through serious considerations he wants to find the values worthy of his commitment. What changes about the evaluation itself comes after the evaluation to discover the good has been made. All that changes is that one of them is actually right, which we can call evaluation in the strong sense, and the other where he is neither right nor wrong evaluation in the weak sense. Formatively I maintain that the evaluations are equal in terms of the development of the self, and where they differ is in the ontological and epistemological aspects only. Even through this, they both become aware to an equal degree whether they are right or not and as such, being correct in our values is not what makes the self, it's in part our ability to evaluate our self in a genuine self-critical way based on a set of values which seem to be present in both cases.

I do not mean to argue against value realism per se, but rather I'm arguing that it does not matter whether values are real for self-development, only that we take the values we hold to be such. Rudd argues against Frankfurt's similar notion of quasi-objectivism because values and our 'loves' end up coming purely from brute psychology, with endorsements coming purely from genetics and personal history. We should care about morality and values but only from a regulative perspective not to be confused with its necessity in self-development. While Rudd's criticism of Frankfurt is that on Frankfurt's view our cares and values are purely based on who we happen to be thus undermining self-shaping, I argue that our values come only in part from that, because we consciously accept/endorse or reject those values based on what we believe upon reflection and reason about the nature of the good,

which is evidenced by our lives. Our endorsements do not simply come from our cares.

What is important for the consideration here is that the Good and the objectivity of our ground projects stay away from metaphysical inquiries which try to impose the necessity of their existence onto self-development. Rather they should be treated as a regulative idea in allowing us, given the nature of our existence, to project meaning and structure on to our existence. I want to endorse a kind of value agnosticism which operates similarly to this concept; these values may or may not be there, but in so far as they give us a regulative constraint on our self-development we can use them without committing to any one value structure or impeding self-development. Our choices themselves that are within these value structures that are established by our ground projects further inform our value structures which impose a normative structure on us as part of a regulative framework mitigating the tension between self-shaping and self-acceptance. The reality of these values just does not factor into self-development since we don't know whether our values are the correct ones either way.

At this time I recognize that the objection could be made that Jo Jo still cannot flourish due to the inherently cruel nature of his projects. I further do not wish to argue that Jo Jo will necessarily be fine in his cruelty merely that even with his projects of cruelty he retains the possibility of a full self as defined in section 2. I want to focus on the logical structure of coherent selves and what it might take to become fulfilled selves (which as I argued Jo Jo can still be a candidate for); the specific projects and further needs of human flourishing which may be necessary in the pursuit of these are valid concerns requiring further examination but are beyond the scope of this dissertation.

But if we evaluate ourselves in the weak sense (without ontologically real criteria being used as the frame of reference), where do values come from? It starts with Davenport's claim of "limitations that will make some actions 'unthinkable' for a person" (Davenport, 2001a, p.100). These are guides that are imposed on a person from who he is initially. They are based on the notion of absolute free choice within which there are inherent character dispositions, which place limitations on action, or

predispose an individual towards certain actions which they find valuable; "free choice … is embodied in this existential structure" (Davenport, 2001a, p. 101). The true choice is in directing these character impulses towards an ethical good or evil or a particular value. Each choice shapes the higher order will towards a coherent structure of the agent's choosing (Davenport, 2001a, p.102). It is choices that establish the character and thus, they are not reversible, for further choices are made in regard to the character, giving it historical significance and direction. "[C]hoice must *both affect and be affected by* inward character" (Davenport, 2001a, p. 104). In this way, a person simultaneously is given what he values through his character, but through reflection and choices he endorses some of these values, makes decision and choices based on them, which further develop his sense of what the good is, and what values are worth endorsing. Unlike what Rudd criticized about Frankfurt's account, our endorsements do not simply come down to our "loves"; they are merely informed by them and rather are developed through choices and reflection upon them. Noting Davenport again, we act against the background of moral understanding and character, that may motivate our decisions but do not wholly control them (Davenport, 2001b, p.304). As such, we are not wholly given the self, but there are still normative restrictions towards which we have obligations to shape it.

For example, Williams uses the example of Gauguin the painter. In his pursuit to become a great artist, he must make certain choices which will only be justified if he succeeds in them, especially if he neglected his other duties in favour of them; "If he fails.... than he did the wrong thing", at least in a certain sense (Williams, 1981, p.23). If the project is successful, than he did the right thing for what he saw most value in was accomplished and was able to be accomplished, making the sacrifices in pursuit of it worthwhile. In his failure, however, this does not become evident. If the failure was his own fault, whether by misjudging his capacities to accomplish his project or by doing something which directly causes his project to fail, than he was wrong in pursuing the project and making the perceived negative choices that he did in pursuing it. Thus, his action in this sense is determined in its 'rightness' (again

what I believe to be in a certain sense only i.e. his evaluation of it) by its consequences. None the less, he chooses his projects based in part his psychological makeup, but upon reflection he endorses this project as having value and giving him some standards by which his own life, actions and choices may be evaluated. He none the less wants to strive for the good, and he gets justification through his success or failure and his subsequent relation to that success or failure in further evaluation of his self. Williams also stresses that what matters in the outcome of Gauguin's project is not that it failed, but that *he* failed; what makes his choice in carrying through with his project of becoming a painter justified is whether he himself was able to accomplish or fail in this endeavor. In either sense, his quest was an honest self-evaluative attempt to 'get things right', in the sense of having justification for his actions (Williams, 1981, p.25) and evaluating himself as being for the good in the general sense.

4.4: Authority and Motivation

Ground projects are projects which are endorsed as independently valuable by an individual. None the less, they are commitments to roles and identities which bring with them obligations, and in some sense have authority over who we should be and the choices that we make, or more importantly should make. As I argued above, the actual objective criterion is not what the emphasis should be on. The emphasis should instead be placed on the relation to this objective criterion, and how this compels one to action, and allows one to express the good in their lives thus becoming an authentic self.

Taylor notes we cannot be authentic human selves without regards to outside demands upon our selves (Taylor, 1991, p.35). Taylor talks about "recognizable self-definitions" which seem close to ground projects in this respect. They are parts of our self-identity consisting in something that is particular and important to me. Further, one cannot just *decide* the significance and value of actions and their choices (Taylor, 1991, p.36). This is where ground projects really connect in with what the Judge

was saying. They do come from an outside influence. They arise out of objectivity, but are internalized by us. However, this does not simply mean that I now hold personally whatever the society or this objective outside force now holds. It means that my values are informed by this, and what make them mine are my internal desires and motivations towards them and the conscious direction of my will towards values that I recognize in them. "Things take on importance against a background of intelligibility." (Taylor, 1991, p.37) We cannot suppress these backgrounds against which what we do or value becomes significant. It can't just be because I willed it to be significant. It may be significant to me because of volition to hold it as significant, but even within this context my volition is informed by this 'horizon' which gives it intelligibility and significance (Taylor, 1991, p.37).

It may be true that we need objective principles for purity of heart, but for Kierkegaard these objective principles are still coming from subjectivity, from the limited perspective and particular nature of the individual. I want to put the emphasis in the objective, *absolute binding nature* of these principles, not within them being actually objectively true. As such, what is of key importance to self-development in terms of our projects giving us obligations and having authority over us is relating to them absolutely. It is freely chosen inward commitments that make social roles important, not the fact that they are followed (Davenport, 2001a, pp.90-91). Davenport puts it well: Objective ethical principles do not get their authority from the absolute choice, but rather they get their motivating power from the absolute choice when they are internalized, and accepted in a passionate first personal context. Thus, although no objective authority is determined purely from the choice, motivation to do it is derived from its validation in first person experience (Davenport, 2001a, pp.91, 92).

As Rudd argues for standards for evaluation, Davenport also considers them important in this context. Practices, once internally motivated, require us to adopt the standards that are related to those practices in history (Davenport, 2001b, p.288) -objective values are those which have authority over us by us being subjectively motivated by them. Because of our 'givenness' we chose them, and they form

our character, and also are chosen by our character; our character and projects simultaneously inform each other, but none the less these projects have authority over us by virtue of the personal, individual care that we show towards them and recognizing them to be valuable in our lives.

In terms of our self-evaluation, we must always remember not just the value of these actions but the motivational significance of them in our lives. As Marino explains- we often elude our duties by over rationalizing our actions in eluding them, justifying them in a form of self-deception (Marino, 2001, pp.9, 10). But we all have moral responsibility, and once we realize this, it is disingenuous to try to evade them. We deceive ourselves by failing to appropriate moral knowledge into our own lives. We convince ourselves that we don't, after all, know what is morally right, weakening our will to do what is morally right- "the easy road became the right road" when the knowledge of what is morally right is loosened (Marino, 2001, p.10). This is in part why self-awareness and through it evaluation is a crucial part of self-becoming.

4.5: Unity through a Nexus

In *Purity of Heart*, Kierkegaard wrote "that a man can will only one thing, then he must will the good" (PoH p.53). Yet, Ground Projects are a nexus of worldly endeavors, seemingly exactly what Kierkegaard warned us against. But this is not the whole story.

I discussed unity and its relationship to the good in self-development in the previous section. In it I argued that unity can be thought of both as unity through time, and as unity in the moment. Through time, the person cultivates and holds unto his projects which give him personal unity in time. They give the self identity and all choices are made in regard to the values that these projects impart. As such, even though they are not a single thing, pursued in harmony, they constitute a coherent whole of the person's life. Projects are what give the person reasons for living his life, which is the most passionate

temporal engagement that one can think of in a Kierkegaardian sense, in relating to the infinite in these projects unlike the bourgeois mentality Kierkegaard warns us against.

Ground projects can bring about personal unity in time through a harmonious, non-conflicting nexus. Natural human telos of self-development involves the kinds of choices towards commitments and social roles. A combination of predisposed character and life experiences allow the choice in cultivating ground projects which in turn allows for "a meaningful exercise of the human capacity" (Davenport 2001b, p.290, 291). This arises from the telos implicit in Kierkegaard; namely, the meaningfulness of a person's life, through the development of the self. Williams argues that theoretical and practical goods will often conflict, thus a single overriding good of human life, or a telos, is not possible (Davenport, 2001b, p.292). But through the projects we can get "the goal of existential coherence": order our ground projects in a way that they may be pursued together harmoniously. It is every person's natural desire for their cares to not be in conflict (Davenport 2001b, p.293). In the second sense, Ground Projects, though varied in number, can still unite a person. There might be several which seem to be equally important, and they might result in the person willing several completely different things at any one time; hardly reminiscent of unity. While this might be true, it does not exclude the possibility that ground projects themselves, all independently be willed *for* the Good. Rudd talks about the Good in a 'rich' sense of a particular and distinct object, which is in Kierkegaard's sense God, versus a 'minimal' sense of the Good, which is more ambiguously *something* that the self wills in recognizing it to be good (Rudd, 2012, p.44). Unity is not gained in accordance with orienting oneself towards an objective particular Good which is end all be all, but rather the Good as in that which is more generally valuable or worth doing, that is represented by the nexus of projects that a person holds as part of what they believe valuable in a more specific sense.

4.6: Conflicting Ground Projects

I have so far attempted to explain the way in which ground projects are found to be valuable, and how they simultaneously shaped by and become the shapers of the selves. They provide unity in being willed for the good, and through the individual having recognized objective value within them. However, since there are many ground projects in a person's life all with recognized outside value, these create different obligations for the individual. Ideally, all these obligations can be pursued simultaneously without issue, resulting in a harmonious nexus. However, one can easily see that this is not always the case. Ground Projects can conflict or be mutually exclusive, leaving the individual to making difficult choices sacrificing one object of value for another. I maintain that on the one hand, these conflicts are natural, and in fact provide a person with cues to reflect and evaluate what they truly find valuable. On the other, these conflicting obligations raise the question that amidst the nexus of projects how is one to make the decision of which projects to pursue and which ones to abandon, and what happens when one is forced to abandon projects which give a person (in part) their reasons for living?

Williams was aware that while Ground Projects are supposed to provide the value upon which decisions are made, they themselves can conflict and thus must be evaluated. He calls these instances tragic conflicts. A great example of a tragic conflict can be found within Kierkegaard's works. The case of Quidam in *Stages on Life's Way* can be interpreted as a character deeply troubled by his inability to choose (or even be aware that a choice needs to be made) between what could arguably be called his two main ground projects in his life. Davenport at this point suggests that the existential crisis within Quidam is a crisis of two ethical commitments and the evaluation of himself as being guilty in either of his ground projects (Davenport, 2000, pp.236-237). This kind of deep ethical dilemma is exactly the point of self-evaluation and 'getting things right'. If it is truly difficult for the person, it means that they have understood the full weight of being a self, and relating to the Good. This kind of choice is

precisely what is meant to be resolved in our development as individuals, as true self evaluators in Rudd's sense.

Where the self is no longer a multitude, it's not building a self by adding to it (perhaps constructing a narrative) as the aesthete does constantly, but rather it is a form of reduction of the self to what one values the most (or more precisely what one takes to be most valuable), and perhaps even more importantly, prompting *ethical* deliberations and subsequent reflections. "Deliberation must be about practical possibilities of action rather than about 'disinterested' logical possibilities" (Davenport, 2001a, p.88) which, contrasting aesthetic deliberation, is mindful of actual actions that can be accomplished in time within the agent's life, not merely plans of what one *could* conceivably accomplish. In this sense, even if one considers some conflicting ground projects, it can be said that holding them simultaneously as parts of the agent's life is aesthetic fancy, and could be viewed as concentrating too much on the infinite and eternal qualities and values within those projects, neglecting the finite nature of human beings in their ability to carry out those projects realistically. These conflicts both highlight and allow for a chance for the individual to really reflect on his values and make choices that are concrete and result in everyday consequences and produce feasible, actual results *in time*.

So how does he chose between two seemingly equally valuable obligations? As Williams notes while these values may be conflicting, and their resolution in choice leading to a loss of value (or something valuable in what was given up), it does not necessarily mean that these conflicting values are incommensurable (Williams, 1981, pp.76, 77). Williams makes an argument for why these inherent interpersonal value conflicts cannot be resolved rationally. He argues that in these cases choosing either of the projects will put the person in the wrong in some sense, because both represent giving up something that is inherently valuable (Williams, 1981, pp. 77, 78). Williams offers a number of ways in which projects can be in a sense endorsed but not carried out, and how one is to make a decision in this regard. He talks of a universal currency which allows for independent examination of these values,

revealing that there is no real conflict: one must follow the one which has a greater degree of this universal currency. While Williams claims that it can only be utility, as I've noted Kierkegaard's self requires orientation towards the good making the 'Good' a natural universal currency in this instance.

At the same time Williams makes the case that we could "rationalise our moral thought as having a more... personal basis" (Williams, 1981, p.81). Marilyn Piety's explanation of passion is relevant here. It is passion that informs reason in decisions (Piety, 2001, p.63): "passion emerges as the catalyst of the exchange of one perspective of existence for another" (Piety, 2001, p.66). It is in part passion that drives us to make choices between different and perhaps conflicting perspectives of our projects or objects of value. Passion in this sense is understood as subjective, intense interestedness in our experience and our place in the world. She loosely defines this passion as essential interest and "personal participation" in life (Piety, 2001, p.65). While she is talking about frameworks in terms of Kierkegaard's spheres of existence in choosing the ethical in favor of the aesthetic, a similar guideline can be used in the determination of conflicting ground projects. It is this passionate interest in our subjective experience that informs our choice of ground projects and our further choice should they conflict. What Piety describes as 'passion' in this context is the desire for our lives to have meaning and to be for the good, and deciding what is the best way for *our* lives to be for the good and be engaged with that life in an ethically serious way.

In other words as Rudd states: "ethical (and religious) questions only become intelligible if asked from the first personal perspective" (Rudd, 2001, p.142). It is through the rigorous examination of passionate personal issues and circumstances and emotions that one can make sense of their obligations. Through being very personal they create long term, but more importantly identity conferring commitments that prevent the arbitrary nature of these choices of projects. They are fundamental for who we are or who we believe we should become. As such, they may come down to not what is more valuable or relates more to the 'good' (in terms of the universal currency), but through

what can *I* express and relate to the Good more. Ultimately these are choices of life, and they are an inevitable part of our developing selves both in terms of self-awareness and our judgment of values and how we interact with these values.

However, one can raise the concern that projects do not have to be in direct external conflict to create a conflict within the self. Projects do not have to be incommensurable to be in conflict with each other. One can think of the example of a man who, on the surface, lives the bourgeois life of a law abiding statesman. He enjoys and advocates the pleasures and luxuries afforded to him and his family by this life, and as his ground project, he works at upholding the values that come with his station. On the other hand, he becomes involved with a group that attempts political discord and a revolution, which becomes another project that he passionately endorses. Through the circumstances of his life, there never comes about a time in his life where the values of his bourgeois life come into conflict with his anti-state activism, and as such he is able to carry out both projects in relative "harmony" never being forced to make a choice between them. But in this case, one can say that in some sense holding on to such glaringly conflicting values simultaneously seems to be rather disingenuous. This example highlights that there can exist a deeper conflict within a person's value structure, one that prevents true harmony of ground projects and brings to light the issue that we must always be reflecting on our values and the mere fact that we can avoid our projects directly and concretely conflicting in our lives and forcing us to make choices in regards to them, does not in itself mean that we are internally consistent and harmonious in our selves and value structures. In these cases self-transparency and honest evaluation of our motives and what we take to be valuable is all the more important, even without circumstances forcing our hand. This is in part what it means to "rest transparently" as Kierkegaard puts it.

To sum up, Ground Projects may come into conflict, but these are a natural part of human development and the development of the self. The choice between them and the reconciliation of these

conflicts further reinforces our values and identities. We chose between them through being passionately interested in our existence and for that existence to have meaning, and so we make the choice based on our reasons and endorsements being informed by our passions and identities with these values.

4.7: Impossible Demands: Through God everything is possible

In the choice of conflicting ground projects, it is implied that in pursuing one, another is doomed to failure. On that same line of thought, one can envision our projects failing without making a conscious decision to abandon them, simply by virtue of our inability or through the particular moral demands that those projects may place upon us being simply humanly out of reach. It is the continuous pursuing of these projects that give meaning to our lives, so it is possible that when they fail, we are lost forever in despair. There are two ways in which this idea can be expressed. First, it can be claimed that human beings are inherently incapable of fulfilling the demands of morality on their own, and without help from God are doomed to despair. In a second sense, even if one acknowledges that this is not the case, our particular projects can still fail, leaving us in perpetual guilt or regret. For instance, in the failure of a marriage that was considered a ground project, if one did everything possible for the marriage, one may feel regret for the failure of the project, all the while being aware that in a moral sense, since they did everything they could for the project, are themselves not guilty. Alternatively, they may feel both guilt and regret having failed in their part to keep the marriage together.

There is an argument by Kierkegaard in *Stages on Life's Way* (SLW p.435), which is echoed elsewhere by Connell, that ethics is 'shipwrecked' because it cannot fulfill the ideality in reality, but none the less maintains that it has the autonomous capacity to do so. This leads to guilt and causes the instability of the ethical self. The realization and acceptance that with God everything is possible and

that God is the giver of the self then culminates in the awakening of a religious experience that solves these problems (Connell, 1985, pp.182, 183). Through God there is always hope. As Davenport points out to act truly for the Good one cannot worry about the outcome of the action, but simply perform it as best as she can for the sake of the good itself (Davenport, 2001a, p.79). This point of placing focus away from outcomes is further reinforced by Fermsteddal, who makes a comparison to Kant in both authors' treatment of the highest good: "The ethicist criticises the aesthete for relying on external factors that he cannot control" (Fermsteddal, 2011, p.159) and Kierkegaard asserts "we are neither capable of realising virtue nor the highest good" (Fermsteddal, 2011, p.167). This is why we need help from God in the form of divine grace. For Kierkegaard it is important to realize that we cannot achieve the highest good or fulfill our ethical obligations. But Fermsteddal uses Kant's emphasis on intention in moral actions to argue for a way in which the outcomes do not matter. "Kant says that for practical purposes we should start doing our duty to the uttermost of our capability, adding that God will complete what we are unable to do". But even if he doesn't, the extent of our personal obligations to that good goes only as far as our finite abilities (Fermsteddal, 2011, p.168). This is also reminiscent of what Climacus refers to as being "uplifted in divine jest" in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (CUP) (CUP[15], p.135), carrying out ethical tasks with enthusiasm, not worrying about whether or not anything is actually achieved by this.

A similar notion of both Davenport and Fermsteddal can likewise be applied to ground projects in focusing on earnest action without worrying about the outcome. Not because one believes that the outcome will be reached, but because working towards that outcome is what is ethically important and what is important for self- development in our relation to the good. If one does all one can in their ethical duties, than one need not be stricken with guilt; in pursuing the ground projects with passionate involvement and earnest, the emphasis is also lifted from the accomplishment.

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[15] For Translation used, see references section

Taking the notion of intention and passionate action in hand, one can take Williams's point of justification further that even if we would see our projects be successful, we do them justice and are justified in their pursuit not necessarily through their success, but rather the wholehearted earnest action with which we do what we can for them. Expecting anymore of ourselves is similarly aesthetic fancy, the same as expecting to be able to complete all of our projects in our limited finite capacity.

Self-evaluations impose criticisms and make us aware of the harsh obligations upon ourselves, which are necessary for self-development. This evaluation combined with our finitude brings about guilt, and prevents a crucial aspect of self-development; resting transparently. It is in this context that I believe that in the absence of God's forgiveness of our sins, self-forgiveness of our own moral failings becomes an important and central part of self-acceptance, and thereby self-actualization in the Kierkegaardian sense. While I believe this is attainable, this notion is complex and beyond the scope of this dissertation.

4.8: Last Words

I have introduced ground projects as an alternate third relation of the self through which it could become a full self. While Williams's original conception wasn't completely up to this task, I have shown here that looking at Ground Projects in a different way is compatible with and complementary to Kierkegaard's idea of self-development. By recognizing a minimal good of external value, we can have grounds for our self-evaluation and have normative constraints for mitigating self-shaping and self-acceptance. Ground projects through their relation to the good can still provide unity and a connection to the eternal in the values they represent, and allow earnest action and guidance in time to the individual. As I've argued the conflicts and inherent failures that come with their responsibilities are themselves part of self-development and any guilt that would come from their failure can be overcome

by proper engagement with these failures. In this capacity Ground Projects are able to fill the role of God in self-development providing the outside third to which we must relate.

Section 5: Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to identify the nature of the self as proposed by Kierkegaard, and to explore whether there is a necessity for God in the fulfilling of this self as Kierkegaard suggests. In section 2, I analyzed the *Sickness Unto Death* to determine what the features of the Kierkegaardian self are. This self as described is spirit, or put differently awareness of the existence and need for the synthesis of the limiting factors of finitude, necessity and temporality and the potentials of infinitude, possibility, and eternity of a human being. Further, this self is one which is 'transparently resting in the power that established it', or in other words, one which mitigates the tension between self-shaping and self-acceptance through acknowledging the necessity and importance of certain values and the historical and personal circumstances that lead to the adoption of those values all the while, through rigorous self-examination and reflection, seeking to endorse and further those values in full self-acceptance.

I have also demonstrated that the above described self does not, by definition, require God. The Kierkegaardian self is not defined through God, but rather God is claimed to be a necessity in bringing about a full self. The self is intelligible and can be defined without references to God, but God is then imposed unto this picture of the self as the way through which it may become fulfilled. This leads to the consideration of the possibility of there being other means for self-development in the fullest sense. While God is not a necessity of the self by definition, the reasons for which Kierkegaard claims the necessity of God appear valid. For proper synthesis of the self, there exists a need for an 'outside third' or an object of infinite and eternal quality in relation to which the self can express both the limiting and potential factors present within it. Aspects of eternity and unity, particularly harmonious unity of the self is likewise important to avoid despair in self-becoming. All these requirements are shown to be fulfilled through an individual's relation to God, but as I have argued, not exclusively through this relation.

In my exploration of a substitute for God as the outside relation, I focused on Bernard Williams'

notion of Ground Projects. Due to the fact that Williams' aim was quite different to Kierkegaard, his notion of Ground Projects by itself is insufficient for Kierkegaardian self-development. However, upon additions from Rudd's more Platonic conception of orientation towards a Good, I have revised Ground Projects to be both compatible and advantageous in regards to self-development which seems to allow for all necessary principles to achieve Kierkegaard's selfhood in concept. While this does not take into account all that can go wrong with self-development, as evidenced by the case of Jo Jo, it does manage to highlight the conceptual possibility of Ground Projects being able to achieve this selfhood.

Another issue that arose was that of self-acceptance and the need for self-forgiveness given the nature of Ground Projects. Guilt is perpetually present, but I believe even without God it can be overcome and the self can rest transparently, which may be further explored. Ultimately, I have not provided a sure method through which the Kierkegaardian self can be achieved without God, but have highlighted a way in which it is definitely possible given the right circumstances.

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