

In Defense of the Devil's Despair

An Argument based on Kierkegaard's *Sickness Unto Death*
and Milton's *Paradise Lost*

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Welcome to Class!

Introductions



- Tell me a bit about yourself!
- Tell me your name and why you are interested in this class in particular?
- Any experience reading Kierkegaard or familiarity with his philosophy?
 - Interest in or familiarity with the sub-discipline of existentialism in philosophy?
- Interest in the work of John Milton, English literature?
- Have you read or are you familiar with the narrative of *Paradise Lost*?
 - Favorite pastimes, hobbies, interests in life?
- Finally, how did you hear about the OLLI program, and are you taking other courses here as well this semester? Which Ones?
- Just anything you want to say about yourself, brief or a bit more detailed... the floor is yours!

Overview for Today

- ❖ **MONDAY'S SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**
 - ❖ **HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF EXISTENTIALISM**
 - ❖ **OVERVIEW OF EXISTENTIALISM**
- ❖ **KIERKEGAARD'S ORIGINAL SYNTHESIS AND SELFHOOD**
 - ❖ **THE INWARD JOURNEY TO GOD**
 - ❖ **KIERKEGAARD'S FORMS OF DESPAIR**
 - ❖ **CONSCIOUSNESS**
 - ❖ **SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**
- ❖ **LOOKING FORWARD (NEXT MONDAY): SEPARATION FROM GOD (SIN); SATAN THE ANTI-HERO; DEFIANCE; SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

Small Group Discussion Questions to Consider

- ❖ Have you ever experienced any of the following forms of despair in your life? Give an example.
 - ❖ 1. **Despair of not being conscious of having a self:** This is the most common form, where individuals are **unaware** they are in despair. They live superficially, absorbed in worldly matters, and avoid confronting their true selves or their relation to the eternal.
 - ❖ 2. **Despair of not willing to be oneself (weakness):** Here, the individual is **aware** of having a self but is unwilling to embrace it fully. They might wish to be someone else or try to escape their responsibilities, feeling trapped or inadequate.
 - ❖ 3. **Despair of willing to be oneself (defiance):** This is the most intense form, where the individual **defiantly wills** to be their own self, apart from God. They reject any dependence on a higher power, choosing self-creation and rebellion. Kierkegaard equates this most radical form of despair with sin.

Historical Context of Existentialism

- **19th century:** The idea of “upward mobility” (Referring to Europe) had come to fruition.
- There was an erosion of beliefs and meta-narratives.
- **Darwin**
- **Freud**
- Knowledge, faith, and values were eroding.
- Georg Wilhelm Friedrich **Hegel** (1770-1831) had an answer for all of this: The only thing that counts is **RATIONALITY**.
- In EXISTENTIALISM, BY CONTRAST, THE ONLY THING THAT COUNTS IS **EMOTIVE/MOOD/SUBJECTIVITY/AFFECT**.
- Descartes (1596-1650): We must **LOOK INWARD** to find truth (“I think, therefore I am”)
 - “Clear and distinct” is the criterion, but what is our **INTERNAL CRITERION FOR AUTHENTICITY?**
- TO FIND CERTAINTY... INTROSPECTION IS THE HALLMARK OF MODERNITY
 - **THE EXISTENTIAL CRISIS ARISES!**
 - What is an EXISTENTIAL CRISIS?
 - **The rise of ANXIETY-PROVOKING SOCIAL UPHEAVAL AND INTROSPECTION IS ONE OF THE CORNERSTONES OF EXISTENTIAL ANALYSIS.**

Overview of Existentialism

- ❖ What is the Meaning of Life?
- ❖ Is this a question we need to ask? Why?
- ❖ What is the point of living?
- ❖ Who (or What) is in charge of our lives? Who (or What) placed us Here?
- ❖ What is "Here"?
- ❖ If there is a "Here", where is "There"?
- ❖ Existentialism: "Life is absurd". Is this true?
- ❖ Existentialists: A collection of writers, poets, philosophers, thinkers who MAY find life absurd but celebrate the FREEDOM TO CREATE MEANINGFUL LIVES.

Overview of Existentialism

Nihilism

Engagement versus Detachment

Existence Precedes Essence

Freedom

GENUINE FREEDOM (Kierkegaard)

Authenticity

Ethics

Overview of Existentialism

In surveying its representative thinkers, one finds secular and religious existentialists, philosophers who embrace a conception of radical freedom and others who reject it. And there are those who regard our relations with others as largely mired in conflict and self-deception and others who recognize a deep capacity for self-less love and interdependence. Given these disparate threads and the fact that there is no unifying doctrine, one can nonetheless distill a set of overlapping ideas that bind the movement together. Source: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

Kierkegaard's Original Synthesis

Selfhood

- Self is a spirit - the spirited component of life.
- The self [is a] synthesis.
- The self is a conjoining, [it is] activity driven, a creative act whereby we are making ourselves what we are and what we are to become.

As a fusion of these polarities, the self is a relation which relates to itself, or that in the relation which is its relating to itself. *Not the relation but the relation's relating to itself.*



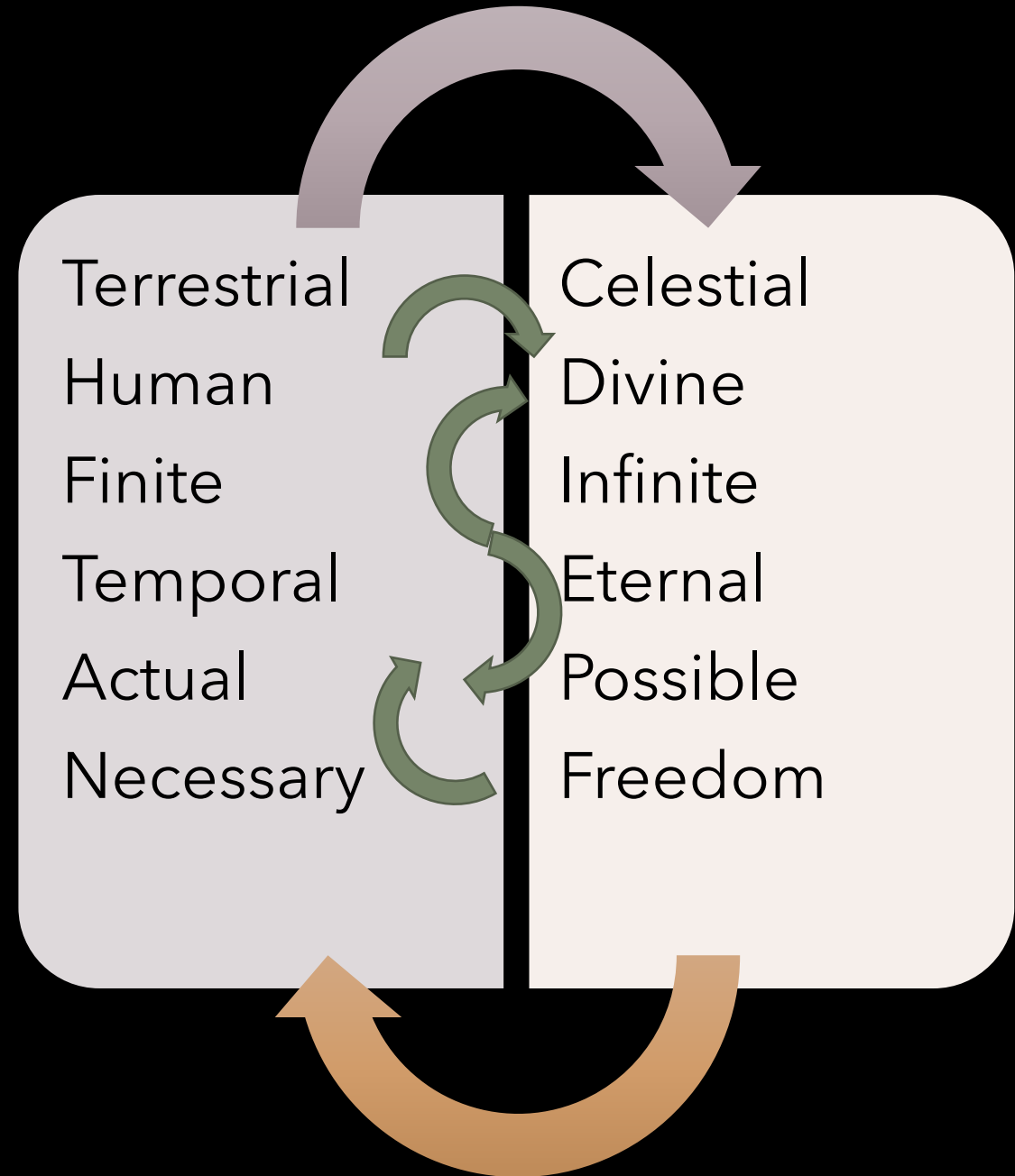
Selfhood

Two relations: Self-self and Self-God.

The self is a relation between the polarities.

The self is the relation that relates itself to itself.

Yet it is not the relation but the **relation's relating** to itself.



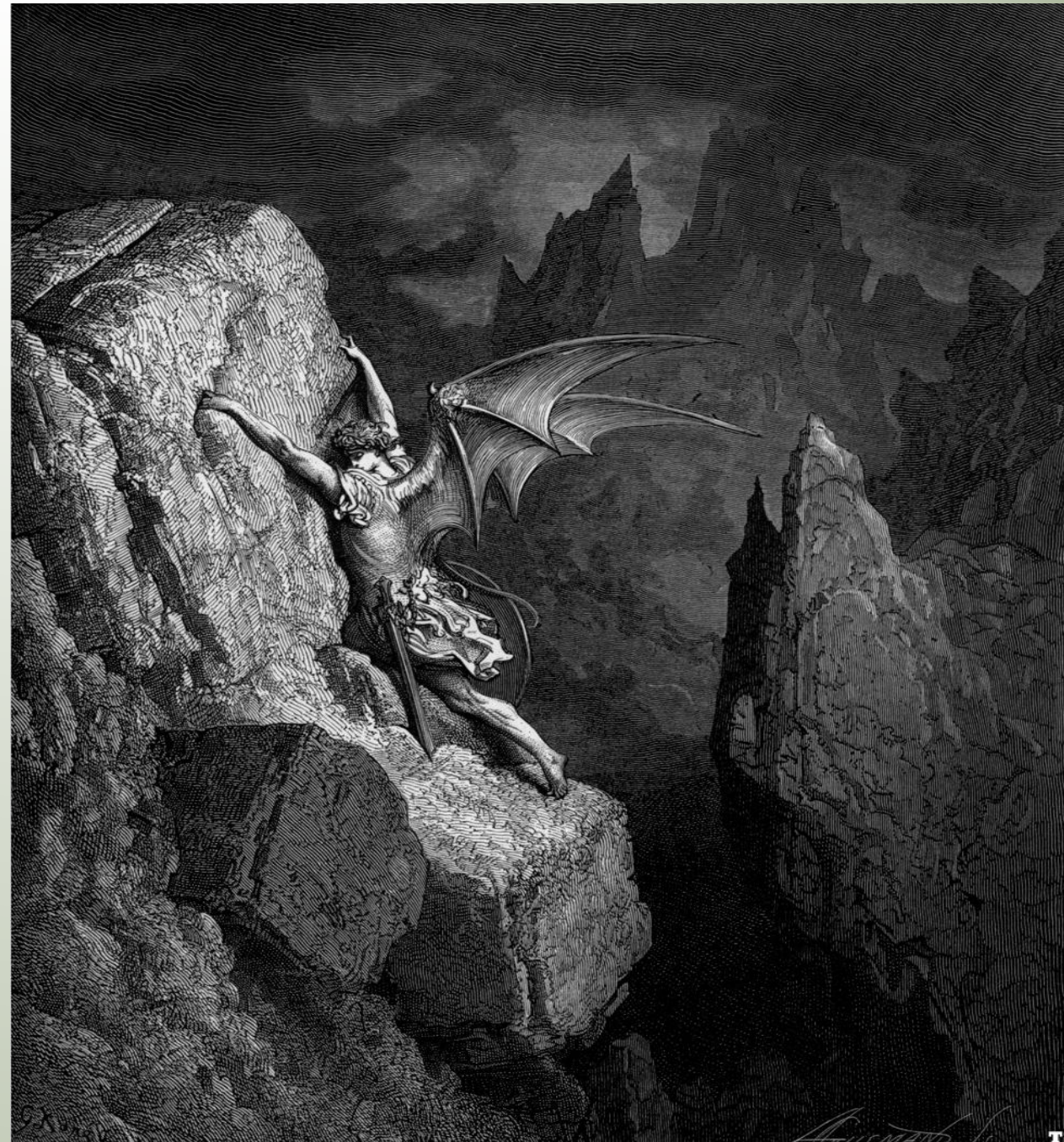
The Inward Journey to God

- Despair as a misrelation of the synthesis, a sickness of the spirit
- *The Sickness Unto Death*
- Knowing oneself in relation to God
- Standing before God from within
- The leap of faith towards the Kingdom of God
- The inward journey of despair into hope →
Genuine freedom

Forms of Despair

- The higher forms of despair belong to beings of higher consciousness
- Consciousness of having a self in which there is something eternal
- In despair of not wanting to be oneself (weakness)

Defiance: The despair of wanting in despair to be oneself





Consciousness

- Self in conscious despair: More will to be oneself or to not be oneself
- Awareness of transgressions
- Awareness of the despair itself
- Responsibility to self
- Responsibility to God
- Responsibility to self-God (eternal relation)

Small Group Discussion Questions

- Do you agree that the more conscious one is of one's transgressions (against God, others), the worse the manifestation of despair in one's life?
- What defenses does Satan utilize to mask the worsening of the despair in his own existence?
- What do humans do to mask the worsening of the despair in their lives? How does this affect the self-self and self-God relationship?
- How does this affect relationships with those closest to us (family, friends, close acquaintances, animals)?

Looking Forward to Next Monday, March 23rd

- **Small Group Discussion Questions**
- **Separation from God**
- **Satan the *Anti-Hero* in *Paradise Lost***
- **Defiance**
- **The Power of Creation**
- **More Small Group Discussion Questions**