A Faith and a Science
Kierkegaard and Nietzsche on Living Existentially

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By

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Table of Contents

**Introduction**  
1

**Section 1** – Kierkegaard Against Philosophical Systems  
4

**Section 2** – From Resignation to Faith: The Leap in *Fear and Trembling*  
19

**Section 3** – A New Health: Joy and Affirmation in *The Gay Science*  
34

**Section 4** – The Revaluation of All Values  
56

**Section 5** – Kierkegaard and Nietzsche Address the Same Problem  
62

**Bibliography**  
79
Introduction

In his piece “On My Philosophy,” Karl Jaspers summarizes the philosophical tradition he finds himself in. He observes that our present age possesses a new quality: “Even in the history of philosophy we can witness the tremendous incisiveness of our age.” Jaspers notes that Hegel, Plato, and Kant have all made tremendous contributions to the world of philosophy and warrant close study. Philosophy did not, however, culminate ultimately in Hegel, but rather moved daringly forward through the works of Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche. Jaspers acknowledges, “we cannot forget for one moment what has been brought about since by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. We are so exposed that we constantly find ourselves facing nothingness. Our wounds are so deep that in our weak moments we wonder if we are not, in fact, dying from them.” It is precisely because of this nothingness we face, these wounds we endure, that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche cannot be forgotten for a moment over a century after their deaths. Jaspers is exactly right in his analysis of their legacy: two philosophers, faced with the abyss, answered it. This attempt at a response is the heart of their philosophy, and the great challenge of their project.

There is no shortage of literature on Kierkegaard and Nietzsche individually, and many have drawn out important parallels between the two. This is frequently, however, qualified with the observation that they fundamentally disagree on a central issue (this is often claimed to be either religion or morality) and thus can never truly be in harmony with one another. With this

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2 One such example is Alastair Hannay’s essay “Nietzsche/Kierkegaard: Prospects for Dialogue?,” in which Hannay, after noting the shared concerns and approaches of the two, goes on to qualify their similarities: “Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are in such fundamental disagreement on the matter that interests them the most that it
common belief about their irreconcilability in mind, my purpose in writing this thesis is twofold: first, I will show that the central issue of both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche’s projects is essentially the same; second, I will argue that while their approaches to this issue may appear irreconcilably different, they are advocating for what I would refer to as nearly identical “ways of life.” As Kierkegaard outlines their fundamental problem in Concluding Unscientific Postscript, we will begin with a look at this text.

First, I will outline Kierkegaard’s critique of philosophical “systems” in Concluding Unscientific Postscript (hereafter CUP), as this is one of the driving forces behind both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche’s work. Next, I will look at how Kierkegaard defines truth (also in CUP), and what that definition means for the possibility of an existential system. With this foundation, I will move into a discussion of Fear and Trembling, in order to examine the characteristics of the Knight of Resignation and the Knight of Faith, as well as the movement from the former to the latter. I will close my look at Kierkegaard in isolation with an analysis of Repetition, focusing primarily on what exactly repetition means for Kierkegaard and what implications it has for his philosophy as a whole.

Moving then into Nietzsche, I will begin by analyzing Nietzsche’s proclamation of the death of God in The Gay Science Book III, for it is similar in many ways to Kierkegaard’s critique of existential systems and serves as a good jumping off point for the remainder of my discussion. I will then examine several passages from Book IV, as this is the focal point for my understanding of Nietzsche’s project. These passages are what I see Nietzsche as arguing for:

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these are his positive arguments and his advocation for a certain way of living. Understanding this, I will next attempt to detail what it is that Nietzsche argues against, and why he decides to go back and say “no” after he decides in *The Gay Science* to only affirm in the future. In this section on Nietzsche’s “no-saying,” I will draw primarily from *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morals*.

After analyzing Kierkegaard and Nietzsche’s projects separately, I will tie the two together. While there are important differences, I will primarily focus on the similarities between their responses to nihilism and the attempt to attain objective truth. Fundamentally, their response is a way of living that affirms life: this is detailed most clearly in *The Gay Science*, and is exemplified by the movement from the Knight of Resignation to the Knight of Faith in *Fear and Trembling*. I will also look at the parallels between Nietzsche’s concept of the eternal return and Kierkegaard’s use of repetition and explain how these two concepts can help illuminate our understanding of their philosophy. I will close with a brief discussion on how and why Kierkegaard and Nietzsche remain relevant today, many years after their deaths: they speak to a fundamentally human question, one that is faced in every culture at every time. We are subjective, existing beings. How can we conduct our lives in a meaningful way when the world seems devoid of an absolute, certain purpose? Kierkegaard and Nietzsche respond to the apparent absence of meaning with a call to create meaning, to embrace the subjectivity and finitude of human existence, and to turn our daily trudge through life into a joyous dance. Their call to live creatively and joyously is a fully human solution to the problem of human life.
Section 1 - Kierkegaard Against Philosophical Systems

In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard famously announces that “An existential system is impossible.” This claim is central to Kierkegaard’s philosophy, and warrants close examination. As a starting point, it is best to clarify exactly what Kierkegaard means by “system,” and what he means by “existential.” Kierkegaard’s work in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* is largely a response to the Hegelian philosophy that dominated Europe at the time. Hegel’s dialectic philosophy deals primarily with the process of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. On the most literal level, this applies to the world of ideas and logic, in which two opposing propositions are reconciled to form a new one (the synthesis), which is more complete than either original proposition. The first proposition, A, comes against a proposition that is in tension with it (which we can refer to as B). This tension makes A incomplete and flawed. Similarly, B is in tension with A, and faces the same problem. Through A being drawn into B and vice versa, a new proposition emerges (proposition C). This third proposition, the *synthesis* of A and B, contains elements of both A and B, uniting them in a way which both preserves elements of each but also fundamentally transforms them. While A and B are preserved in this synthesis, they are also in a way abolished; they are preserved in a *modified* form, a new understanding. A and B are no longer conflicting in C but are raised higher than either was initially on its own. In this process of dialectical logic, the newly synthesized proposition C becomes the starting proposition of a new thesis-antithesis-synthesis dialogue. This exchange and development between two propositions, ultimately synthesized, is referred to as the

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“dialectic” because the resolution is found “between” the “speech” of the two initially conflicting propositions.\(^5\) As this process moves toward completeness, Hegel goes on to assert that this system is a *universal* system: all things are contained in the Absolute Spirit. In the end, the individual concerns of a particular human life are subsumed in the totality of the dialectic system.

It is also important for our present examination to understand what Hegel means when he uses the terms “subjective” and “objective.” One useful example of this in Hegel’s writing is found in a discussion of the dialectic as syllogism. He explains that once a syllogism “has attained the correspondence of its concept (or its middle term) and its existence (or extremes),” the syllogism “has attained its truth—and with that it has stepped out of subjectivity into objectivity.”\(^6\) We see already that subjectivity and objectivity for Hegel have something to do with truth, and that the objective is a state in which truth has been attained (implying that the subjective lacks or has a lesser form of this truth). Furthermore, subjectivity has something to do with inwardness, while objectivity has to do with that which is external and unchanging:

“subjective thought is our own most intimately inner doing, and the objective concept of things constitutes what is essential to them.”\(^7\) It is also clear that while subjectivity is tied to the particular and personal, objectivity deals with the realm of the fundamental and universal: “The principle of a philosophy also expresses a beginning, of course, but not so much a subjective as an objective one, the beginning of *all things.*”\(^8\) Ultimately, however, even such distinctions as subject-object break down in the finality of the absolute Idea, which is where Kierkegaard’s

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\(^5\) “dialectic”: from Greek *dialektos*: dia-, between; + legesthai, to speak.
\(^7\) Ibid, 16.
\(^8\) Ibid, 45.
problem with Hegel comes to a head: “The Idea may be described in many ways. It may be called reason… subject-object; the unity of the ideal and the real, of the finite and the infinite, of soul and body… The Idea is the dialectic which again makes this mass of understanding and diversity understand its finite nature and the pseudo-independence in its productions, and which brings the diversity back to unity.” The individual subjective and universal objective are ultimately taken up into the Idea, their differences mediated and abolished. In this mediation, the subjective and objective are no longer at odds with one another but are unified. The system is perfect and closed.

Kierkegaard is unwilling to accept that a human being could have any real role in such an all-encompassing and completed system. This is not to entirely write off Hegel’s work, however. Kierkegaard praises Hegel as possessing perhaps the most powerful intellect in history: “If Hegel had written his entire Logic and said in the preface that it was merely a thought-experiment in which he had even shirked things in various places, he would no doubt have been the greatest thinker who ever lived. As it is he is comical.” This critique of Hegel being “comical” comes up repeatedly in Kierkegaard’s critiques, and is useful in understanding why Kierkegaard views all existential systems as impossible. For Kierkegaard, existential systems, i.e. attempts to capture human existence systematically, wholly, finally (Hegel being the chief offender), effectively write humans out of existence itself, and wholly disregard the significance of all lived experience. Emphasizing the comic nature of this systematic endeavor, Kierkegaard warns that “One must therefore be very careful in dealing with a philosopher of the Hegelian school, and, above all, to make certain of the identity of the being with whom one has the honor to discourse.

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Is he a human being, an existing human being? Is he himself *sub specie aeterni*, even when he sleeps, eats, blows his nose, or does whatever else a human being does?” Through merely listing mundane activities of human life, Kierkegaard demonstrates the absurdity of a philosopher claiming to stand outside history and participate in absolute, perfect reason: one can never escape the need to sleep or eat, and such daily practices ought to draw us back from our more fantastical thoughts, and remind us that we are finite.12

Calvin Schrag expands on this “comic problem” in *Existence and Freedom: Towards an Ontology of Human Finitude*. He observes, “The Hegelian system makes the existential subject accidental and transforms him into something objective, indifferent, and impersonal. He becomes intellectually vaporized in the rarefied heights of pure thought. The comic predicament is precisely that the system embraces thought, only to lose the thinker. Thus it becomes a satire on the thinker himself.”13 Just as Kierkegaard stresses maintaining the contradiction between the finite and infinite, so too does the “comic predicament” turn on this contradiction: a finite human claims to grasp the infinite and absolute. For a helpful comparison, we may consider the humor found in several children standing on one another’s shoulders inside a trench coat, pretending to be an adult man in order to see an R rated film. It is funny because they are so clearly not an adult man: perhaps the top child’s voice cracks when he speaks, or a face is quickly glimpsed between the buttons of the coat. There is a tension between the attempt at seriousness and adulthood by the children, and their inability to escape the condition of their youth. In the same

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12 I am reminded of the practice dealing with a victorious general at Roman triumphs, recounted by Tertullian. “When he is in the very prime of his glory, sitting in his triumphal chariot, even then he is admonished to know himself a man, by one speaking from behind in these words, ‘Look back, and remember yourself to be but man.’” Tertullian, *The Apology of Tertullian*, translated by Jeremy Collier (n.p.: Sagwan Press, 2018), 97.
way, Kierkegaard says that we ought to laugh at a Hegelian who claims to reach the universal while needing to fulfill the very particular needs of their physical form. The “rarefied heights of pure thought” give birth to many fascinating and fantastic ideas, but one plays the part of the fool in disregarding whether these ideas have an application or truth for an existing individual. That is not, however, to say that one could attempt to create an absolute objective system that is compatible with lived experience; on the contrary, by virtue of being a system, the system cannot possible include finite beings such as humans. Kierkegaard argues that existing necessarily entails becoming, as an existing individual must go through experiences and change. This is contrasted with that which is “objective,” which is complete and thus must remain static in being, for to be able to become would imply that the objective is not yet finished, which is contradictory.

Kierkegaard further elaborates on the incompatibility of existing and being “finished” in a system, specifically with regard to the Hegelian principle of “mediation,” of synthesis. Kierkegaard believes that this works in abstract principle, but once again falls apart when applied to an existing individual: “may we not here resort to a mediation, and say: It is on neither side, but in the mediation of both? Excellently well said, provided we might have it explained how an existing individual manages to be in a state of mediation. For to be in a state of mediation is to be finished, while to exist is to become. Nor can an existing individual be in two places at the same

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14 As always, Kierkegaard has a wonderful and humorous metaphor for this exact problem. Referring to Hegel through the flimsy guise of a “German professor,” Kierkegaard speaks of the attempted existential application of speculative philosophy: “For such a speculative philosopher could hardly be more embarrassed than by the sincere and enthusiastic zeal of a learner who proposes to express and to realize his wisdom by appropriating it existentially. For this wisdom is something that the Herr Professor has merely imagined, and written books about, but never himself tried. Aye, it has never even occurred to him that this could be done. Like the custom clerk who writes what he could not himself read, satisfied that his responsibilities ended with the writing, so there are speculative philosophers who write what, when it is to be read in the light of action, shows itself to be nonsense, unless it is, perhaps, intended only for fantastic beings.” Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, 171.

15 Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, 74.
time—he cannot be an identity of subject and object.” As though the point were not made clear, Kierkegaard states it even more explicitly: “An existential system cannot be formulated… Reality itself is a system—for God; but it cannot be a system for any existing spirit. System and finality correspond to one another, but existence is precisely the opposite of finality.” It is therefore important to note that Kierkegaard does not deny the possibility of a universal and absolute system: as far as Kierkegaard knows, Hegel could very well be right about the nature of the universal system. Where Kierkegaard and Hegel diverge, then, is whether such a system can be formulated and understood by an existing individual, and whether it can have any real impact on the way one conducts their life.

The problem of mediation in the absolute, and how it can possibly relate to human existence, is one of Kierkegaard’s primary focuses in the Postscript. For Kierkegaard, an important aspect of existence is that it holds apart. As he explains after declaring the impossibility of an existential system, “system and existence are incapable of being thought together; because in order to think existence at all, systematic thought must think it as abrogated, and hence as not existing. Existence separates, and hold the various moments of existence discretely apart; the systematic thought consists of the finality which brings them together.” Systematic philosophy cannot merely disregard or attempt to swallow up the “various moments of existence,” though this itself would be (for Kierkegaard) an affront to all living beings. Rather, there is no room for existence (and by extension the existing individual) anywhere in the system; it must be unequivocally denied or destroyed before the system can ever attempt to call itself “complete.” Kierkegaard further illustrates the issue by observing that there is not even any room

16 Ibid, 178.  
for the system’s own creator, or any other existing being for that matter: “Existence must be revoked in the eternal before the system can round itself out; there must be no existing remainder, not even such a little minikin as the existing Herr Professor who writes the system.”

Schrag notes that this problem, the lack of any individual existence or “selfhood” in such a system, was central to Kierkegaard’s criticism:

It was on this point that Kierkegaard most bitterly opposed the idealism and rationalism of Hegel. Hegel could confer significance on the individual only as a moment in the self-actualization of the universal consciousness of the Absolute Spirit. Hegel recognized that nothing great in history happens without passion and interest expressed in individual actors, but in his system these individual actors become the ‘victims’ of a universal consciousness which defines their significance and determines their destiny. The closer the Hegelian system approaches its completion, the less important the individual becomes, and in the end the Hegelian finds himself unable to define the relation of the system to the existing individual. The individual is swallowed up by the universal-historical.

For Kierkegaard, this is also the reason why the Hegelian system fails to include an ethics: ethical concerns are necessarily found within the realm of the individual and the discrete moments that make up one’s life, as it is in these moments that ethical decisions must be made. Kierkegaard compares the Hegelian with the existential in this way: “While the Hegelian philosophy goes on and on and becomes an existential system in sheer distraction of mind, and what is more, is finished—without having an Ethics (where existence properly belongs), the more simple philosophy which is propounded by an existing individual for existing individuals, will more especially emphasize the ethical.”

Hegelian philosophy cannot accommodate (and in fact must do away with) existing individuals; the system finds no place for existence. As Kierkegaard has explained, system corresponds with finality, while to exist is to become. This is the way in which the individual is “swallowed up” in the universal in Hegel’s system, and this is

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19 Ibid., 111.
20 Schrag, Existence and Freedom, 53.
21 Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, 110.
why Kierkegaard does not believe that such a system is compatible with or true for an existing individual.

Further considering the potential effects of embracing the Hegelian Dialectic in one’s life, we come to a “fork in the road.” There are two potential reactions, quite different from one another. The first being the realization that each of our actions ripples throughout all time and space, as all things are connected in this “melting pot” of negation and synthesis: thus the particular determinations of our lives have consequence (unfathomably enormous consequence, unless one is capable of grasping the totality of all things). The second reaction, which more correctly interprets Hegelian Dialectic as it relates to our lives, can be summarized in this way: if all particular determinations, everything that we hold as individuals, will ultimately be stripped and finally synthesized into the Absolute Idea, then our particular determinations are really of no consequence whatsoever. After all, what weight could the peculiarities of our subjective existence hold when measured against the totality of all things under the Absolute Spirit?

If we accept Kierkegaard’s analysis and criticisms of Hegel, particularly the impossibility of an absolute system being in relation to an existing individual, then the necessary step becomes clear: what is needed is an existential way, one that is both formulated and carried out in existence. Kierkegaard repeatedly asserts that there is a great difference between the absolute and the existential: “Surely it is one thing for something to be a philosophical doctrine which desires to be intellectually grasped and speculatively understood, and quite another thing to be a doctrine that proposes to be realized in existence.” Hegel’s system, according to Kierkegaard, is to be exclusively grasped intellectually and understood speculatively, by an existing individual, and

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22 Ibid, 182.
23 Ibid, 339n
this is where the problem lies. A finite individual engaged in becoming can, perhaps, attempt to
intellectually grasp the absolute system (though the possibility of even this is uncertain); to
appropriate or incorporate such a system into one’s experience and action is an entirely different
matter. 24 Furthermore, the highest end that can be attained in an absolute system and an
existential method is equally different: “In relation to a doctrine, understanding is the maximum
of what may be attained; to become an adherent is merely an artful method of pretending to
understand, practiced by people who do not understand anything. In relation to an existential
communication, existing in it is the maximum of attainment, and understanding it is merely an
evasion of the task.” 25 This concept of understanding being an evasion is well illustrated by
Kierkegaard’s seemingly contradictory assertion that “it is easier to become a Christian when I
am not a Christian than to become a Christian when I am one.” 26 While this at first appears
contrary to reason, it is in keeping with Kierkegaard’s previous assertions. One who is already a
Christian in name but does not live out Christianity in their experience understands Christianity:
they are able to cite relevant passages from scripture, allude to the decisions of various church
councils, and recall certain particularly moving sermons on a variety of topics. This individual
has attained the highest understanding of the doctrine, but this is only a hollow understanding.
To be a Christian, one must “realize in existence” the teachings found in scripture. Thus, one
who comes to Christianity without understanding it is in a better position to appropriate
Christianity in their experience, as they do not come to it with the pretense of understanding.
When one has grown up in Christianity and knows no other way of life, it can be easy to accept

24 “A speculative philosophy which dabbles in theology does not have much, if anything, in common with a doctrine
which, rather than being speculatively understood, is subjectively appropriated.” Shannon Nason, “Opposites,
25 Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, 332n.
26 Ibid, 327.
its teachings and traditions without thinking; one who only comes to it later in life may have an easier time critically examining Christianity and seriously reflecting upon it.

It is clear that Kierkegaard’s refutation of Hegel relies upon the distinction between the universal and the individual, the infinite and the finite, the “what” and the “how.” Kierkegaard further defines these as the “objective” and the “subjective,” respectfully. He explains, “The objective accent falls on WHAT is said, the subjective accent on HOW it is said.”27 While this point is found throughout the arguments already examined, it is isolated and made most clear in one of Kierkegaard’s clever parables. He tells:

I shall here permit myself to tell a story, which without any sort of adaptation on my part comes direct from an asylum. A patient in such an institution seeks to escape, and actually succeeds in effecting his purpose by leaping out of a window, and prepares to start on the road to freedom, when the thought strikes him (shall I say sanely enough or madly enough?): “When you come to town you will be recognized, and you will at once be brought back here again; hence you need to prepare yourself fully to convince everyone by the objective truth of what you say, that all is in order as far as your sanity is concerned.” As he walks along and thinks about this, he sees a ball lying on the ground, picks it up, and puts it in the tail pocket of his coat. Every step he takes the ball strikes him, politely speaking, on his hinder parts, and every time it thus strikes him he says: “Bang, the earth is round.” He comes to the city, and all at once calls on one of his friends; he wants to convince him that he is not crazy, and therefore walks back and forth, saying continually: “Bang, the earth is round!” But is the earth not round?28

In this way, Kierkegaard humorously illustrates the significant difference between what is said, and how that thing is said. The madman is in no way mistaken regarding what he says: the earth is indeed round. Rather, it is the way the madman goes about proclaiming this fact that lands him back in the asylum. This is in line with Kierkegaard’s general critique of Hegel. It remains entirely possible that Hegel is objectively, factually correct, and God did order the universe to be a sort of Hegelian system. This, however, would be impossible for existing humans to

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27 Ibid, 181.
subjectively experience. This hearkens back to Kierkegaard’s praise of Hegel as having perhaps the greatest intellect of all time. He is (possibly) able to grasp things about the world far beyond the understanding of most humans, but this is not where the problem lies. Hegel becomes the “madman” when he attempts to claim that his system is entirely objective, the pure “what” of the world, despite being written by human hands and conceived by a finite (though genius) human mind. In his relentless pursuit of the absolute, Hegel has neglected the commonplace and the ethical, which are largely what comprise our individual lives. As Kierkegaard summarizes, “The way of objective reflection makes the subject accidental, and thereby transforms existence into something indifferent, something vanishing. Away from the subject the objective way of reflection leads to the objective truth, and while the subject and his subjectivity become indifferent, the truth also becomes indifferent.”

This idea of the objective leading away from the subject, and making the truth indifferent, is crucial to understanding why Kierkegaard sees the need for an existential response to philosophical systems. For this reason, it is a point worth examining further.

Kierkegaard does his readers a favor in Concluding Unscientific Postscript by giving a clear and concise definition of truth as he understands it. He has even gone to the trouble of italicizing it, so that we might be certain of its importance:

When subjectivity is the truth, the conceptual determination of the truth must include an expression for the antithesis to objectivity, a memento of the fork in the road where the way swings off; this expression will at the same time serve as an indication of the tension of the subjective inwardness. Here is such a definition of truth: An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the utmost inwardness is the truth, the highest truth attainable for an existing individual.

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29 Ibid, 173.
30 Ibid, 182.
First, Kierkegaard reminds us that, while he is concerning himself with subjective truth, this does not mean that there is only subjective truth. As mentioned previously, Kierkegaard believes that there can indeed be objective truth, but not for an existing individual. For humans truth must be of a subjective nature, and this is reflected in Kierkegaard’s mention of the “fork in the road where the way swings off,” the point where we move away from universal objectivity and into the existential realm of truth as subjectivity. Truth is an objective uncertainty; this seems contradictory, but Kierkegaard clarifies, “At the point where the way swings off… there objective knowledge is placed in abeyance. Thus the subject merely has, objectively, the uncertainty… The truth is precisely the venture which chooses an objective uncertainty with the passion of the infinite.”

One can only be certain of the objective; the word “certain” has its origin in the Latin word “certus,” meaning “fixed,” or “settled.” Of course, the existent is incompatible with being fixed or settled, as Kierkegaard has explained. In this way it is only the uncertainty itself that is certain, and even this is not “fixed” as objective knowledge, but is rather held fast through a process, ongoing and ever-unfinished. Schrag reflects on the meaning of this “appropriation-process” in *Existence and Freedom*:

> Truth is not something which I possess or have but rather is something which I am and live… The metaphor of ownership when applied to the relation of the individual to truth is grossly misleading. This is already to objectify truth, to think of it as an object which I would grasp in the same way that I would grasp a piece of chalk. But the truth of existence is not an objective truth in this sense. Existential truth is a mode of existence and a way of life. It is something which one is rather than has, something which one lives rather than possesses.

It is important that Kierkegaard defines truth as a process, as this is the most significant point of departure from traditional accounts of truth. Through this process we do not come to possess

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31 Ibid, 182.
33 This can be contrasted with, for example, Aristotle’s famous definition of truth in the *Metaphysics*: “To say that what is is not, or that what is not is, is false; but to say that what is, and what is not is not, is true To say that what
truth (as Schrag explains), but rather we live truth. This is what makes the pursuit of truth a process of “the most passionate inwardness,” it is subjective and must be lived. 34 Kierkegaard provides an illuminating example of what can happen when one believes they possess truth, but does not attempt to take it inwardly. Schrag summarizes:

Nathan came to David with a story: There lived two men in a city. One man was a rich man with a huge flock of sheep. The other was a poor man with nothing save one ewe lamb, which as his sole possession was his pride and joy. Now it happens that a stranger passes through the city, takes nothing from the rich man but steals from the poor man his sole possession. Upon hearing the story, David, his anger kindled, boldly pronounces, “This man surely ought to be put to death.” To which the prophet Nathan replies, “Thou art the man!” 35

While David is able to understand impersonally that stealing is especially wrong from those who have little (and is even enraged by the thought), he is unable to connect this truth to his own theft of Bathsheba from her husband Uriah. David fails to approach the truth inwardly, and cannot see himself as the thief in the story. This is the difference between the objective and the subjective, which Schrag explains: “The story of the two men and the stranger was an objective story which David could analyze in terms of a theoretical detachment. But ‘Thou art the man’ constituted another story; it effected the transition to the subjective.” 36 It is only through relating to truth and attempting to incorporate it into one’s lived experience that one can undergo this existential process. The process always remains unfinished; this is not a failure on the part of the truth-seeker but rather a condition for the process itself.

34 Subjectivity and inwardness are intimately linked in Kierkegaard’s thought, such as in the following quote: “Objectively the interest is focused solely on the thought-content, subjectively on the inwardness” (CUP 181). This hearkens back to the what/how distinction. As explained previously, the “how” aspect must be lived—there cannot be a manner of living and relation without lived experiences and relations.
35 Schrag, Existence and Freedom, 7.
36 Ibid, 7-8.
The truth available to a finite being is never as grand and ultimate as the all-encompassing objective truth that the Hegelians and other systematists claim to possess, but it is one that can be related to and lived, and no systematic truth can be engaged with in such a way. In keeping with Kierkegaard’s definition of truth as an “appropriation process,” the truth that is available to existing individuals must be personal. How could one bring a finished universal system into any sort of process, much less one that occurs on the individual level; the impersonal objectivity of the system stands against any motion of inwardness. For this reason, the truth of the Hegelian system must always be outside the experience of the existing individual. If someone currently engaged in existence is unsatisfied with the conditions of subjective truth, Kierkegaard proposes that they must look beyond the realm of human experience. In one brief passage, Kierkegaard issues his most honest and insightful critique of Hegel while providing one more reflection on the finitude of humanity:

If a dancer could leap very high, we would admire him. But if he tried to give the impression that he could fly, let laughter single him out for suitable punishment; even though it might be true that he could leap as high as any dancer ever had done. Leaping is the accomplishment of a being essentially earthly, one who respects the earth’s gravitational force, since the leaping is only momentary. But flying carries a suggestion of being emancipated from telluric conditions, a privilege reserved for winged creatures, and perhaps also shared by the inhabitants of the moon—and there perhaps the System will find its true readers.\(^3^7\)

There is great value and beauty in a dancer that leaps very high, and such a dancer ought to be respected for their talents and dedication. It is when a dancer claims to instead have joined the winged creatures and inhabitants of the moon that the dance becomes comedic rather than awe-inspiring. To those who have pined endlessly for wings (or speak as though they have actually learned to fly), Kierkegaard provides an alternative: with enough practice, we might strengthen our legs enough to jump very high indeed, making our dance all the more beautiful. Leaping is

\(^3^7\) Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 112-113.
the place of the human, and we humans ought to take great pride in our ability to escape the irresistible pull of the earth for a short time. For Kierkegaard, the concept of dancing and leaping is of the utmost significance, and he reuses this language in his powerful *Fear and Trembling*. The “dance” that Kierkegaard describes there expands upon this concept found in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, and it is in his discussion of the “leap” from resignation to faith that Kierkegaard shows us the wondrous things humans are capable of in spite of (because of) our finitude. From *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* we have come to know Kierkegaard’s argument against philosophical systems: the finality of system is incompatible with the decidedly unfinished process of an individual human life. The truth offered by Hegel cannot be true for the existing individual, and one must instead search for truth through the aforementioned appropriation process which takes place in human experience. The question remains, however, of what exactly this process might look like, and how one might go about seeking this newly-understood individual truth. For this, we must look at the movement from resignation to faith; it is through this process that truth is appropriated. Perhaps most importantly, this is not a process of rigorousness or seriousness, but one of creativity and joy.
Section 2 - From Resignation to Faith: The Leap in Fear and Trembling

Kierkegaard provides a poetic call to a new way of life through his depiction of the knights of resignation and faith, as well as the movement between them. If *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* is Kierkegaard’s analysis of the problem and rejection of previous solutions, *Fear and Trembling* contains Kierkegaard’s own attempt at a solution. This “solution” is not the complete and final answer put forth by systematic philosophies, but it is true to the subjective human experience. For the sake of understanding Kierkegaard’s existential solution, we must first define what is meant here by “existential.” This is best understood in contrast with what we might call Hegel’s “absolute” method. Where Hegel’s method and system deal with the universal and are far removed from the daily experience of a living individual, Kierkegaard advocates a return to personal experience; any sort of approach to or explanation of life must be rooted in the individual, in one’s existence. To understand what Kierkegaard is saying about our own existence, it is most important to examine the “double-movement” of faith as exemplified by the knights of resignation and faith. Kierkegaard acknowledges that many past thinkers have mistaken resignation as being the higher of the two, but asserts that this is wholly incorrect: while resignation deals with the “infinite” and seems higher, it is in fact faith’s ability to elevate the commonplace and the finite that makes it great. This act of moving beyond resignation in order to affirm and embrace the human, subjective elements of life is Kierkegaard’s solution to the emptiness left behind by the failure of systematic philosophy. Kierkegaard rejects the possibility of an existential system, and instead gives us an existential way.

Before delving into the details of the knights of resignation and faith, it is important to understand how Kierkegaard relates this to the story of Abraham and Isaac, as this is the parable around which the entirety of *Fear and Trembling* revolves. The facts of the parable are
straightforward and well-known. After initially believing that he and his wife Sarah would be unable to conceive a child, Abraham is given a son through God. The son, named Isaac, becomes Abraham’s greatest pride and deepest love. Moreover, Isaac is Abraham’s promised child, and the one foretold to carry on Abraham’s legacy. God then tests Abraham’s faithfulness by asking him to sacrifice Isaac, and surrender to God that which he treasures most in the world. Abraham faithfully takes Isaac to the nearby Mount Moriah, and binds Isaac to a wooden altar. As Abraham is about to bring the knife down and sacrifice Isaac, an angel of God calls out to Abraham, ordering him to spare the child and instead sacrifice a ram caught in a thicket close by. Abraham has passed the test, and his descendants will be blessed.

Kierkegaard is deeply moved by this story, and is particularly fascinated by Abraham’s ability to attempt to sacrifice Isaac while maintaining complete faith that things would turn out well. In examining the difference between Kierkegaard’s accounts of the faith of Abraham and the alternative possibility of resignation by Abraham, we can come to an understanding of what Kierkegaard means by both faith and resignation, and why Kierkegaard considers faith to be higher. As evidenced in the parable, Abraham does not hesitate to take Isaac to the sacrificial mount, despite understanding the implications of losing his only beloved son. This is because, according to Kierkegaard, Abraham believed at every moment that his son would not be lost to him; despite the absurdity of the belief (and the situation itself), Abraham was certain that he could genuinely attempt to go through with the sacrifice without losing his son. Kierkegaard writes of Abraham:

All that time he believed—he believed that God would not require Isaac of him, whereas he was willing nevertheless to sacrifice him if it was required. He believed by virtue of the absurd; for there could be no question of human calculation, and it was indeed the absurd that God who required it of him should the next instant recall the requirement…

38 For the original biblical text, see Genesis 22:1-19
He was indeed astonished at the outcome, but by a double-movement he had reached his first position, and therefore he received Isaac more gladly than the first time.\(^{39}\)

For Kierkegaard, this is the single greatest example of faith: maintaining, even face-to-face with the utter absurdity of it all, that all will be well. Abraham trusted himself, despite the great fear he must have felt somewhere deep in his chest. Kierkegaard asserts that Abraham believed “by virtue of the absurd” when human reason failed him. It truly was an absurd situation in which Abraham found himself on top of Mount Moriah. Isaac represented the culmination of Abraham’s entire life and purpose, his destiny to be the father of a great and numerous people promised to him by God. How, then, could Abraham reconcile this promise with God’s present demand of a sacrifice? Reason cannot bridge this gap, but Abraham was able to believe by virtue of the absurd. It was an absurd demand by God, and equally absurd that God would rescind the demand at the climactic moment; Abraham nevertheless believed. On the mountaintop, Abraham came up against his own existence and finitude. Rather than attempting to abstract himself or devise some sort of all-encompassing system that claims to assimilate every absurd moment, Abraham remains always with one foot in the human and finite. It is through a recognition and embrace of this finitude, of the seemingly irreconcilable gap between the human and the absolute, that Abraham is able to believe. This is the foundation of the “double-movement” that Kierkegaard’s Abraham makes, the movement that allows him not only to believe that Isaac will be returned to him, but also allows Abraham to receive Isaac gladly. While this is referred to as a “movement,” the individual making it (in this case Abraham) never truly leaves his original position fully. This double movement, which is most fully exemplified by the knight of faith, is the grasping of the infinite while remaining rooted in the finite and existential. It is Abraham’s

ability to receive Isaac back joyfully as a loving father, while simultaneously being prepared to 
sacrifice Isaac at God’s command. The double movement is the ability to *dance* through 
existence, reaching the heights of faith and touching the infinite without ever losing sight of 
one’s humanity and finitude. This is Kierkegaard’s knight of faith in action, though from just this 
example it is unclear exactly how one would get to this point, or exactly what a knight of faith 
would look like in an everyday circumstance; very few will be called on to sacrifice their 
children (one would hope). To trace the formation of a knight of faith, we must first go back to 
the concept of resignation, as this is the step that true faith must inevitably pass through. As 
Kierkegaard writes, “The infinite resignation is the last stage prior to faith, so that one who has 
not made this movement has not faith; for only in the infinite resignation do I become clear to 
myself with respect to my eternal validity, and only then can there be any question of grasping 
existence by virtue of faith.”\textsuperscript{40} We must now examine what exactly Kierkegaard means by 
resignation, so that we might see why it is the necessary prerequisite to faith.

Against Abraham’s timeless demonstration of faith, Kierkegaard portrays a lesser 
Abraham, one who failed God’s test and fell into resignation rather than attaining the heights of 
faith.\textsuperscript{41} Kierkegaard writes, “If Abraham the instant he swung his leg over the ass’s back had said 
to himself, ‘Now, since Isaac is lost, I might just as well sacrifice him here at home, rather than 
ride the long way to Moriah’—then I should have no need of Abraham, whereas now I bow 
seven times before his name and seventy times before his deed.”\textsuperscript{42} This is the essence of 
resignation: surrendering when met with the infinite, accepting that there are greater powers that

\textsuperscript{40} Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 57.
\textsuperscript{41} Kierkegaard presents multiple accounts of what the journey to Moriah may have been like, attempting to convey 
the sheer weight of Abraham having to walk for several days with his son, all the while believing that they were 
walking to the place of Isaac’s death.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid, 47.
have already determined the course of fate long before one was faced with the illusion of a choice. To show what the knight of resignation looks like divorced from such dire circumstances, Kierkegaard gives another parable, this being of a young man in love with a princess. The young man is absorbed by his love for the princess, so much so that “the whole content of his life consists in this love.” This love is unable to ever be fully realized, for he is but a poor country boy and would never win the affection of a wealthy princess. Those around the young man might tell him that his love ought to be abandoned in favor of something more practical, such as a relationship with a rich widow. If the young man assumes the mantle of the knight of infinite resignation, he will disregard all such advice: “He does not give up his love, not for all the glory of the world.” Rather, the young man wholly embraces his impossible love, and allows it to fully consume him, coursing at every moment through his blood. Once the young man as the knight of resignation has done thusly, he is prepared to make the movement of the infinite.

Kierkegaard details this movement:

So the knight makes the movement—but what movement? Will he forget the whole thing?... No! For the knight does not contradict himself, and it is a contradiction to forget the whole content of one’s life and yet remain the same man. To become another man he feels no inclination, nor does he by any means regard this as greatness... So the knight remembers everything, but precisely this remembrance is pain, and yet by the infinite resignation he is reconciled with existence. Love for that princess became for him the expression for an eternal love, assumed a religious character, was transfigured into a love for the Eternal Being, which did to be sure deny him the fulfilment of his love, yet reconciled him again by the eternal consciousness of its validity in the form of eternity, which no reality can take from him.

The movement of infinite resignation is fundamentally a subjugation of the finite to the infinite. The knight does not forget the finite, but rather allows the finite to pass away into something

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43 Ibid, 52-57.
44 Ibid, 52.
45 Ibid, 52
46 Ibid, 54.
eternal, assuming a “religious character,” and becoming oriented solely toward the eternal. It takes that which is impossible in the finite (such as a princess’s love) and makes it possible in the realm of the infinite through resignation. This is characterized by the young man’s loss of interest in the finite aspects of his love. The young man does not feel the need to see his love, and is not particularly interested in her day to day activities. More dramatically, the young man is not even concerned or shaken when the princess marries a prince, shutting the young man off from her love finally and certainly. When faced with this awful circumstance, “the knight does not annul his resignation, he preserves his love just as young as it was in its first moment, he never lets it go from him, precisely because he makes the movements infinitely.” One cannot help but notice that there are similarities between the systematic approach of philosophers like Hegel and the movements of the knight of infinite resignation. Both allow the finite to be swallowed up in the infinite, and claim that, through incorporation into the eternal, the finite and subjective are preserved and lifted up. Even if the motions of the finite seem to contradict the infinite and the system (such as the princess’s marriage to a wealthy prince), this is of no particular consequence to one who has resigned the finite and embraced the infinite. It is important to note here the difference between contradiction in Hegel’s system and Kierkegaard’s movement towards the knight of faith. In Hegel’s absolute system, any “contradiction” in the finite is ultimately resolved through the process of synthesis and taken up in the universal. All apparent contradictions are ultimately resolved, and there is no contradiction in the infinite. In Kierkegaard, however, the finite and the infinite stand at odds with one another, and neither can

47 “Fools and young men prate about everything being possible for a man. That, however, is a great error. Spiritually speaking, everything is possible, but in the world of the finite there is much which is not possible. This impossible, however, the knight makes possible by expressing it spiritually, but he expresses it spiritually by waiving his claim to it.” Ibid, 54.
48 “He no longer takes a finite interest in what the princess is doing, and precisely this is proof that he has made the movement infinitely.” Ibid, 55.
49 Ibid, 55.
be done away with; this is a fundamental aspect of the human experience, of being an existing individual. Even when one is swept up in the infinite, one remains an existing human; similarly, each person feels at times a call beyond the finite, a desire for some deeper and timeless meaning or purpose. For Hegel contradiction is an obstacle to be overcome and forgotten, but in Kierkegaard it is this contradiction between the finite and infinite that makes individual existence so unique, beautiful, and ultimately, as we shall soon see, joyful.

Just as we find Kierkegaard greatly respecting Hegel’s intellect (though Kierkegaard cannot help but mock Hegel’s seriousness), so too does Kierkegaard express deep admiration for the stalwart knight of infinite resignation. He observes that, “In the infinite resignation there is peace and rest; every man who wills it, who has not abased himself by scorning himself (which is still more dreadful than being proud), can train himself to make this movement which in its pain reconciles one with existence.”

Kierkegaard acknowledges the comfort that surrendering can bring; it is far easier to say of a tragedy or difficult situation that it was destined to happen, and all occurs for the purpose of some greater unknowable plan. The infinite resignation is, in this way, solely a looking forward: it is a surrender of the present, of one’s very existence, to the infinite and the eternal. Though this resignation ends with the infinite, it begins in existence, through suffering in the finite. Kierkegaard compares infinite resignation to a mythical shirt made of tears, capable of protecting its wearer better than iron or steel. Through suffering, the individual can be estranged from the world, using the pain as a sort of buffer between oneself and existence. While the attempt to rise above or escape existence is noble to Kierkegaard, he also makes clear that this way falls short of being fully human, and fails to attain the heights of faith. Of one who mistakes resignation for a greater achievement than faith, Kierkegaard says,

50 Ibid, 56.
51 Ibid, 56.
“This is the greatest falsehood, for my prodigious resignation was the surrogate for faith.”

Imagining himself as the knight of resignation in Abraham’s stead, Kierkegaard asserts that his attempt to meet the terrible situation with resignation would inevitably fail, for there could be no happy ending even should Isaac be returned to him: “By my behavior I would have spoiled the whole story; for if I had got Isaac back again, I would have been in embarrassment. What Abraham found easiest, I would have found hard, namely to be joyful again with Isaac.” This is the true failure of resignation: where faith is able to gladly return to the finite and receive existence with joyfulfulness, resignation is unable to return from the infinite with anything but sorrow and hesitation. For when one commits oneself wholly to the infinite and the absolute, there is nothing left to inhabit the finite and the commonplace. To surrender everything and reach for the infinite, and still be able to return to everyday life with joy, one must pass beyond the knight of resignation and assume the mantle of the knight of faith.

How does one pass beyond resignation and reach faith? Kierkegaard gives the first clue when, discussing the movement of faith beyond resignation, he states that “after having made the movements of infinity, [faith] makes those of finiteness.” This is quite similar to the distinction between the objective and the subjective: where the objective reaches for the universal and absolute, the subjective remains in the finite and personal. The distinction continues in Kierkegaard’s first explicit comparison of the knight of resignation with the knight of faith: “The knights of the infinite resignation are easily recognized: their gait is gliding and assured. Those on the other hand who carry the jewel of faith are likely to be delusive, because their outward

52 Ibid, 46.
53 Ibid, 46.
54 “By my own strength I am able to give up the princess, and I shall not become a grumbler., but shall find joy and repose in my pain; but by my own strength I am not able to get her again, for I am employing all my strength to be resigned.” Ibid, 60.
55 Ibid, 48.
appearance bears a striking resemblance to that which both the infinite resignation and faith profoundly despise... to Philistinism." Always the lover of paradoxes, Kierkegaard has provided yet another with this first depiction of the knight of faith. He claims that the knight of faith seems strikingly similar to one who has outright disdain for art, poetry, intellectual pursuits, and beauty in general, favoring instead the commonplace and drab. This, of course, is not at all to say that the knight of faith actually behaves and feels this way, but rather can easily be mistaken for such an individual. After Kierkegaard has described the manner of the knight of faith, the reason for this paradoxical claim becomes clear. In describing a possible encounter with a knight of faith, Kierkegaard mistakes the knight for yet another traditionally unsavory individual: “The moment I set eyes on him I instantly push him from me, I myself leap backwards, I clasp my hands and say half aloud, ‘Good Lord, is this the man? Is it really he? Why, he looks like a tax collector!’ However, it is the man after all.” Kierkegaard launches into a lengthy description of the knight of faith’s day-to-day activities, taking care to show at every instant that the knight goes about the day just as anyone else would, and is indeed largely indistinguishable on the surface level. The only indication that the knight of faith might be more than the common individual is the knight’s optimism and ability to enjoy the present moment: “He takes delight in everything, and whenever one sees him taking part in a particular pleasure, he does it with the persistence which is the mark of the earthly man whose soul is absorbed in such things.” As this is the only outward sign of the knight, it is an important aspect of the knight’s character. This is a glimpse of the knight’s near-miraculous ability to grasp

56 Ibid, 49.
57 Ibid, 49.
58 Kierkegaard provides many wonderful examples of this, such as: how the knight walks, eats dinner, sings in church, looks at building sites, and smokes a pipe. Ibid, 50-51.
59 Ibid, 50.
at and leap up towards the infinite while remaining in the finite. At every moment, the knight seeks (and with any luck finds) the joy of the infinite in the commonplace. In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, we saw how Kierkegaard repeatedly characterizes Hegel’s professorial type as constantly attempting to escape and forget the finite, to rise above the conditions of human existence. The knight of faith offers a response by affirming the opposite: even in one’s greatest ecstasy and triumph, one must remain fully engaged in existence.

Aside from this one outward indication, everything that distinguishes the knight of faith is demonstrated inwardly. While remaining firmly anchored in the commonplace and the finite, the knight of faith is always making the movements of resignation and infinity without becoming swallowed up in it. Kierkegaard explains:

>This man has made and every instant is making the movements of infinity. With infinite resignation he has drained the cup of life’s profound sadness, he knows the bliss of the infinite, he senses the pain of renouncing everything, the dearest things he possesses in the world, and yet finiteness tastes to him just as good as to one who never knew anything higher, for his continuance in the finite did not bear a trace of the cowed and fearful spirit produced by the process of training; and yet he has this sense of security in enjoying it, as though the finite life were the surest thing of all.\(^60\)

This is the single most important aspect of the knight of faith, the ability to paradoxically touch the infinite through the commonplace while remaining in the present. We see here not a concept of faith that only looks forward to another life, or focuses solely on the anticipation of some future good: we see a faith in the beauty of the present moment and circumstances, and finds the joy of the infinite in the finite and subjective. Described here is the full realization of the previously discussed “subjectivity as truth” that Kierkegaard describes in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. This is the infinite, the objective uncertainty one can reach for the absolute for a moment, but never possess it fully. The movement of faith ascends from the finite

\(^60\) Ibid, 51.
into the infinite, all while the mover remains a human being. It is for this reason that Kierkegaard repeatedly refers to this process as a *leap*: it is only momentary, and one must always return to the earth. This idea is rooted in Kierkegaard’s earlier discussion of why Hegel ought to be mocked, that we should respect a great dancer but ridicule any dancer that claims to be really flying. It is impossible for one to attain and hold onto the absolute for more than a brief moment, and it is certainly ridiculous for one to claim possession of the eternal and all-encompassing truth (as Kierkegaard said, this is perhaps possible for the inhabitants of the moon, but not humans). On the contrary, we should take pride in the fact that we are only leaping, for it is the ability to “leap” from finite human experience into the infinite and back down that makes the knight of faith truly miraculous. Faith for Kierkegaard is not a lifelong complete apprehension of the divine, but rather the ability to find true beauty and the expression of unconditional love in something as simple as a dinner cooked by one’s spouse, all while remaining fully conscious that one is only eating dinner and not communing with the eternal world-spirit. I am reminded here of a story from Thich Nhat Hanh’s *The Miracle of Mindfulness*. Hanh recounts a conversation he had with his friend Jim, who often became so immersed in his thoughts and plans that he “forgot about what he was doing in the present.” Hanh noted that Jim was eating a tangerine once, but seemed to be entirely oblivious to the fact that he was eating a delicious tangerine. Hanh reflects on this: “A tangerine has sections. If you can eat just one section, you can probably eat the entire tangerine. But if you can’t eat a single section, you cannot eat the tangerine. Jim understood. He slowly put his hand down and focused one the presence of the slice already in his mouth. He chewed it thoughtfully before reaching down and taking another section.” Here, Hanh is talking

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63 Ibid, 6.
about finding joy in the finite. There is nothing wrong with planning ahead, with having grand thoughts, but one should always remain rooted in the present moment. This is reminiscent of one of Kierkegaard’s criticisms of Hegel, that he is unable to remain in the present. The esteemed professor believes himself to be entirely grasping the infinite while he blows his nose or eats his lunch, likely forgetting where he is and what he is feeling. Against this rejection of the present and the finite, we must savor the food in front of us and find the beauty of the infinite within.

When I was a child, my father would often draw me pictures on the back of napkins when we went out to dinner. My father is not an artist, and these silly drawings were of questionable quality, but I treasured each drawing. I found in these very finite drawings the expression of boundless love. I knew that the drawings were special. In this way, the infinite can be found in the finite: this is what Kierkegaard means by his portrayal of the knight of faith going about his daily business. Though we are finite beings in a finite world, we are capable at each moment of finding the color and beauty of the infinite in the finite. Put succinctly, “Faith is convinced that God is concerned about the least things.”  

This is how the knight of faith goes beyond resignation: the knight of faith knows that the infinite can be found must fully in the finite.

The ability to return to the finite, and do so joyfully, is the key distinction between the knight of resignation and the knight of faith. The knight of faith is able to return to the finite joyfully because the knight finds joy in the finite, a point Kierkegaard makes clear in his description of the knight’s daily life. While the knight of resignation reaches for the infinite, there is nothing particularly remarkable about this; the knight of faith is able to do so as well. It is the finite that makes the difference, and separates the greatness of the knight of faith from the ultimate failure of the knight of resignation. Resignation is about giving up, but faith is what

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64 Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 45.
65 “It is about the temporal, the finite, everything turns in this case.” Ibid, 51.
enables one to re-receive, more gladly now than when one first came into possession of the finite good. Kierkegaard again draws upon the imagery of the knight and the princess, juxtaposing the knight of resignation with the knight of faith after renouncing any claim to the princess’s love:

And yet it must be glorious to get the princess, and yet the knight of faith is the only happy one, the heir apparent to the finite, whereas the knight of resignation is a stranger and a foreigner. Thus to get the princess, to live with her joyfully and happily day in and day out (for it is also conceivable that the knight of resignation might get the princess, but that his soul had discerned he impossibility of their future happiness), thus to live joyfully and happily every instant by virtue of the absurd... He who does it is great, the only great man.

The knight of faith, upon winning the princess’s love against all reason, is able to joyfully receive her and live happily with her, even after renouncing claim to her love. In the same way, Abraham is able to receive Isaac again with the highest happiness, even after resigning him to death and readying the sacrificial blade above Isaac’s throat. Through this comparison of the knight of resignation and the knight of faith, we can come to a greater understanding of Kierkegaard’s criticism of Hegel and the systematic philosophy that he represents. Kierkegaard frequently makes use of dancing imagery in his writing, utilizing it in his critique of Hegel as being the dancer that claims to really fly. In Fear and Trembling, Kierkegaard again uses dancing imagery to show the superiority of an existential faith to infinite resignation. Both the knight of resignation and the knight of faith are dancers and are capable of great leaps; the distinction lies in the way they return to the earth. Knights of resignation “are dancers ad possess elevation. They make the movements upward, and fall down again.”

These knights, however, are marked by their landing: “Whenever they fall down they are not able at once to assume the
posture, they vacillate an instant, and this vacillation shows that after all they are strangers in the world… One need not look at them when they are up in the air, but only the instant they touch or have touched the ground—then one recognizes them.” The knight of resignation leaps with no difficulty, but struggles to integrate this leaping fully into their daily routine, to return to the earth and continue moving forward. For such a knight, there is always some hesitation, a difficulty in returning to the finite; in the same way, Hegel refuses to permit himself any philosophy of finitude. Hegel is unable to incorporate the existential into his philosophy, precisely due to the nature of his “dancing.” If one were to describe both systematic and existential philosophy as a dance, systematic philosophy would be a dance that focuses on the leap and disregards the landing, whereas existential philosophy focuses as much on the landing as on the leap. Indeed, the knight of faith is so remarkable in their landing that they are able to continue forward without hesitation: “But to be able to fall down in such a way that the same second it looks as if one were standing and walking, to transform the leap of life into a walk, absolutely to express the sublime in the pedestrian—that only the knight of faith can do—and this is the one and only prodigy.” This is the essence of the way of living that Kierkegaard puts forward. If we are to take a single recommendation from Kierkegaard, one clear call to action, it is to turn the leap of life into a walk. We finite human beings are uniquely equipped to do so: we are finite like a rose or an ant, but we are also capable of reaching up towards the infinite. Humans belong in the finite, but with some courage can make leaps into the infinite before returning to daily life. If we learn this well enough, we may even begin to find the infinite in the finite, find the expression of complete love in a cooked dinner or a drawing, find perfect beauty in a blossoming tree or even the ruins of some old building being swallowed by moss and vines.

69 Ibid, 52
70 Ibid, 52.
In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard argues that the systematic philosophy exemplified by Hegel has failed and is untrue to human experience, leaving no room in it for the truth-as-subjectivity that humans must live in. A philosophy that can be true for the existing individual must place the most passionate emphasis on the temporal and the finite, as this is where humans find and live out subjective truth, the highest truth accessible for existing individuals. In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard provides us a model of one who has succeeded in embracing the finite and appropriating truth with the most passionate inwardness. By setting the knight of faith against the knight of resignation, Kierkegaard shows us how we might move beyond the resignation of philosophical systems to the joy of fully-embraced subjectivity through faith. As I will show in the next section, this joyful way of life is mirrored closely by the philosophy of “affirmation” that Nietzsche sets out in *The Gay Science*. 
Section 3 - A New Health: Joy and Affirmation in *The Gay Science*

In discovering how the affirmative life that Nietzsche advocates is complimentary to what we have found in Kierkegaard, we will address three of Nietzsche’s most significant insights in *The Gay Science*: first, Nietzsche’s explanation of the great problem facing modern humans, the attempt to live in the shadow of God after God’s death; second, his call to live dangerously as a response to the collapse truth-giving systems; finally, his explanation of how to live affirmatively, and what it means and looks like for one to be a Yes-sayer. Through examining these points, we will come to see why Nietzsche sees the need for a new way of living, and how one might actually go about building a life in this way. This understanding will enable us to compare the life Nietzsche calls us to with the life of Kierkegaard’s knight of faith.

Mirroring Kierkegaard’s proclamation in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* that an existential system is impossible, Nietzsche in *The Gay Science* illustrates his interpretation of the failure of traditional systems of thought. Nietzsche first clearly states the problem at the beginning of Book III, when he famously declares that God is dead: “After Buddha was dead, his shadow was still shown for centuries in a cave—a tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown. –And we—we still have to vanquish his shadow, too.”⁷¹ What does it mean for us, this “death of God,” and what is God’s shadow? Why must it be vanquished? To begin answering these questions, we ought to first look at the famous formulation of God’s death, from the section titled “The madman”:

Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly: “I seek God! I seek God!” … The madman

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jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. “Whither is God?” he cried; “I
will tell you. We have killed him—you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we
do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire
horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it
moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging
continually?”

The death of God, according to the madman, has “wiped away the entire horizon” and
“unchained this earth from its sun.” Without God to give direction, we feel as though we are
adrift and aimless in space, plunging further and further into darkness. This sense of loss and
confusion, of the absence of direction and meaning, is the most immediate and striking effect of
God’s death. David Allison discusses this idea in his *Reading the New Nietzsche*: “Certainly, the
first effect of God’s death is to remove the universal foundations of morality. A dead God no
longer has the power and authority to determine values. There is no longer an absolute or
transcendent ground for ethics and morality, since there is no ground of authority or justification
beyond the merely human actions and habits of those who live.”

According to Nietzsche, the world after God’s death may seem a hollow and alien place; the absolute meaning and certainty
provided by belief in the Almighty has become uncertain, and it may appear as if there could be
no true substitute to stand in God’s stead. If there can be any meaning or value after such a
cataclysm, it must find its origin elsewhere. Moreover, we may need to question not only where
our values might come from, but also what those values could possibly be. The foundation of our
lives has been shaken, and we feel for the first time the dizzying emptiness of freedom. As Tyler
T. Roberts writes in *Contesting Spirit: Nietzsche, Affirmation, Religion*, “After the death of God,
in other words, there is no longer anything to hold us together, or hold us in place, and so
circumscribe our world as a meaningful one: Where will we find meaning? What shall we

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72 *Ibid., GS 125.*
value?" Roberts later extends this line of thinking further, questioning, “if God dies, if truth is not an absolute value, how can human beings determine the value or the meaning of life? From what perspective, or with what criterion, will they be able to determine what is or is not valuable?" With belief in an absolute creator that assigns meaning to the universe, one need not question what is valuable, for all the answers have either been laid out bare before us, or they are solely in the realm of the divine and not to be our concern. The absence of certain truth and prescribed value means that all questions are back on the table: what is right and wrong, what is the purpose of human life, how should we go about our daily activities in a directionless world? Nietzsche himself provides yet another way of framing the greatest of all events, asserting that the death of God means “that the belief in the Christian god has become unbelievable.” Belief in an absolute revealed truth begins to seem absurd (as Kierkegaard repeatedly observes), and the entire framework around this system of belief inevitably begins to crumble. This includes not just religion, but much of our way of living; morality in particular is singled out by Nietzsche as one of the most significant upheavals: “How much must collapse now that this faith has been undermined because it was built upon this faith, propped up by it, grown into it; for example, the whole of our European morality.” With the breakdown of such central concepts as right and wrong, what does this mean for the age pursuing the death of God, the time of God’s shadow?

According to David B. Allison, the death of God in Nietzsche’s writing must be followed by an “age of ambiguity and transition,” in which individuals will begin to realize the boundless possibilities now made available. Most will respond to this event with terror and

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75 Ibid, 40.
77 Ibid, GS 343.
78 Allison, *Reading the New Nietzsche*, 97.
despair (as is to be expected when one is faced with the collapse of their entire system of values),
though most have not yet recognized the perilous position we find ourselves in. Those who have
seen the death of God and are prepared to move into the future, however, will feel “homeless” in
this time of transition. Nietzsche writes,

    We children of the future, how could we be at home in this today? We feel disfavor for
    all ideals that might lead one to feel at home even in this fragile, broken time of
    transition; as for its “realities,” we do not believe that they will last. The ice that still
    supports people today has become very thin; the wind that brings the thaw is blowing; we
    ourselves who are homeless constitute a force that breaks open ice and other all too thin
    “realities.”

Even in the time of transition, most people continue to cling to the shadow of God mentioned
previously. While the event may have already happened, and God is already dead, the majority
are not prepared for the implications of this, and will attempt to continue holding on to their
previous beliefs that have now lost their footing. Allison explains this phenomenon, remarking,
“we will continue to live under the shadow of the dead God, we will continue to display his
raiments and trappings for some time. There will begin an age of metaphysical nostalgia that will
last for hundreds of years, a period where we shall be carried along by the mere inertia and habit
of theology and metaphysics.”

This is the age in which those who are able to accept
Nietzsche’s “secret wisdom and gaya scienza” will feel foreign; the age of the shadow of God
must be an age of looking back, but Nietzsche’s listeners are to be children of the future. Indeed,
where most will be filled with dread upon realizing that all possibilities are now open,
Nietzsche’s “premature births of the coming century” will rejoice. The collapse of faith in the
absolute and subsequent realization of freedom marks the coming of a new age for those who are

80 Allison, Reading the New Nietzsche, 97.
82 Ibid, GS 343.
willing to seize the opportunity. Just as there was no room for the individual in Hegel’s absolute system, so too was there little room for exploration beyond the bounds prescribed by systems such as “our European morality.”\textsuperscript{83} Nietzsche frequently employs the imagery of a new day when discussing the void left by the death of God, and describes the excitement and daring that are now possible if we take up the challenge:

Indeed, we philosophers and “free spirits” feel, when we hear the news that “the old god is dead,” as if a new dawn shone on us; our heart overflows with gratitude, amazement, premonitions, expectation. At long last the horizon appears free to us again, even if it should not be bright; at long last our ships may venture out again, venture out to face any danger; all the daring of the lover of knowledge is permitted again; the sea, our sea, lies open again; perhaps there has never yet been such an “open sea.”\textsuperscript{84}

This same imagery of an open sea appears earlier, just before the madman’s declaration of God’s death. In this section, titled “\textit{In the horizon of the infinite},” Nietzsche compares humans after the death of God to a boat far out on the ocean, with no way to turn back and no land in sight; while there is indeed great possibility before us, Nietzsche recognizes that such freedom can be terrifying: “We have left the land and have embarked. We have burned our bridges behind us—indeed, we have gone farther and destroyed the land behind us. Now, little ship, look out! … Woe, when you feel homesick for the land as if it had offered more \textit{freedom}—and there is no longer any ‘land.’\textsuperscript{85} Allison echoes this claim in \textit{Reading the New Nietzsche}, that the time after the death of God will be filled with nostalgia for the previous age, for faith in absolute meaning. Some will pine for more certain times so strongly that they believe they were more free when meaning was handed to them, though Nietzsche argues that this is certainly not the case. Nietzsche compares those who wish to return to the time of a living God to “the poor bird that

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid, GS 343.  
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid, GS 343.  
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid, GS 124.
felt free and now strikes the walls of this cage!” In the absence of external meaning and truth, we are free now to create or discover our own. The dogma that for countless years guided human existence answered all of our most frightening questions for us: What is my purpose? Why do I suffer? What should I do with my life? What is the Truth? Dogma (particularly religious dogma) answered these questions for us and gave us meaning. Perhaps more significantly, it provided us with a rubric by which we could measure ourselves; we need not question ourselves, or indeed anything else, as long as we measure up. When the rubric is provided for us, we need not question the values behind the rubric, but only whether or not we are living in accordance with the rubric itself. When the rubric is taken away, we find that we are not only left without a guide, but we may well be forced to question the values themselves.

Humans take great comfort in, and intensely desire, certainty; when this is lost, people are in danger of falling into despair at the paralyzing magnitude of their new freedom. Furthermore, the loss of belief in some higher, supernatural purpose places much greater weight on the daily and the natural. As Thomas Howe explains, “Nietzsche’s celebration of the death of God is infused with notes of tragedy. By this, I mean that the life we awaken to in the godless universe contains real and profound possibilities for significant joys and beauties. But they come only with great effort and unavoidable cost.” With the death of God, one’s every action can be of the utmost significance, every undertaking in pursuit of new values. Regarding this change, Nietzsche writes, “Under the rule of religious ideas, one has become accustomed to the notion of ‘another world (behind, below, above)’—and when religious ideas are destroyed one is troubled by an uncomfortable emptiness and deprivation.”

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86 Ibid, GS 124.
subsequent feeling of emptiness can truly be terrifying, and it is far easier to meet such a realization with surrender than with enthusiasm. Indeed, many who are faced with this realization will instead opt to simply ignore it, carrying on blindly and acting as though the world were still in complete and certain order. While this does not take advantage of the great new dawn and infinite horizon that has now opened, it mitigates the terror and despair somewhat. Rather than change their worldview in light of this dawn, many choose to remain in the shadows of old comforts, systems which at least provide a sense of certainty and security. This shunning of the light in favor of reassuring darkness is what it means to continue living in God’s shadow. Nietzsche makes clear, however, that in attempting to avoid all discomfort and danger, those who remain in the shadows subject themselves to a quieter but more serious danger: the danger of stumbling through life blindly.

In describing the “different types of dangerous lives,” Nietzsche depicts one such shadow-dweller: “You have no idea what you are living through; you rush through life as if you were drunk and now and then fall down some staircase. But thanks to your drunkenness you never break a limb; your muscles are too relaxed and your brain too benighted for you to find the stones of these stairs as hard as we do.”89 With belief in a prescribed and absolute meaning comes a certain comfort; the belief in another life, or some supernatural meaning to the present life, can take much of the weight off of an individual’s action. It is possible to “rush through life as if drunk,” one can go about one’s day without questioning the systems one was born into and has accepted unquestioningly. Any sort of “fall” that one might suffer can be written off as part of some higher, unintelligible plan, and one can push off some of the responsibility for one’s actions onto greater powers. The dangerous life of one who embraces the “new dawn,” on the

89 Ibid, GS 154.
other hand, is not in danger of stumbling blindly through life, but of falling in the way that a
drunken stumbler cannot. Because one’s every action can have great meaning, and there is no
certain universal meaning, misfortunes and missteps can feel much more significant: “For us life
is more dangerous: we are made of glass; woe unto us if we merely bump ourselves! And all is
lost if we fall!”\(^9\) The prospect of a dangerous life is certainly frightening, and will discourage
many from attempting to step out of the shadows, but Nietzsche asserts (as we will soon
examine) that it is only through living dangerously that one can feel true joy and fulfillment.

Before delving deeply into the complimentary points between Nietzsche and
Kierkegaard, it is beneficial to begin considering in what ways the person who Nietzsche would
describe as living dangerously might be similar Kierkegaard’s knight of faith. Kierkegaard
depicts for us the manner of the knight of faith; does Nietzsche give any such description of the
firstlings of the coming age? One potential location for such an explanation is the section on
“Preparatory human beings” in Book IV.\(^9\) Nietzsche recognizes that a great time of transition is
coming (as Allison notes), and there will be a need for “preparatory courageous human beings”
to pave the way into the future. While there will be many in the coming age that will cling to the
shadow of God and long for an earlier time, these preparatory humans will face the new day with
excitement and joy. Those who remain in the past will continue to adhere strictly to the
traditional codes, customs, and systems of their upbringing; the new breed shall be “human
beings with their own festivals, their own working days, and their own periods of mourning…
more endangered human beings, more fruitful human beings, happier beings!”\(^9\) These new,endangered humans are to be the antithesis of those living in the shadow of God; the latter are

\(^9\) Ibid, GS 154.
\(^9\) Ibid, GS 283.
\(^9\) Ibid, GS 283.
continually engaged in looking back, while the former have only an eye for the way forward.

Those who look and drive forward are to be “endangered” precisely because of their daring, an idea which hearkens back to the sort of dangerous life that Nietzsche alludes to in “Different types of dangerous lives.” Failure is much more dangerous when one does not have the comfort of a system to fall back on, and if one should fall there is no blaming the customs or circumstances, for one has created their own. When exploring one’s hometown, it is certainly possible to get lost at times, but this is easily remedied by continuing in any direction at all until one stumbles across something recognizable to them. To be an explorer in a foreign land, however, is a venture of an entirely different character. If one becomes lost, there are no landmarks to reference, and there is not the kindness of one’s neighbors or safety of cultural bonds to fall back on. This is what Nietzsche means by discussing the new endangered sort of human, and his characterization of this way of life culminates in his revelation of the key to a fulfilling and joyous life:

For believe me, the secret for harvesting from existence the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment is—to live dangerously! Build your cities on the slopes of Vesuvius! Send your ships into uncharted seas! Live at war with your peers and yourselves! Be robbers and conquerors as long as you cannot be rulers and possessors, you seekers of knowledge! Soon the age will be past when you could be content to live hidden in forests like shy deer. At long last the search for knowledge will reach out for its due; it will want to rule and possess, and you with it!94

The translator Walter Kaufmann notes that, while this is the only time it is phrased in this way, the concept of living dangerously “is one of [Nietzsche’s] central motifs.”95 Indeed, the idea is central to understanding the sort of life Nietzsche is advocating, the life that brings the greatest fruitfulness and enjoyment. This danger comes from acknowledging the near limitless freedom

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93 Ibid, GS 154.
94 Ibid, GS 283.
95 Ibid, GS 283n.
humans have once liberated from the conception and shadow of absolute truth and indisputable, imposed meaning; with the acceptance of moving forward comes radical individual responsibility. Just as it is easy when doing poorly in a group project to blame the other members for this or that shortcoming, it is much harder to avoid responsibility for the poor outcome of some work that one is the sole author of. One who stumbles through life as if drunk is in danger of never harvesting the great fruitfulness and enjoyment of a daring life; one who scales mountains suffers the danger of great heights and great falls.\textsuperscript{96} For Nietzsche, a human life cannot be called truly fruitful or happy unless one strives for great heights and takes the necessary risks that come with seeking truth. What does one experience when one chooses the danger? Are not the most memorable, exhilarating, and beautiful moments of one’s life those moments of danger and triumph? One always remembers the day one proposes to one’s spouse: it is a truly \textit{dangerous} moment, in which one’s entire life is offered to another. Such moments are always dangerous. The line about diamonds being created only under tremendous stress is perhaps overused, but this does not make it less truthful. An alternative: many of the most unique evolutionary traits came about as a response to some hardship the organism faced. It is truly beautiful to see a cluster of fireflies hovering around at night, and these creatures only developed the ability to emit light in response to the difficulty of finding a suitable mate. For a human example, take Randy Gilson and his public art masterpiece, Randyland.\textsuperscript{97} He grew up impoverished and suffered bouts of homelessness, experiencing firsthand the difficulties of life on the streets of Pittsburgh. Saddened by the run-down and bleak appearance of his local area, he

\textsuperscript{96} Nietzsche reiterates this idea in \textit{Beyond Good and Evil}, observing: “In all kinds of injury and loss the lower and coarser soul is better off than the nobler one: the dangers for the latter must be greater; the probability that it will come to grief and perish is actually, in view of the multiplicity of the conditions of its life, tremendous. In a lizard a lost finger is replaced again; not so in man.” Friedrich Nietzsche, \textit{Beyond Good and Evil}, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House Inc, 1989), BGE 276.

\textsuperscript{97} Laura Zorch, “How Randyland, Pittsburgh’s Most Colorful Folk-Art Landmark, Came to Be,” \textit{Thrillist}, June 14, 2016.
purchased an abandoned building and turned it into a beautiful and colorful public art piece. Had he never gone through such hardship, he likely would never have been inspired to create such a beautiful space or install over eight hundred small gardens around Pittsburgh. Randy Gilson turned the negative experiences of his upbringing into something beautiful and meaningful. Rather than passively accepting circumstances and attempting to make himself comfortable, he chose the dangerous option of pouring much of his time and money into making a public space beautiful. In every picture I have ever seen of Randy Gilson, he wears an enormous smile.

This idea of a dangerous, fruitful life for the sake of knowledge is expanded upon in the section “In media vita.” Just as the title alludes to the reflections of one who has reaches an intermediate stage in their life, so too is this section a sort of turning point in the way one can understand life, recoloring the entire experience of being an existing human. Nietzsche writes:

No, life has not disappointed me. On the contrary, I find it truer, more desirable and mysterious every year—ever since the day when the great liberator came to me: the idea that life could be an experiment of the seeker for knowledge—and not a duty, not a calamity, not trickery.—And knowledge itself: let it be something else for others; for example, a bed to rest on, or the way to such a bed, or a diversion, or a form of leisure—for me it is a world of dangers and victories in which heroic feelings, too, find places to dance and play. “Life as a means to knowledge”—with this principle in one’s heart one can live not only boldly but even gaily, and laugh gaily, too. And who knows how to laugh anyway and live well if he does not first know a good deal about war and victory?"

This entire passage, particularly the concept of “life as a means to knowledge,” is essential to understanding the way Nietzsche encourages his listeners to approach life. God is dead, the holy festivals have come to a halt, the horizon itself has been scrubbed away; all that remains is an open sea: wild, uncharted, and limitless. Some will be paralyzed by this realization, clinging desperately to the shadows and nostalgia of a world that still had absolute truth and meaning.

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99 Ibid, GS 324.
impressed in every countryside and city square. Others will continue on drunkenly, perhaps without ever noticing that the entire character of the world has been irreversibly altered. These are safe and comfortable lives, and with little elevation comes little risk of a catastrophic fall; the deepest abyss might be only a foot or two deep, hopped out of with careless ease. There is, however, another option, a new option for a new age, one that is only possible in the wake of the erasure of the absolute. According to Nietzsche, humans are unique in their need to have one more thing than a common animal: “man has to believe, to know, from time to time why he exists; his race cannot flourish without a periodic trust in life—without faith in reason in life.”

The concept of life as a means to knowledge is the perfect mean between two approaches to life: living without purpose, and seeking only the purpose. If we live without seeking knowledge, this would be comparable to performing an experiment and then throwing all data away the instant the experiment is finished: the experiment was pointless, and we learn nothing. It is equally foolish to throw out hypotheses without attempting to back them up with experimentation, for hypotheses are of little value without application. It is only through the combination of the two that we arrive at knowledge. This new way will not seek comfort, nor will it be content with some small sliver of the truth; it will instead inhabit a “world of dangers and victories,” with the possibility of living not only daringly and authentically, but gaily. This grand process of experimentation gives life its meaning, the joy of discovery its sweetness. Those who maintain energy and a positive disposition in old age are those who are open to learning new things, seeking out new experiences and ideas, refusing to remain stagnant after decades of comfortable sameness; adventure and discovery creates and preserves youthful energy and joy. This concept of joy or gaiety features heavily in The Gay Science, hence why Nietzsche advertises the

\[100\] Ibid, GS 1.
approach he offers as a _gay_ science, for this is what distinguishes it from the old ways, those that still cling to the shadow of God. If this concept of joyfulness is so significant, we must ask: where does it come from, and how is it achieved? We have seen what the sort of human who practices this might look like and what the character of their life would be, but how does one _get_ there? To find this, we must look to the idea of affirmation.

Nietzsche’s way of affirmation is first proposed in Book IV of _The Gay Science_. The book begins with the passage titled “For the new year,” which contains the initial and clearest articulation of this idea. Nietzsche writes:

> Today everybody permits himself the expression of his wish and his dearest thought; hence I, too, shall say what it is that I wish from myself today, and what was the first thought to run across my heart this year—what thought shall be the warranty and sweetness of my life henceforth. I want to learn more and more to see as beautiful what is necessary in things; then I shall be one of those who make things beautiful. _Amor fati_: let that be my love henceforth! I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse those who accuse. _Looking away_ shall be my only negation. And all in all and on the whole: some day I wish only to be a _Yes_-sayer.

This is one of the most important passages in all Nietzsche’s philosophy; this is the place where Nietzsche gives his true “answer” to the denial of life following in the wake and shadow of God. This is Nietzsche’s genuine heartfelt wish, and his approach to life going forward. The focal point of this passage is the concept of loving fate, of moving from opposition or negation to affirmation. One key to understanding this is Nietzsche’s claim that in order to be one who “makes things beautiful,” one must find beauty in all necessary things, even going so far as to love fate. This is not a passive acceptance, but rather an active and considered _embrace_. To focus on deeming things “ugly” and waging war against them is to avoid the hard questions of life,

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101 Kaufmann notes that the title of Book IV, “Sanctus Januarius,” is a reference to Saint January, whose preserved solidified blood supposedly turns liquid again on a particular feast day. Nietzsche, too, now feels that his blood has become liquid again, and he is revitalized. Ibid, 221.

102 Ibid, GS 276.
such as what does one actually value and who does one want to be. Additionally, expending all
one’s energy on negation leaves little room for positive action and creativity. This is what
Nietzsche means by claiming that “the Christian resolve to find the world ugly and bad has made
the world ugly and bad”\textsuperscript{103}: the way one approaches life will inevitably change the character of
one’s interactions with and experience of the world. Take, for example, a white supremacist,
whose entire identity is wrapped up in their conception of being a white individual \textit{against}
various minorities. When one’s identity is entirely reliant upon and a reaction to that which one
hates or calls ugly, one really has no identity at all.\textsuperscript{104} Nothing is made beautiful through such a
worldview; indeed, the entire color of the world seems to be muted due to one’s obsessive
emphasis on the distinctions between the various colors of human beings. This is the sort of
danger Nietzsche referred to previously as stumbling through life drunkenly, as one need never
take any real risks in a life that is only defined by that which it is not. While dangerous, it is
much less terrifying than the danger of attempting to achieve great heights, and it is easier to
decry that which we do not like as evil or ugly than try to find the beauty in it or act to make
things better. Similarly, waging war against that which one calls bad is trivial compared with the
potentially paralyzing burden of reflecting upon one’s life and the world and attempting to
determine what one deems truly valuable.

Important to this idea is the principle of \textit{looking away} rather than negating, choosing
instead to devote one’s energy to creating and affirming.\textsuperscript{105} Later in Book IV, Nietzsche writes,

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\item[Ibid, GS 130.]
\item[103] This idea is covered at length in Nietzsche’s \textit{On the Genealogy of Morals}, which will be dealt with in the
following section.
\item[104] This is also the theme of the chapter of \textit{Thus Spoke Zarathustra} titled “On Passing By.” A fool approaches
Zarathustra outside a great city and urges Zarathustra to cast his scorn upon the city, spit on it, and turn back the way
he came, for the city is corrupt and infirm. Zarathustra instead offers the fool some parting advice: “I am nauseated
by this great city too… This doctrine, however, I give you, fool, as a parting present: where one can no longer love,
there one should \textit{pass by}.” Thus Spoke Zarathustra, and he passed by the fool and the great city. Friedrich Nietzsche,
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“I am well disposed toward those moralities which goad me to do something and do it again, from morning till evening, and then to dream of it at night, and to think of nothing except doing this well, as well as I alone can do it.”\textsuperscript{106} Again, Nietzsche argues that one should live \textit{positively}, devoting their energy and whole heart to that which they \textit{value}, as opposed to that which they hate or shun. Instead of negating and waging war against that which we find ugly, we should let it fall to the wayside through our disregard for such things; there ought to be no time in the day for negation, we will be so busy with seeking to grow and pursue that which we find valuable. Nietzsche explains, “What we do should determine what we forego—that is how I like it, that is my \textit{placitum.”}\textsuperscript{107} As this passage makes clear, Nietzsche is not saying that we should allow negativity to remain in our lives, in a sort of “turn the other cheek” way. Rather, there will simply be no \textit{room} for negativity and hatred in a life that is overfull with creative action and the pursuit of knowledge and value; negative influence will be pushed out of one’s life “like yellow leaves that any slight stirring of the air takes off a tree.”\textsuperscript{108} This is what it means to forego by \textit{doing}: rather than active negating or renouncing, the fullness of positivity and creation in one’s life squeezes out that which “simply does not belong to such a life.”\textsuperscript{109} Nietzsche further illustrates this way of living when discussing the importance of not attempting to punish or change others because they do not fit our standards or worldview: “Let us rather raise ourselves that much higher. Let us color our own example ever more brilliantly. Let our brilliance make them look dark. No, let us not become darker ourselves on their account, like all those who punish others and feel dissatisfied. Let us sooner step aside. Let us look away.”\textsuperscript{110} Focusing on


\textsuperscript{106} Ibid, GS 304.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid, GS 304.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid, GS 304.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid, GS 304.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid, GS 321.
that which one finds dissatisfying or “bad” does not fix the problem, but rather makes oneself darker. By choosing instead to devote oneself fully to that which is valuable, to (as Nietzsche stated previously) think of nothing day in and day out but doing that well and to the best of one’s ability, one makes oneself brighter, a shining example to those who remain in the shadows and define themselves through that which they are not. We have thus far examined Nietzsche’s diagnosis of what ails the modern world (remaining in the shadow of God and longing for a system of absolute truth), and have seen a potential new way of living that enables individuals to step out of this colossal shadow, the life lived dangerously and treated as a joyful experiment. It is time now to turn to the critical question, of which we have thus far only caught glimpses: what does it look like to live dangerously and gaily, and how does one arrive at such a way of life? We will find the answer in one of the central ideas of The Gay Science, the concept of affirmation.

The concept of affirmation is closely tied with the processes of creation and experimentation, which Nietzsche claims are essential to using life as a means to knowledge and living dangerously. For Nietzsche, life (if lived well) is very much an expedition into foreign territory, filled with discovery and challenges. Along with this image, Nietzsche uses the metaphor of scientific research (hence the gay science) to illustrate how we ought to approach life. In this context we, the scientific researchers, are to gather raw data through lived experience for interpretation and evaluation. Nietzsche explains,

One sort of honesty has been alien to all founders of religions and their kind: They have never made their experiences a matter of conscience for knowledge. ‘What did I really experience? What happened in me and around me at that time? Was my reason bright enough? Was my will opposed to all deceptions of the senses and bold in resisting the fantastic?’ … But we, we others who thirst after reason, are determined to scrutinize our

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111 This is similar to Martin Luther King Jr’s assertion that “hate for hate only intensifies the existence of hate and evil in the universe,” and the only solution is to “inject within the very structure of the universe that strong and powerful element of love.” Martin Luther King Jr., “Loving Your Enemies.” Sermon delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama. 17 November, 1957.
experiences as severely as a scientific experiment—hour after hour, day after day. We ourselves wish to be our experiments and guinea pigs.\textsuperscript{112}

The analogy is vivid, and entirely earnest: we indeed should be absolutely diligent in our reflection and experimentation. This is the supplement to the ability to create or affirm our own values after God’s death; these values should not go unexamined, for this is precisely the shortcoming of those who cling to God’s shadow. Say, for example, that one affirms the accumulation of vast quantities of wealth, and is fairly certain that this is what is most important and noble in life. It is not enough for one to dedicate oneself to such acquisitions unreflectively, as this is again as though one put forth a hypothesis, performed the experiment, and then refused to look at the data. If such an individual does as Nietzsche suggests, they would frequently (perhaps not hourly, but certainly every once in a while) “check in” with their lived experiment to evaluate it. One should ask oneself whether the experience of living in this way met one’s expectations, whether one finds this way of life fulfilling, whether one wakes up excited to face the day and continue pursuing this or that, and so on. After all, there is a difference between living dangerously and living senselessly or recklessly. On one hand is the example of Barry Marshall, the Australian gastroenterologist who proved that ulcers are caused by bacteria by drinking a bacteria-ridden solution, getting an ulcer, and then curing himself with antibiotics.\textsuperscript{113}

There is no question that this was dangerous (perhaps even a bit unwise), but one would have a difficult time arguing that his actions were not noble and motivated by the search for knowledge. On the other hand would be an individual who, say, drinks a bacteria-ridden solution because their “friend” bet them twenty dollars that they wouldn’t. Barry Marshall is a clear example of

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid, GS 319.
what Nietzsche means by “life as a means to knowledge” and “living dangerously,” taking matters into his own hands rather than acquiescing to the rejection of his initial study.

With experimentation also comes the ability of creation. Under a complete system, under the “shadow of God,” there is little room for true creativity; one can only create within the prescribed bounds of the system. After the death of God, those who are willing to boldly begin to stray out of his shadow realize the boundless creativity and possibility afforded to human beings. Nietzsche imagines a dialogue between those within and those without God’s shadow, naming the two characters A and B respectively. A asks, “Do I still understand you well? You are seeking? Where is your nook and star in the actual world? Where can you lie down in the sun so that you, too, reap an excess of wellbeing and your existence justifies itself?” B responds, “What I want is more; I am no seeker. I want to create for myself a sun of my own.”

Though brief, this dialogue contains the entire spirit of The Gay Science. A, believing that there can be no meaning, wellbeing or justification outside of the sun (representative of some absolute truth-giver, the God that has died), believes that B’s search for meaning spans the entire world, seeking a place that B might call his/her own. B clarifies his/her intentions: B seeks nothing, but rather intends to create. Wellbeing and justification, if there can be justification, must be created for oneself. Of course, as previously discussed, this does not mean that one can simply choose meaning and values carelessly and at random; we are to go about this as a scientist putting forth and testing hypotheses: rigorously, diligently, and thoughtfully. This concept of

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115 Nietzsche’s thought on whether there can be justification for life is a fascinating topic, one that would warrant an entire examination of its own. In The Birth of Tragedy, Nietzsche argues that “it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified” [Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy and the Case of Wagner, Translated by Walter Kaufmann (Random House Inc, Toronto, Canada, 1967), section 5]. This standpoint has changed by The Gay Science, however. At the end of Book Two Nietzsche claims, “As an aesthetic phenomenon existence is still bearable for us” (Nietzsche, The Gay Science, GS 107). From The Birth of Tragedy to The Gay Science, Nietzsche seems to have moved from existence being justifiable to it being bearable, an significant shift to be sure.
self-creation is central to living a life of affirmation. It is only after the death of God that such self-creation is possible, but this creation is unstable, dangerous, and will fall apart if not bolstered by a foundation of Yes-saying. After all, Yes-saying inherently builds up, and No-saying must by its nature tear down. Where can one find lasting joy in destruction or negation? One who goes about each day wishing to be somewhere else (or someone else) could hardly be called happy or fulfilled. Rather, joy and fulfillment must be found in the process of creation, which says “Yes.” The process of self-creation is expressed most succinctly and famously by a brief aphorism in Book Three, titled “What does your conscience say?” It is answered by a single line: “You shall become the person you are.” This line clearly had special meaning, for Nietzsche would affix onto his autobiographical Ecce Homo this subtitle: “How One Becomes What One Is.” The idea of becoming what one is has its roots in the concept of self-creation, implying that we as humans have the power to determine our own identity through our choices.

Rather than finding our place in the sun, we are to create suns of our own; this is the new possibility afforded by the death of God. Through living dangerously, through looking critically at the unexamined values we have inherited and affirming our own through lived experiments, we have the privilege of forging a new identity, the power to live a life that is “truer, more desirable and mysterious every year.” As Nietzsche states in the penultimate passage of the fifth and final book of The Gay Science, our new identities must be accompanied by a new conception of health. He writes, “Being new, nameless, hard to understand, we premature births of an as yet unproven future need for a new goal also a new means—namely, a new health,

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116 Ibid, GS 270.
118 Nietzsche, The Gay Science, GS 324.
stronger, more seasoned, tougher, more audacious and gayer than any previous health.”

Similar to the way Kierkegaard depicts the knights of resignation and faith, here Nietzsche gives a (much briefer) description of what one of the practitioners of the gay science would look like.

In contrast to the dull and uninspired way of living in the shadow of God, these new people will be strong, bold, and joyous, the sort of joy that comes with achieving great heights and loving oneself and one’s fate. While this description is useful, it can often be difficult for one to assess one’s own “health” according to these qualities. For this purpose, of reflecting on one’s life and chosen identity and assessing one’s values, Nietzsche provides the striking measure referred to as “the Eternal Recurrence.” The question begins by proposing that one day or night some demon “curses” one to relive their every moment in the exact same way over and over, for all eternity.

Every success and failure will come at the same time, and feel as it did the very first time.

Having framed the issue, Nietzsche then asks the definitive question:

Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: “You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine.” If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you. The question in each and every thing, “Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?” would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to crave nothing more fervently than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?

This famed image and question drives at the heart of the sort of life Nietzsche advocates in *The Gay Science*, indeed in all his work. Yes-saying in the fullest sense is an embrace of all the elements and experiences of one’s life, of everything that one is; it is *amor fati*. Nietzsche draws

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119 Ibid, GS 382.
120 Ibid, GS 342.
121 Another key iteration of this idea comes in *Beyond Good and Evil*, in which Nietzsche writes: “the ideal of the most high-spirited, alive, and world-affirming human being who has not only come to terms and learned to get along with whatever was and is, but who wants to have what was and is repeated into all eternity, shouting insatiably *da capo*—not only to himself but to the whole play and spectacle.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, BGE 56.
a clear connection between the Eternal Recurrence and loving fate: “My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity.”¹²² While this is the *goal*, it does not mean that one should simply attempt to accept a life that one does not find fulfilling, and cannot live through day after day *joyously*. One must live dangerously, experiment, and *reflect*. Only when one has performed the experiment can one analyze the data and come to a conclusion; similarly, only after trying to live a particular life can one ask if they would praise or curse the demon that dooms them to an eternity of the same. If the answer to such a fate would be wailing and gnashing one’s teeth, then one must clearly reconsider the way they live and should reevaluate their values. The thought experiment of the Eternal Recurrence is a way to foster the point of view of a Yes-sayer, of seeing that which is necessary as beautiful, of learning not to negate but look away and pass by. If one only has the courage and will, it brings one to a monumental and world-changing realization: “The hidden Yes in you is stronger than all the Nos and Maybes that afflict you and your age like a disease.”¹²³ While No-saying has dominated the world for (by Nietzsche’s account) at least several thousand years, that does not mean that it is stronger or better. Nietzsche’s gay science is the science of living a joyous and fulfilling life, an end (if one can truly call it an end, as it must be an ongoing process) that can only be reached through danger and experimentation. While it is difficult and may be frightening, those who succeed may call themselves the first children of a coming future, a future no longer under the shadow of God, in which humans are free to create, choose, and *become* who they are. Once this has been achieved, all that remains is to look at every summit and valley on the way and say, “Yes.

Section 4 - The Revaluation of All Values

The Gay Science was first published in 1882. A brief four years later in 1886, Nietzsche published Beyond Good and Evil, and seems to recant on his vow to only be a Yes-sayer going forward. Looking back from Ecce Homo at Beyond Good and Evil, Nietzsche observes that “the book is devoid of any good-natured word.” As Nietzsche states, the book does not make any attempt at looking away, but rather attempts to tear down the structures that have constricted Western civilization for millennia. Why did Nietzsche decide, against his previous wish, to say “No” again? His reasoning can be found in his analysis of his own work in Ecce Homo. In the section on Beyond Good and Evil, Nietzsche explains, “After the Yes-saying part of my task had been solved, the turn had come for the No-saying, No-doing part: the revaluation of our values so far, the great war—conjuring up a day of decision.” From this comment, we glean two key insights: Nietzsche saw his Yes-saying project completed after The Gay Science and Thus Spoke Zarathustra were written, and he believed that the “revaluation of values” was the necessary next step. From our reading of The Gay Science, we might understand why his project took this particular trajectory. According to Nietzsche, the majority of humanity remains helplessly clinging to the shadow of God, refusing to leave the comfort of those traditional worldviews and structures that have anchored civilization for many generations. Those who are able to escape this condition, able to step outside God’s shadow, are the “premature births” of a coming age. The firstlings of the new age cannot feel at home in this current time because the world is not ready to accept the implications of God’s death, the responsibilities and possibilities that come with a new and limitless sea. The second half of Nietzsche’s project, then, is to liberate those

124 Nietzsche, Ecce Homo, EH BGE, 2.
125 Which Nietzsche had resolved to do in GS 276.
126 Nietzsche, Ecce Homo, EH BGE, 1.
who remain chained to the shadow of God by tearing down the values that have held the system in place for so many years, waking them to their new freedom and the boundless possibilities now available to them. Nietzsche attempts to do so by revealing what he believes to be the true foundations of our conception of the world, particularly the true moral foundations.

Nietzsche first outlines the “true” foundation of western morality in the final section of Beyond Good and Evil, titled “What is Noble.” Our modern conception of morality is fundamentally born of two separate types of morality, these being “master morality” and “slave morality.” Nietzsche begins by describing the history and character of master morality: it originates “when the ruling group determines what is ‘good,’ the exalted, proud states of the soul are experienced as conferring distinction and determining the order of rank… in this first type of morality the opposition of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ means approximately the same as ‘noble’ and ‘contemptible.’” The immediate revelation here is that the noble, master morality is fundamentally creative and Yes-saying, it determines and affirms that which is good, noble and valuable. This sort of morality incorporates affirmation into its very foundation, for it is focused on the self and on lifting up. As Nietzsche observes, “The noble soul has reverence for itself.”

The noble sort of morality takes full advantage of the freedoms afforded by the death of God, and puts into practice the desire to “create a sun of one’s own.” Nietzsche describes this type further: “The noble type of man experiences itself as determining values; it does not need approval; it judges, ‘what is harmful to me is harmful in itself’; it knows itself to be that which first accords honor to things; it is value-creating. Everything it knows as part of itself it honors:

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127 This formulation is presented first and most clearly in BGE 260.
128 Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, BGE 260.
129 Ibid, BGE 287.
such a morality is self-glorification.”

If one understands Nietzsche’s message in *The Gay Science* and attempts to implement it into one’s own life, this is the sort of morality that one would arrive at. It affirms and creates, it determines its own values rather than blindly accepting the values of its time and place, and honors itself rather than focusing its energy on tearing down or opposing. Many of the passages in the *Gay Science* we have examined here and in the previous section are fundamentally expressions of this sort of master morality: living dangerously, using life as a means to knowledge, creating and determining one’s own meaning and values, looking away, and Yes-saying are all expressions of the creative and affirmative drive found in master morality.

Slave morality, in stark contrast, is fundamentally No-saying. Nietzsche asks what sort of morality would be born from conditions of suffering, oppression, restriction, and weariness, and what would be valued in such a system. He first notes that “a pessimistic suspicion about the whole condition of man will find expression, perhaps a condemnation of man along with his condition.”

Nietzsche reflects on this later in *Ecce Homo*, claiming that he was the first to see “the real opposition: the degenerating instinct that turns against life with a subterranean vengefulness.”

From slave morality comes the negation of life itself, a suspicion of life that devalues all experience. This view of the human condition itself being at its root a negative thing leads to a degeneration; where affirmation attempts to acquire and continually grow healthier and fuller, the No-saying of slave morality rejects life and fate, placing its emphasis on that which it deems evil and its hope in something it deems higher. Because this sort of morality devalues life, it must place its value and hope in another sort of life: “The concept of the

132 Ibid, BGE 260.
‘beyond,’ the ‘true world’ invented in order to devaluate the only world there is—in order to retain no goal, no reason, no task for our earthly reality!” This, perhaps, is the greatest damage done by slave morality and No-saying: the devaluing of life, the urge to meet the tribulations and possibilities of life with resignation and indifference. It is this sort of attitude that Nietzsche condemns Socrates for in *The Gay Science*, causing Nietzsche to lament that “we must overcome even the Greeks!” With the death of God comes the possibility for a new health, one that raises what is good and noble in us and allows us to live our lives dangerously and creatively; slave morality rejects this new possibility, and instead clings to a belief in some other life, taking any loftiness away from our human accomplishments and experiences. If the metaphor of the Eternal Recurrence is meant to instill our every action with “the greatest weight,” slave morality leads to carelessness and disregard for our freedoms and our positive creative power. This devaluation of life causes us to stumble through life as if drunk, feeling neither the great joy nor powerful suffering that comes with a human life. This disregard for freedom and tendency to avoid the dangers of creative action explain slave morality’s dependence on opposition, and defining itself by what it is not. Where master morality creates and affirms, slave morality has no identity apart from that which it opposes. Nietzsche gives the example of birds of prey and lambs: lambs naturally dislike birds of prey, which is natural and reasonable. This does not, however, make the birds of prey evil, for they are only fulfilling their natural function and attempting to survive. In fact, the birds of prey harbor no disdain for the lambs whatsoever, and are indeed appreciative of the lambs. The lambs, however, might say,

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134 Ibid, EH IV, 8.
135 Socrates’ last words before his death are an observation that he owes Asclepius a rooster, referencing the custom of paying the god of medicine Asclepius for curing one of a disease: a clear implication that life is a disease. It is no wonder why Nietzsche despises this last moment of the philosophical hero. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, GS 340.
137 See discussion of GS 154 in Section 3.
“these birds of prey are evil; and whoever is least like a bird of prey, but rather its opposite, a lamb—would he not be good?” This is the origin of slave morality for Nietzsche, and clearly poses a problem; we have seen that Nietzsche advocates for creativity, experiment, danger, and joyfulness, all elements lacking in a reactionary morality. Put less metaphorically:

The slave revolt in morality begins when *ressentiment* itself becomes creative and gives birth to values… While every noble morality develops from a triumphant affirmation of itself, slave morality from the outset says No to what is “outside,” what is “different,” what is “not itself”; and this No is its creative deed. This inversion of the value-positing eye—this need to direct one’s view outward instead of back to oneself—is of the essence of *ressentiment*: in order to exist, slave morality always first needs a hostile external world; it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all—its action is fundamentally reaction.

Where affirmation is spontaneous, slave morality can only come out of reaction and must be preceded by a “hostile external world.” Thus, when affirmation is about discovery and experimentation (one begins with a self-created “hypothesis” which is then tested through experience, *life as a means to knowledge*), negation or slave morality is a *shying away from* experimentation and discovery. When faced with a difficult circumstance, a practitioner of master morality would use this difficulty as the opportunity to learn and grow, hopefully turning the hardship into something positive. A practitioner of slave morality would only be driven further into his or her routine and grow more certain of the dangers outside. This sort of morality is not an attempt to create a sun of one’s own, or even to find one’s place and purpose in the sun. It is rather the attempt of one who fears the possibilities and demands of sunlight to convince oneself that the light is actually evil, and the shadows are good and holy. Nietzsche’s work, then, is an attempt to show the brilliance of the sun and the real darkness of the shadows, waking

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139 Ibid, GM I, 10.
140 Both the devaluation of life and the stifling of creativity and experiment lead to nihilism, a central problem that Nietzsche combats in his work. While this is important, it is not my focus here.
individuals from their slumber in the shadow of God. If we truly attempt to live dangerously and affirmatively as Nietzsche suggests, we will find ourselves more joyful, even waking up in the morning with *excitement*. This is the fundamental effect of both Nietzsche and Kierkegaard on the earnest reader: they attempt to show the reader that one can live creatively and joyfully as soon as one finds the courage to do so. In the final section, we will examine more closely exactly how they do this in response to the systems that discourage individuals from undertaking this adventure.
Section 5 - Nietzsche and Kierkegaard Address the Same Problem

Although Kierkegaard and Nietzsche approach the issue from different perspectives, the problem with philosophical systems that Kierkegaard outlines in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* is the same fundamental problem of subjectivity and finitude that Nietzsche identifies through his discussion of the death of God in *The Gay Science*. Humans are finite and experience life subjectively: there can be no accounting for such an experience of the world in absolute systems. In Kierkegaard, we see that philosophical systems such as Hegel’s are unable to incorporate the existing individual. Because such systems deal exclusively in the objective and infinite they fail to account for the subjective and finite, which is the realm that all humans must live in. Any system that does not allow for subjectivity and the process of becoming cannot possibly be true for the existing individual, because the existing individual’s truth must necessarily be subjective. For such an individual to attain “objective” truth would be to shed one’s finitude and existence, an impossibility in the living world. It is for this reason that Kierkegaard compares Hegel and all such philosophers to dancers that claim to fly: they are very good at what they do, but they remain human and must always return to the earth. Even the most intelligent human in the world cannot escape these dimensions of being human, and this is Hegel’s greatest flaw. A human philosopher must speak to human truth, which cannot help but be subjective. As we have seen in Section 1, we as humans can never have objective certainty; at best we can claim objective uncertainty and attempt to appropriate and incorporate it through our subjective experience. Thus, our focus should not be on constructing all-encompassing philosophical systems, but rather on discovering and living out subjective truths, which Kierkegaard has claimed is the only sort of truth available to us in existence. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche identifies the problem that has plagued civilization for thousands of years: a belief in
objective systems, represented here by “God.” The belief in such absolute and universal truth stifles human creativity and possibility by forcing every person into one particular mold of the way the world must be, and those who rebel against or attempt to stray outside this absolute conception are deemed evil or immoral. This loss of creative power is a fatal blow to one’s ability to participate in the full range of human experience, particularly positive, triumphant experiences. Under such a system, or clinging to the shadow of such a system, one does not experience the need to use life as a means to knowledge, for all the important answers have either already been provided or are outside the scope of human understanding. Someone who lives under this system is encouraged not to experiment with it, and certainly not to create any new values that are outside of its tradition. The otherwise endless sea of possibility available to human beings is walled off, reduced to a small and safe lake that one is permitted to paddle around in briefly before returning to shore. This lake is hardly large enough to accommodate fish; it is hardly a suitable condition for human life. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche agree that there is a sickness that befalls humans when our wings are clipped and we are shoved into a small cage. Seeking, discovering, creating, learning, and growing are all fundamental aspects of the human experience, for each of us is on this earth always engaged in the never-ending process of becoming. It is more important, however, that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche agree on the following point: the cure for this life-sapping illness is not to surrender or to resign ourselves from the world, but rather to throw ourselves into it fully, wholeheartedly, and joyously. This is the affirmation of the Yes-sayer and the dance of the knight of faith. The movement from resignation to faith in Fear and Trembling is the same movement from negation to affirmation that Nietzsche exemplifies in The Gay Science, particularly Book Four. We will now compare Kierkegaard and Nietzsche’s assessment of how absolute systems lock individuals out of the
most beautiful and joyful human experiences, and how each philosopher proposes a similar solution. Nietzsche responds to nihilism with affirmation, while Kierkegaard responds with faith by virtue of the absurd.

With this in mind, we may first consider that each philosopher outlines the same fundamental problem: the attempt to possess objective truth and fit the entire world into a closed system fails to account for the inherent subjectivity of human existence, leaving no room for exploration or growth. It is for this reason that Kierkegaard asserts that a philosophical system cannot possibly include existing individuals: a system is by its nature finished, while to exist is to be engaged in the process of change and becoming. Take, for example, Kierkegaard’s two options for an existing individual:

*Either* he can do his utmost to forget that he is an existing individual, by which he becomes a comic figure, since existence has the remarkable trait of compelling an existing individual to exist whether he wills it or not… *Or* he can concentrate his entire energy upon the fact that he is an existing individual. It is from this side, in the first instance, that objection must be made to modern philosophy; not that it has a mistaken presupposition, but that it has a comical presupposition, occasioned by its having forgotten, in a sort of world-historical absent-mindedness, what it means to be a human being… what it means that you and I and he are human beings, each one for himself.\(^{141}\)

This is the fundamental problem that both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche see with modern philosophy: its authors have forgotten themselves, and have accounted for everything *but* being human. Nietzsche makes a similar point in *Beyond Good and Evil*, observing that all previous philosophers “pose as if they had discovered and reached their real opinions through the self-development of a cold, pure, divinely unconcerned dialectic… while at the bottom it is an assumption, a hunch.”\(^{142}\) He goes on to criticize them for their dedication to the “truth,” stating that they are “wily spokesmen for their prejudices which they baptize ‘truths’”—and very far from

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\(^{142}\) Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, BGE 5.
having the courage of the conscience that admits this, precisely this, to itself.”

All philosophers experience, observe, and speak from a particular point of view, and cannot truthfully claim to possess a “divinely unconcerned dialectic.” Rather than admit this, they opt to pretend that they have indeed transcended the subjectivity of human life and arrived at the universal and objective. The attempt to systematize and finalize has allowed the system’s followers to pretend that they are more than human, that they are not actively engaged in the process of existence. Anyone who has followed any sort of sporting event closely has learned at some point that one cannot possibly call the outcome of the game while it is still being played; the outcome seems certain, there is little time left, but there are still human beings on the playing field, and anything could happen. Those who attempt systematic philosophy, by this analogy, have called the game while they themselves participate in the game. Not only is the game unfinished, but each player is placed within the game at a particular perspective, and cannot claim to experience the thing in its objective totality. Existence is subjective and deeply personal, for it can only be experienced by us as individual persons. Furthermore, existence and human life are rarely clean and uniform; life is often difficult, messy, and full of contradictions and change. For Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, this is not something to be “swallowed up” in the infinite objective system, but something to be embraced. As Nietzsche observes, “Those thinkers in whom all stars move in cyclic orbits are not the most profound. Whoever looks into himself as into vast space and carries galaxies in himself, also knows how irregular all galaxies are; they lead into the chaos and labyrinth of existence.”

Life is chaotic and far from resolved, and philosophers like Hegel have understood the whole thing backwards. Existing humans are not to be swallowed up in the universal, but rather each human contains within his or herself entire

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143 Ibid, BGE 5.
144 Nietzsche, The Gay Science, GS 322.
galaxies. Each person has a deep and complex inner life, one that is entirely unique to them. It is impossible for two people to speak from exactly the same perspective, as all people have different experiences that form them. It is due to the uniqueness of the individual that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche assert the impossibility of a universal claim, of fitting every existing person into a universal system that accounts for all of them fully. Truth for humans must be subjective, as Nietzsche argues, “it is selfish to experience one’s own judgment as a universal law: and this selfishness is blind, petty, and frugal because it betrays that you have not yet discovered yourself nor created for yourself an ideal of your own, your very own—for that could never be somebody else’s and much less that of all, all!”\textsuperscript{145} This complements our earlier examination of Kierkegaard’s critique of Hegelians as being arrogant, mistaking themselves for one who is able to speak for humanity \textit{in totality} as opposed to speaking as an individual. As Kierkegaard would say, “Herr Professor” loses himself in the absolute, for there is no room for the individual in an objective system. The system attempts to strip away any shred of existence from the living individual, locking them in place as if some prehistoric insect preserved in amber. The “death of God” wiped away the horizon, unveiling a dangerous and infinite sea to explore; objective systems set down absolute limits on human experience, freedom, and creativity, penning us in a safe pasture to spend our time thoughtlessly and untroubled. While this life is \textit{easier} and freer from turbulence, it is hardly a life befitting a human. The greatest triumphs and joys must be experienced alongside the often painful and difficult vicissitudes of our limited human existence. If we are to truly live our lives dangerously and creatively, fully embracing our finitude and forging ourselves through experience, we must move beyond philosophical systems, and in doing so, beyond good and evil. We must find within ourselves the...\textsuperscript{145} Ibid, GS 335.
daring to wander out of the comfortable and protective shade of God’s shadow and overcome the fear of freedom and its infinite possibilities; we must begin to recognize each day not as another period of senseless toil under the sun, but as yet another opportunity to make ourselves anew and create a sun of our own. This is the task, of course; part of the great, uncharted territory into which Nietzsche invites his readers. Just as Nietzsche calls his readers out of the shadow of God, Kierkegaard shows us this path out of the shadows through the movement from resignation to faith.

We see in *Fear and Trembling* the character of the knight of infinite resignation through the analogy of the young man and the princess. Though there is a certain nobility in the knight of resignation, the knight must ultimately fall short of the goal. Believing that it is impossible to attain the love of the princess in this life, the knight of resignation *gives himself up* to this impossibility, surrendering the princess’s love. In resigning himself from the princess’s love in the *finite*, he moves to preserve it in the *infinite*. The princess will never love the knight of resignation during his lifetime; the knight cannot change this. Instead, the knight makes peace: “by the infinite resignation he is reconciled with existence.”¹⁴⁶ By withdrawing from existence, and surrendering his deepest wish to impossibility, he *reconciles* himself with existence; life cannot let him down, for he seeks nothing from it. This is fulfilled in the next (and most important) step of resignation: “Love for that princess became for him the expression for an eternal love, assumed a religious character, was transfigured into a love for the Eternal Being, which did to be sure deny him the fulfilment of his love, yet reconciled him again by the eternal consciousness of its validity in the form of eternity, which no reality can take from him.”¹⁴⁷ This is where the knight of infinite resignation most fully exemplifies what Nietzsche would describe

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¹⁴⁶ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 54.
¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 54.
as negation or slave morality. Recognizing the impossibility of getting what he wants in the
finite, the knight places his hope and effort in the universal, and by this universalization the
princess’s love is preserved for him. The knight allows his love of the princess to become love in
the absolute; one might say in more colloquial terms that this knight is in love with the idea of
the princess, more than the princess herself. Indeed, so unshakable is the knight’s new universal
love that he cannot even be perturbed by the princess’s own actions. Should the princess marry
another, express her distaste for the young man, or even die, the young man as the knight of
infinite resignation is not disturbed in the least. His love goes beyond the particular and the finite,
and in spite of all subjective experience to the contrary, the knight “preserves his love just as
young as it as in its first moment, he never lets it go from him, precisely because he makes the
movements infinitely.”148 The finite, human world loses its color and its value; compared with
the princess’s love in the infinite, no worldly experience can possibly measure up or give the
knight a sense of fulfillment. The knight’s true world is no longer the human world, but has
rather shifted to an idealized world, one in which the princess’s love remains unrealized in
existence but is full and unchanging in the objective and infinite. In a way, the knight no longer
considers himself an inhabitant of earth, but has renounced his worldly citizenship and believes
himself to inhabit someplace higher and more pure. From this depiction of the knight of infinite
resignation, it is clear how this might tie in closely with Nietzsche’s criticism of negation and
slave morality. The knight of infinite resignation rejects our world for the sake of the “true”
world, a measure that Nietzsche claims must also “devaluate the only world there is.”149
Furthermore, such renunciations of the finite cause us “to oppose with a ghastly levity everything
that deserves to be taken seriously in life, the questions of nourishment, abode, spiritual diet,

148 Ibid, 55.
149 Nietzsche, Ecce Homo, EH IV, 8.
treatment of the sick, cleanliness, and weather.” Resignation and *ressentiment* pull us out of our human experience and attempt to *swallow up* the finite in the infinite; in attempting to raise oneself above existential concerns, one actually strips one’s own life of all real significance and immediacy. While Kierkegaard acknowledges that there is indeed some tragic nobility in one who resigns oneself from the world in this way, it must always fall short of the goal, of fully embracing one’s humanity and existence (as Kierkegaard lays out in his either/or for the existing individual). This is at its heart the same problem Kierkegaard sees in Hegel: whatever one does, one must always do it as a finite, existing individual. Any attempt to rise *above* this reality rather than *embrace* it opens itself up to ridicule, for the contradiction of a finite human grasping the entire infinite cosmic plan is comic. Nietzsche further criticizes this attempt to devalue the world and dehumanize our human experience: “And what do they call that which serves to console them for all the suffering of life— their phantasmagoria of anticipated future bliss?... They call that ‘the Last Judgement,’ the coming of *their* kingdom, of the ‘Kingdom of God.’”

This “anticipated future bliss” takes the weight out of our lives and our actions, encouraging the dismissal of everyday concerns such as diet, health, environment, and so on. As we have heard from both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, however, it is precisely these everyday concerns and occurrences that cannot be removed from human life. The existing individual undergoes *existence*, which is experienced through the commonplace as much as the remarkable and outstanding. A father takes his son out camping: this is not at all uncommon, and is in no way an event that completely turns one’s world upside down. Nevertheless, the simple experience of a father and son walking in the woods for a day can be a profoundly meaningful experience for the both of them, and may color the character of their relationship with one another for years to

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150 Ibid, EH IV, 8.
come. It may be the image of the father being undisturbed by a sudden torrential rain during their hike that teaches the son how to respond to unexpected problems, or perhaps the son’s fascination with various types of trees rekindles the father’s love of nature. These little experiences are swallowed up in the world-historical perspective; what bearing does a familial camping trip have on the infinite and absolute? Yet it is precisely these experiences, the sort that make up a central part of human life, that the existing individual must embrace and hold onto with the utmost passion and conviction.

Through the examples of the knight of faith and one who practices affirmation, we may come to understand how we can dive into the chaos of human existence and come back up with some pearls of knowledge and meaning. We learn from Kierkegaard that where the knight of infinite resignation falls short, the knight of faith succeeds: “He resigned everything infinitely, and then he grasped everything again by virtue of the absurd.”152 This concept of *absurdity* being the response to resignation and negation is absolutely key here. It is through faith by virtue of the absurd that Kierkegaard responds to nihilism and the crushing weight of absolute systems. Kierkegaard explains exactly what he means by his use of the word absurd: “What is the absurd? It is, as may quite easily be seen, that I, a rational being, must act in a case where my reason, my powers of reflection, tell me: you can just as well do the one thing as the other, that is to say where my reason and reflection say: you cannot act—and yet here is where I have to act.”153 The absurd hinges on the concept of paradox, two irreconcilable points that face a decidedly finite being. For all our power and ingenuity, we cannot reconcile them: there is no recourse through rational argument, through an appeal to some system. It is truly an *existential* dilemma, for we

152 Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 51.
are confronted with the at times incompatible and confusing aspects of human life. Any action will fail to resolve this opposition (at least in the sense of a Hegelian dialectical resolution), the human facing this paradox must find a way to live with it. We see then that the absurd for Kierkegaard is the recognition that our finite human capacities are often insufficient to act with absolute certainty; our knowledge is subjective and is acquired through experience, we are in existence. Despite our lack of certainty, we find that sometimes we simply must choose, and for this reason we have no option but to take a leap of faith. We are not on absolutely stable ground, there is a gap between our knowledge and the choice to be made, but still the choice must be made. Is this not reminiscent of Nietzsche’s proclamation of the death of God? With the death of God comes the loss of absolute certainty and meaning; we find ourselves woefully ill-prepared to make the sort of choices and judgments that were made for us under such a system. Where our certainty fails, we may either resign ourselves to failure and attempt to return to a world of greater certainty and comfort (as the knight of resignation and one who negates do), or we can affirm and sail out on uncharted waters in spite of this uncertainty. If we re-examine the image of the knight of faith in the new light of Nietzsche’s new way of life from The Gay Science, we find that the knight of faith indeed exemplifies living dangerously and becoming a Yes-sayer. Just as Kierkegaard states that resignation is the last stage prior to faith, and it is only through reconciling oneself with pain and the world that one can become the knight of faith, so too has Nietzsche shown us that this new way of affirmation and life as a means to knowledge is only now possible for us in the wake of the death of God. More important for our comparison, however, is the way this knight of faith goes about his daily life, for this is the essence of the question. Every human being is at every moment engaged in existence and cannot help but be so. Our lives as finite, subjective creatures must take place in our particular circumstances as an
individual: where we live, the time we are born, the family we are a part of, our appearance, our profession, and the multitude of other details that color and guide our way of being in the world. We as individual beings cannot be reduced in such a way that these particularities are swallowed up in objective indifference. Neither a poor man nor a rich man is indifferent to the circumstances of his birth that have led him to his present situation, and we all have no choice but to exist in these circumstances. These conditions are both inescapable and entirely unique: no one can experience the same life as another, and thus each choice must be made by the individual. To push off this responsibility is to be inauthentic to one’s own experience and accept resignation. For this reason, it is imperative that the Yes-sayer and the knight of faith fully engage and embrace daily life.

Let us now, to conclude, examine the manner of the knight of faith in his daily activity, to see if he is indeed a Yes-sayer. Kierkegaard first makes clear that the knight of faith throws himself fully into whatever he does: his tread is vigorous, “belonging entirely to finiteness.” From the start, we see that the knight of faith is engaged entirely in the goings-on of daily life, a trait betrayed even by his manner of walking. This is confirmed by the way in which the knight of faith approaches both leisure and work: “He takes delight in everything, and whenever one sees him taking part in a particular pleasure, he does it with the persistence which is the mark of the earthly man whose soul is absorbed in such things. He tends to his work. So when one looks at him one might suppose that he was a clerk who had lost his soul in an intricate system of

154 I am reminded of one of my favorite lines from the Lord of the Rings trilogy. In response to Frodo wishing that he did not live in such a dangerous and demanding time, Gandalf provides timeless wisdom similar to what both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche say about our existence as individuals. “‘So do I,’ said Gandalf, ‘and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.’” J.R.R. Tolkien, The Fellowship of the Ring (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 1994), 55-56.
155 Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, 50.
book-keeping, so precise is he.” From this we understand that Kierkegaard’s knight of faith approaches both work and leisure with due focus, giving to each his full attention and passion. Certainly, this is not the drunken stumbling through life that Nietzsche warns against. The knight of faith does not meet the everyday concerns of life with undue levity, but rather takes each element of the day seriously. So far the comparison seems promising, but the next aspect of the knight’s day could be a potential sticking point: “He takes a holiday on Sunday. He goes to church. No heavenly glance or any other token of the incommensurable betrays him; if one did not know him, it would be impossible to distinguish him from the rest of the congregation, for his healthy and vigorous singing voice proves at the most that he has a good chest.” We are faced now with a difficult question: if Nietzsche truly meant that “the belief in the Christian God has become unbelievable,” then what can this mean for our knight? Is such a figure now unable to be a Yes-sayer? I argue that the knight of faith, even going to church, is not incompatible with the sort of life that Nietzsche advocates in The Gay Science. Nietzsche does indeed believe that the death of God is necessary to allow individuals to become true Yes-sayers and realize their creative affirmative potential, but this refers to God as absolute certain truth and objective meaning. The problem of the death of God is not at its heart a problem of religiousness, but a question of epistemology. When people lose their source of certainty and must figure “the big questions” out on their own what will they do? What source can they now turn to for answers? The central issue is not that people are losing their belief in God (or the transcendent and absolute that God represents), but that they must now answer for themselves. Nietzsche’s central project in The Gay Science is showing those who have realized this reality

156 Ibid, 50.
157 See discussion of GS 154 in Section 3.
158 Ibid, 50.
159 Nietzsche, The Gay Science, GS 343.
how they might go about answering the void left by the loss of absolute truth and breakdown of comprehensive systems. When we now ask “what of the knight?” we may answer: the knight may remain a passionate churchgoer and still live dangerously and affirmatively, provided he answers for himself. Let the knight sing as healthily and vigorously as his heart demands. He does not gaze up at heaven as he sings, nor does he believe that he is in some way set apart; at every moment the knight remains an existing individual and understands that he must claim objective uncertainty through his lived experience. The knight never ceases to pursue his life as a means to knowledge, even when singing hymns in a church pew; our comparison remain applicable.

As we have heard from both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche that it is the everyday conduct of one’s life that is of the utmost significance, it is only fitting to close our examination of the two philosophers with a study of how a knight of faith and Yes-sayer might approach the most minute details of an average day. We have seen that the knight of faith approaches work and leisure with conviction, throwing himself fully into whatever task he finds himself charged with. Even in church, the knight remains fully present in the finite, and seeks to grow and understand through his own subjective experience, foregoing the absolute and objective knowledge of the systematist. The final two scenes Kierkegaard sets the knight of faith in are the most particular, and thus most conducive to our study. He describes the knight’s day further: “Toward evening he walks home, his gait is as indefatigable as that of the postman. On his way he reflects that his wife has surely a special little warm dish prepared for him, e.g. a calf’s head roasted, garnished with vegetables. If he were to meet a man like-minded, he could continue as far as East Gate to discourse with him about that dish, with a passion befitting a hotel chef.”

\[160\] Even considering

\[160\] Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 50.
something as mundane as that evening’s dinner, the knight of faith approaches the activity with the utmost passion and earnestness. He joyfully thinks about what the day further has in store for him and eagerly makes his way home, ready to greet his beloved wife. Should he meet another on the road also anticipating a home-cooked meal, he can talk animatedly and at length about his wife’s cooking. The knight clearly finds great joy and meaning in something as small as dinner with his wife; we begin to see that the knight is no common man, but one who “makes things beautiful.”[^161] Though this is indeed remarkable and laudable, it pales before what follows: “As it happens, he hasn’t four pence to his name, and yet he fully and firmly believes that his wife has that dainty dish for him. If she had it, then it would be an invidious sight for superior people and an inspiring one for the plain man, to see him eat; for his appetite is greater than Esau’s. His wife hasn’t it-- strangely enough, it is quite the same to him.”[^162] We discover now that the dinner is not even real, but rather an imagination of the knight. Despite the fact that the knight must know there is no lavish dinner awaiting him, he eagerly anticipates the feast. If this were all, and the knight arrived home to disappointment, our examination would be at its end; the knight would be but a fool trapped in the desire for a different life, a better life. This is not the case, though, for the knight is entirely unperturbed by the plain meal awaiting him. Indeed, he enjoys it and eats as ravenously as though it were prepared by the finest chef with the most exotic ingredients. To be able to enjoy a lavish meal is a question of taste; to turn porridge into a feast is one of character. This is not the attitude of one who seeks comfort and certainty, or the manner of one who prays fervently for a new and perfect life. This is *amor fati*, this is saying “Yes” to even the most mundane aspects of life, this is willing the same for eternity. If one still doubts that the knight is a Yes-sayer and an explorer of infinite seas, let us cite one more example:

[^162]: Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 50.
On the way he comes past a building site and runs across another man. They talk together for a moment. In the twinkling of an eye he erects a new building, he has at his disposition all the powers necessary to do it. The stranger leaves him with the thought that he certainly was a capitalist, while my admired knight thinks, ‘Yes, if the money were needed, I dare say I could get it.’ He lounges at an open window and looks out on the square on which he lives; he is interested in everything that goes on, in a rat which slips under the curb, in the children’s play, and this with the nonchalance of a girl of sixteen.  

Let us no further doubt his creativity and his gaiety. The knight constructs entire buildings in but a moment, for no particular reason other than the joy of creation. So earnest and convinced is the knight of his ability to do so that his companion is certain that he truly possesses the funds, and likely has taken on many such projects. It would be much easier for the knight to resign with a sigh, lamenting that he does not possess nearly enough money to follow through with such a building project; the knight has nevertheless chosen the beautiful over the easy and comfortable. Even doing something as “boring” as watching the activity of the town out his window, he is fully present and engaged in what he does. He is fascinated by the world and seeks to learn more about his surroundings, an activity he engages in joyfully. The knight’s every action carries with it “the greatest weight,” and none would be surprised to hear such a figure utter, “No, life has not disappointed me. On the contrary, I find it truer, more desirable and mysterious every year.”

If we seek a practitioner of Nietzsche’s *gaya scienza*, we have found them in the knight of faith.

Kierkegaard and Nietzsche both recognize the danger posed by systems that claim to have a handle on the objective and absolute. Such systems leave no room for the individual, and discourage any attempts at growth or exploration outside that which has been sanctioned by whatever authority the system recognizes. Human creativity in these circumstances becomes

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163 Ibid, 50-51.
stifled, and we are unable to fully grow, discover, and become “who we are.” Thankfully, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche also present us with a solution: in the face of those who would generalize the individual and allow them to be swallowed up in the infinite, we must fully embrace our finite human existence. We can approach each day joyfully, fully aware that it may bring with it great challenges, pains, and surprises as well as moments of ecstasy, triumph, and peacefulness. By meeting each in turn and *embracing* them for what they are, all aspects of our human life, we can turn them into positive experiences, learn from them, and use them to make and do things that are beautiful. Metaphors about art, particularly dancing, are important to both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Kierkegaard describes how the knight of faith is every moment making tremendous leaps, greater and more precise than any dancer could ever perform; the knight is so skilled and moves so smoothly that he is able to “transform the leap of life into a walk, absolutely to express the sublime in the pedestrian.” 166 This is a beautiful depiction of how one discovers and creates meaning in their everyday life. One need not be a great king, general, or author to live meaningfully: we all possess the ability to find the infinite in the finite through total and wholehearted embrace of our finite and subjective experiences. Nietzsche, too, employs the idea of a dance to convey the limitless possibility for beauty and meaning in our human lives. He speaks through the voice of Zarathustra:

> I would believe only in a god who could dance. And when I saw my devil I found him serious, thorough, profound, and solemn: it was the spirit of gravity—through him all things fall. Not by wrath does one kill but by laughter. Come, let us kill the spirit of gravity! I have learned to walk: ever since, I let myself run. I have learned to fly: ever since, I do not want to be pushed before moving along. Now I am light, now I fly, now I see myself beneath myself, now a god dances through me. 167

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166 Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 52.
This is but one example of the unfathomable possibilities now before us. If we step out of God’s shadow long enough to become accustomed to the light, we see before an endless and verdant landscape. There are sure to be dangerous beasts and no shortage of ill weather, but the beasts call this place home too, and the storms keep the flowers tall and the grass green. If we are but daring enough and human enough, there is a great deal to discover; there are more possibilities ahead of us than days to explore them, and we are sure to run across new and wondrous things frequently enough that we will never want for something exciting to do. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche have no map to provide us. They have merely informed us that the deed to this land is in our name.
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